

**Harnessing Rivers for
National Prosperity, Public Wellbeing
—A Study on the New Era River Strategy**

National High-Level Think Tank of Xinhua News Agency
China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research

Table of Contents

Preface1

Chapter 1:

Background and Essence of the New Era River Strategy3

 1.1 Background of the New Era River Strategy3

 1.2 Essence of the New Era River Strategy6

 1.3 Characteristics of the New Era River Strategy11

 1.4 Historic Achievements in River Protection and Governance in the New Era ...18

Chapter 2:

Protection First: Revitalizing the Rivers21

 2.1 Safeguarding the Safe and Stable Flow of the Rivers21

 2.2 Scientifically Ensuring Water Resource Security27

 2.3 Systematically Governing Water Ecology and Water Environment33

 2.4 Protecting, Inheriting, and Promoting Water Culture37

Chapter 3:

Taking Rivers as Links to Promote High-Quality Development41

 3.1 Innovation First: Driving River Basin Development, Transformation, and Upgrading41

 3.2 Coordination: Addressing Development Imbalances45

 3.3 Green & Low-Carbon: Fortifying Foundations for Sustainable Development 48

 3.4 Expansion of Opening-up: Forging Link Within and Beyond Basins51

 3.5 Co-building & Sharing: Extending Development Benefits to All54

Chapter 4:

The Chinese Wisdom in The New Era River Strategy59

 4.1 Coordinating High-Quality Development and High-Level Protection59

 4.2 Upholding the Philosophy of the Life Community of Mountains, Rivers, Forests, Farmlands, Lakes, Grasslands, and Deserts62

 4.3 Combining Rule of Law with Rule of Virtue in Water Governance63

 4.4 Giving Full Play to the Institutional Strengths of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics65

Chapter 5:	
The Global Resonance of China's New Era River Strategy	68
5.1 Creating Models for International River Governance	68
5.2 Sharing China's Experience in River Governance	70
Appendix:Xi Jinping's Stories of River Governance	73
Hutuo River: From Sandstorm Source to Scenic Landmark	74
Yundang Lake: From a Malodorous Pond to the City's Parlor	77
Two Rivers, Four Banks in Fuzhou: An Ecological Metamorphosis within One Master Plan	79
Mulan Stream: From a Flood Menace to a Safe, Clear Stream	81
West Lake: Letting Cultural Heritage Benefit the Public	83
Taihu Lake: Singing the Beauty of Taihu in the New Era	85
The Grand Canal: Millennium Waterway, New Life Today	87
South-to-North Water Diversion: For a Perpetual Flow of Clear Water to the North	89
Erhai & Dianchi: Let Natural Beauty Stay on Earth	91
Qinghai Lake: Polishing the Sapphire of the Plateau	93
Conclusion	95
Note	97

Preface

Water is the source of all life, existence, and human civilization. Water management constitutes a fundamental pillar of national governance.

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, pointed out: "Throughout the over 5,000-year history of Chinese civilization, some regions have risen and fallen time and again. Prosperity and decline often alternated in quick succession. To safeguard national stability, protect people's safety, and ensure abundant harvests year after year, we must excel at water governance."

Effective water management is intrinsically linked to a nation's prosperity, as rivers are the cradle of civilizations. When mighty rivers run rampant, they bring suffering to the people; yet when harnessed well, they bestow boundless benefits upon all. China, with its exceptionally complex hydrological conditions, most arduous river management challenges, and most demanding water governance tasks among all nations, has seen its evolution and development inextricably intertwined with its major rivers throughout history. The history of governing this vast nation is also a history of persistent and unremitting efforts in river management.

The ancient maxim "When the Yellow River is secure, the nation is at peace" encapsulates profound wisdom. It reminds us that river governance has always been a matter of national priority -- a long-term endeavor vital to the future of the country and its people. The CPC has long prioritized water management, elevating river governance to a cornerstone of economic and social development. Now, standing at a new starting point, China faces evolving conditions and challenges. Effectively coordinating river protection and governance with high-quality economic and social development in river basins is an indispensable component of advancing the cause of building a strong country and promoting national rejuvenation through the Chinese path to modernization.

Rivers flow ceaselessly, symbolizing the eternal bond between a nation and its people. From the strategic perspective of safeguarding the Chinese nation's sustainable development and long-term stability, General Secretary Xi Jinping has, with far-sighted vision and broad foresight, advanced the nation's water governance philosophy and practice. He has emphasized that "in advancing Chinese-style modernization, we must take water resource issues into account" and has outlined a water governance approach of "prioritizing water conservation, balancing spatial distribution, pursuing systematic governance, and leveraging both government and market forces" -- with the goal of achieving harmonious coexistence where rivers nourish people, people protect rivers, and humanity live in harmony with waters. In this new historical context, the need to explore ways to keep rivers thriving and better support the great cause of building a strong country and advancing national rejuvenation has led to the emergence of the New Era River Strategy.

The New Era River Strategy is deeply rooted in the 5,000-year civilization of the

Chinese nation. It represents a major achievement in integrating the fundamental tenets of Marxism with China's water governance practices and its excellent water governance traditions. It embodies the CPC's unremitting efforts to explore the laws of river protection and governance, and to advance economic and social development through river management. It also constitutes the "river governance chapter" of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.

People across the globe are one family, sharing the same blue sky and a common home planet. China has been actively sharing its insights, wisdom, and experience in river protection and governance with the world, thereby contributing to building a community with a shared future for humanity and a community of all life on Earth.

Truth illuminates the path forward and lights the way to the future. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the historic achievements in China's river protection and governance have borne witness to the truth and transformative power of the New Era River Strategy. This strategy has not only charted the course forward and established fundamental principles for river protection and governance, but also provided the underpinning for advancing Chinese-style modernization through optimized water resource allocation and enhanced water security. The rivers flowing across the Chinese land are unfolding a magnificent new-era panorama -- one that is comprehensive in scope, nationwide in coverage, and integrated into every aspect of our work.

Chapter 1:

Background and Essence of the New Era River Strategy

Following the Yangtze River Economic Belt development strategy, we proposed the strategy for ecological protection and high-quality development in the Yellow River Basin, thus establishing China's "river strategy."

—— Xi Jinping

Water governance constitutes a critical dimension of national governance.

The New Era River Strategy, formulated from the strategic perspective of national rejuvenation, is rooted in China's long-term blueprint for economic and social development and ecological progress. As a major development strategy of the new era, it is centered on the principle of harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature, underpinned by high-quality economic and social development, with rivers as connective lifelines, river basins as fundamental units, the rule of law as a safeguard, and culture as its backdrop. It advances in concert with other major national strategies.

1.1 Background of the New Era River Strategy

Since ancient times, China's water resources have been characterized by extreme spatiotemporal unevenness, with recurrent floods and droughts.

The Chinese nation has cultivated an excellent tradition of adept water governance, accumulating rich experience and wisdom in river management. The legendary feat of Yu the Great in taming floods stands as a testament to our ancestors' indomitable spirit in river governance despite immense hardships. The Dujiangyan Irrigation System, the Zhengguo Canal, and the Grand Canal of China are globally renowned for their enduring history, monumental engineering, and far-reaching benefits to the people, cementing their status as masterpieces in the annals of global river governance.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, under the leadership of the CPC, people across the nation have been mobilized to develop water conservancy and mitigate water hazards. This journey has spanned from the resolute call to "thoroughly repair the Huaihe River" to the determination to "properly handle the affairs of the Yellow River" and "completely govern the Haihe River"; from emulating Dazhai in land leveling and water control to carrying forward the spirit of the Red Flag Canal in tunneling through mountains to dig channels; from constructing the Three Gorges Project, which transformed "high gorges into a serene lake," to the South-to-North Water

Diversion, sending clear water northward; and further to building the Baihetan Hydro-power Station and downstream hydro-power projects on the Yarlung Zangbo River. Through these endeavors, China continues to write new chapters of harnessing water for national security and prosperity, and developing water conservancy for the welfare of the people.

In the heart of Xi Jinping, the rivers of the motherland are matters of enduring significance, bearing the weight of the nation's long-term development. From his years as an "educated youth", through his student days, to his time in office, he has remained deeply concerned with river governance, visiting them time and again, gazing upon them, and personally promoting their governance, while deeply pondering the critical relationships between humanity and water, and between development and ecological protection. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has traveled extensively across the nation's major river systems, tracing their sources and surveying their courses with a future-oriented vision. Through rigorous field investigations, he has conducted scientific assessments of the evolving challenges and tasks facing river protection, governance, and the high-quality development of river basins. With strategic foresight, he has charted a course for ensuring the safety and sustainable prosperity of the Chinese nation through river governance.

Challenges are the clarion call of the times. As China's socioeconomic development advances ceaselessly, persistent challenges in water security remain unresolved, while new problems have become increasingly prominent and urgent. The longstanding issues stem from the uneven spatiotemporal distribution of water resources, shaped by geography, climate, and environment, as well as the water-related disasters they cause. The emerging problems primarily involve water resource shortages, damage to water ecosystems, and water environmental pollution. These intertwined old and new challenges present fresh and complex governance questions for the new era.

Rivers are vital carriers of water resources and serve as concentrated arenas where the challenges and imperatives of water governance and water-driven development converge. In his keen diagnosis of the pulse of the Yangtze River and Yellow River, the two "mother rivers" of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping has profoundly observed, "I have said that 'the Yangtze River is ill,' and the illness is quite serious"; "The Yangtze River is 'ill,' and the Yellow River is even more seriously 'ill'"; "Water has become a severely scarce product in our country, the primary factor constraining environmental quality, and a grave security issue confronting socioeconomic development. An advertising slogan goes, 'The last drop of water on Earth will be human tears.' We must absolutely prevent such a scenario from occurring"; "The whole Party must heighten its awareness of potential danger and its sense of crisis regarding water, and from the strategic heights of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects and achieving the sustainable development of the Chinese nation, attach great importance to resolving water security issues properly."

The perils posed by rivers and water sources threaten not only the living environment

but also the very survival of the nation. General Secretary Xi Jinping has stressed, "Solidly advancing the comprehensive protection of the Yellow River and ensuring its safe and stable flow is a major task in governing the country"; "In promoting the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, we must proceed from the long-term interests of the Chinese nation and follow a path of green development that prioritizes ecological protection."



The Yellow River in Zhongning County, Zhongwei City, Ningxia. (Drone photo taken on August 7, 2024, by Yang Zhisen, Xinhua News Agency.)

In the new era, China faces new challenges in new circumstances. River basins serve as vital ecological corridors, resource corridors, economic corridors, and cultural corridors. The protection and development of rivers are intimately connected to meeting the people's ever-growing aspirations for a better life. Restoring vitality to rivers and rejuvenating river basins hold profound significance for building a beautiful China. Effectively leveraging major rivers to coordinate and advance high-quality development in basins and regions is an important lever for accelerating the formation of a new development pattern and promoting high-quality development. Deeply exploring the contemporary relevance and spiritual essence of water culture and actively promoting Chinese civilization carry profound significance for shaping a new form of human advancement.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized, "Standing at a new historical starting point, we must, in line with the requirements of high-quality development, carry forward the spirit of Jingwei filling up the sea and Yugong removing mountains, and embrace the conviction that success does not necessarily have to be achieved by us, but success must have our contribution. We must persevere in our efforts to advance water management in the new era, just as Yu the Great once did."

Time bears witness to extraordinary achievements. General Secretary Xi Jinping has successively chaired four symposiums on the development of Yangtze River Economic Belt and three symposiums on ecological protection and high-quality development in the Yellow River Basin. He has presided over a series of important meetings to study and deliberate the Outline for the Development Planning of the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the Outline for Ecological Protection and High-Quality Development Planning in the Yellow River Basin. These efforts have elevated the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt and ecological protection and high-quality development

in the Yellow River Basin to the status of major national strategies, thereby establishing the core framework for the New Era River Strategy.

In October 2021, during a symposium in Jinan, Shandong Province, on advancing ecological protection and high-quality development in the Yellow River basin, General Secretary Xi Jinping clearly stated, "Following the Yangtze River Economic Belt development strategy, we proposed the strategy for ecological protection and high-quality development in the Yellow River Basin, thus establishing China's 'river strategy'."

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has also conducted inspections and investigations in many river basins beyond the Yangtze River and Yellow River, issuing a series of important expositions, instructions, and deployments. These are consistent in spirit with the underlying theories, principles, pathways, and methods embodied in the Yangtze River Economic Belt development strategy and the Yellow River Basin ecological protection and high-quality development strategy. Together, they enrich and develop the New Era River Strategy, providing guidance for river protection, governance, and the pursuit of high-quality development across river basins, steadily opening new horizons.

1.2 Essence of the New Era River Strategy

The New Era River Strategy embodies a profound understanding of China's national conditions and hydrological realities. It recognizes the intrinsic interconnection between the lifeblood of rivers and the lifeblood of the nation -- effectively, governing water resources is tantamount to governing the country. Anchored in major river basins, the strategy adopts a basin-wide perspective to inform national development planning. Centering on the Yangtze River and Yellow River as its strategic backbone, it integrates high-quality economic and social development with high-standard ecological and environmental protection.

The strategy emphasizes comprehensive, systemic, and source-based governance, coordinating key elements across population, resources, and environment within the spatial framework of entire river basins. It aims to address structural imbalances between economic development and natural resource endowments, as well as disparities between the North and the South, across regions, and between urban and rural areas. In doing so, the strategy seeks to foster a more harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature, providing vital support for advancing Chinese modernization.

Drawing on the accumulated wisdom of river governance from both Chinese and global traditions -- past and present -- the strategy continues to evolve through practice. It is characterized by expansive vision, profound insight, rich connotations, and systemic coherence, demonstrating powerful intellectual leadership, compelling values, and a strong capacity for practical innovation.

——Harmonious Coexistence Between Humanity and Nature as Core Principle

Chinese modernization is a modernization that pursues harmonious coexistence be-

tween humanity and nature. Rivers and lakes are not only vital components of natural ecosystems but also key pillars supporting socioeconomic development. Within the broader framework of China's ecological civilization, the protection and governance of rivers hold a particularly prominent and indispensable role.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized that the Yangtze River Economic Belt must "promote well-coordinated conservation and avoid excessive development" and that the Yellow River Basin must "make comprehensive plans and joint efforts to protect the ecosystem." He has further underscored that the "battle to safeguard clear waters must promote harmony between people and water," and called for "enhanced conservation of water sources in major rivers such as the Yangtze River and Yellow River, and intensified ecological protection efforts." These directives vividly embody this core principle.

The New Era River Strategy draws on and absorbs the ecological wisdom embedded in traditional Chinese culture, while inheriting and advancing the Marxist view of nature. It distills hard-earned lessons from the industrialization processes of the West and offers a nuanced understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature, as well as between ecological protection and economic development. The strategy emphasizes development through protection and protection through development, ensuring that rivers remain vibrant and resilient, and continue to underpin high-quality economic and social progress.

This vision calls on regions along rivers to cherish their ecological environments as they would their eyesight, and to treat nature with the reverence accorded to life itself. It advocates for the integrated advancement of ecological protection and socioeconomic development, ensuring that lucid waters and lush mountains yield profound ecological, economic, and social benefits, thereby sustaining the long-term harmony between humanity and nature.

—— High-Quality Socioeconomic Development as the Support

High-quality development is the defining principle of the new era and the primary task in building a modern socialist country in all respects. Riverine regions, characterized by dense urban clusters, large populations, and concentrated industries, occupy a pivotal position in advancing the broader strategy of high-quality economic and social development.



The Two Rivers and Four Banks area in Wuhan, Hubei Province. (Drone-stitched photo taken on June 14, 2023, by Wu Zhizun Xinhua News Agency.)

"Such efforts are aimed at turning the Yangtze River Economic Belt into the country's main focus for green development, the major artery for a smooth 'dual circulation' of domestic and international markets, and the main force spearheading high-quality economic development"; "We must promote high-quality development in the Yellow River Basin and compose a grand chorus of the Yellow River in the new era." The New Era River Strategy fully embodies the principle that "development in the new era and new stage must adhere to the new development philosophy and must be high-quality development."

The New Era River Strategy underscores innovation as the primary engine of development. It calls on riverine regions to lead by example in driving innovation-driven growth and fostering new quality productive forces. Through deepened reforms and breakthroughs in conceptual, technological, and institutional innovation, the strategy seeks to reshape the governance landscape of river protection and unlock fresh momentum for economic and social advancement.

The strategy emphasizes coordination as an intrinsic feature of development, positioning regional integration and connectivity as key focal points. It continuously strengthens interregional transport links, policy consistency, unified rules, and coordinated implementation to steadily advance the construction of ecological and interest communities across river basins.

The strategy affirms green development as the prevailing mode of progress, advocating that economic activities and human behavior remain within the carrying capacity of water resources and aquatic ecosystems. It accelerates the transition toward green and low-carbon production and lifestyles, while actively exploring pathways to realize the ecological value of rivers -- transforming lucid waters and lush mountains into invaluable assets.

The strategy identifies openness as an essential pathway for development, urging riverine regions to leverage their strategic location and resource endowments to foster internal-external connectivity. By embracing openness and inclusiveness, these regions are tasked with cultivating new frontiers of domestic and international opening up, thereby contributing more robustly to the circulation of the national economy and the formation of a new development pattern.

Finally, the strategy defines shared prosperity as the fundamental goal of development. It envisions rivers as both medium and means to ensure safe drinking water for the people, to foster a shared and beautiful ecology, and to more effectively advance common prosperity, ensuring the fruits of modernization reach everyone more fairly and extensively.

—— Rivers as Connective Lifelines

Rivers are the lifeblood of human survival and a vital pillar of economic and social development. They provide essential water resources and ecological services for the growth of river basin regions, while fostering connectivity and promoting coordinated development across these areas.

The Yangtze River, Yellow River, and other land-sea connecting rivers serve as vital links in forming an opening-up pattern characterized by "internal and external linkage on land and sea, and mutual reinforcement between east and west." Similarly, the Pearl River, Huaihe River, Haihe River, Songhua River, and other river systems play equally crucial roles in promoting coordinated and balanced development across upstream, mid-stream, and downstream areas.

The New Era River Strategy was formulated based on the Yangtze River Economic Belt development strategy and the Yellow River Basin ecological protection and high-quality development strategy. Covering major river basins, it coordinates population, resources, and the environment while planning for coordinated development at both basin and regional levels, serving the country's overall development.

This strategy links provinces, autonomous regions, municipalities, and city clusters across river basins, fostering mutual connection, coordination, and mutual reinforcement. It optimizes the allocation and efficient collaboration of resources such as water, human resources, logistics, information, and capital, enhancing total factor productivity. This approach provides stronger support for building a new development pattern and promoting high-quality development.

—— River Basins as Fundamental Units

Rivers connect upstream and downstream areas, both banks, and main streams with tributaries, forming a grand socioeconomic system. We must uphold an integrated approach to basin-wide management, adhering to the holistic and systemic nature of ecosystems and their inherent laws. By treating river basins as fundamental units and pursuing unified planning, governance, regulation, and management, we can effectively design and build a comprehensive framework for protection and restoration.

The New Era River Strategy defines the goals, positioning, framework, and pathways for advancing river conservation and governance holistically, using river basins as fundamental units. It emphasizes integrated, basin-wide efforts to achieve high-level protection and high-quality development, fostering upstream-downstream connectivity, bilateral bank coordination, and main-tributary stream synergy, with the aims of promoting coordinated development across economic and social sectors, ensuring effective ecological protection, and continuously improving people's living standards.

At the same time, the strategy is grounded in a holistic view of river basins and the spatial balance of water resources. It calls for accelerating the construction of a national water network, optimizing the spatial allocation of water resources, enhancing the carrying capacity of key regions, and promoting better alignment and balance between population, economy, resources, and the environment.

—— The Rule of Law as a Safeguard

China has long incorporated natural and ecological concepts into systems of state governance. Since ancient China, dedicated institutions were established to oversee mountains, forests, rivers, and wetlands, alongside policy and decree formulation. During the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, water laws were enacted, includ-

ing the Yellow River flood control covenant, Wu Qu Fang (refrain from building detrimental dams). In the Tang Dynasty, the Shui Bu Shi (Regulations of the Water Department) was promulgated for water conservancy management. Over millennia, this legal tradition has deeply rooted the Chinese nation's river protection and governance in the logic of rule of law.

In the new era, China's national river strategy emphasizes the continuous refinement of water-related legal frameworks, strengthening law-based water governance and management, and advancing governance modernization to achieve effective governance under the rule of law. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the vision of safeguarding rivers through legal means has become clearer and more decisive. Landmark legislations including the Yangtze River Protection Law, the Yellow River Protection Law, and the Qinghai-Xizang Plateau Ecological Protection Law have been enacted successively. Regulations on groundwater management and water conservation have also been introduced. Regarding key areas such as river basin governance, the river and lake chief system, and aquatic ecosystem protection, a series of pragmatic and effective laws and regulations have been formulated or revised. Cross-regional and interdepartmental joint enforcement has been promoted, with stronger integration between administrative enforcement and criminal justice, and closer collaboration with procuratorial public interest litigation. Enforcement capacity and standards have been enhanced in critical domains, including flood safety, water supply security, and infrastructure security.

——Culture as the Backdrop

Waterways nourish cultural lineage. Throughout history and across nations, rivers have played a pivotal role in shaping and sustaining human civilizations. China's major waterways -- including the Yellow River, Yangtze River, Pearl River, and Grand Canal -- have fostered distinct cultural traditions, giving birth to the roots and soul of the Chinese nation while sustaining the enduring lineage of Chinese civilization.



An aerial view of the Hangzhou section of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal.
(Drone photo taken on June 12, 2024, by Weng Xinyang Xinhua News Agency.)

General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized, "Yellow River culture is an important component of Chinese civilization"; "The Yangtze River has shaped a millennial cultural vein from the mountains and waters of Ba and Shu to the water towns of Jiangnan. It

is a representative symbol of the Chinese nation and a hallmark emblem of Chinese civilization, serving as an important source for nurturing the core socialist core values." These important expositions profoundly elucidate the vital status of rivers in the origins and prosperous development of Chinese civilization, revealing the deeper strategic considerations of the New Era River Strategy.

The New Era River Strategy emphasizes fully leveraging the important status and role of rivers in continuing the historical cultural lineage, bolstering cultural confidence, and shaping the Chinese national character. It clarifies the direction and pathways for protecting, inheriting, and promoting water culture, guiding the continuation of Chinese civilization in the new era, promoting cultural prosperity and development, enriching the spiritual world of the people, and rallying even greater spiritual strength for advancing the great cause of national rejuvenation.

——Advancing in Tandem with Other Major National Strategies

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has launched a series of major development strategies, including the Main Functional Zone Strategy, the New Urbanization Strategy, the Rural Revitalization Strategy, and the Innovation-Driven Development Strategy, as well as regional initiatives such as the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, and the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta. These strategies are interrelated and systematically integrated, forming a grand strategic landscape for advancing Chinese modernization.

The New Era River Strategy transcends geographical unit limitations, efficiently linking with various regional major strategies to accelerate the building of a regional economic layout and territorial spatial system characterized by complementary strengths and high-quality development. It deeply couples with the main functional zone strategy, new urbanization strategy, rural revitalization strategy, and others, promoting coordinated urban-rural development through joint ecological governance and industrial linkage. Furthermore, it integrates and advances with the innovation-driven development strategy through technological breakthroughs, industrial upgrades, and institutional innovation, accelerating the development of new quality productive forces and continuously shaping new momentum and advantages for development.

1.3 Characteristics of the New Era River Strategy

The New Era River Strategy embodies the profound worldview and methodology of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. It distills the essence of Xi Jinping's thoughts on ecological civilization, the economy, the rule of law, culture, and diplomacy. Shining with the brilliance of dialectical and historical materialism, it represents a theoretical elevation and practical crystallization of the Communist Party of China's century-long exploration of the law governing river governance, marked by distinct characteristics of the times.

——Continuity

Every great theory can be traced back to its intellectual and practical origins. The New Era River Strategy originates from long-term reflections on river governance, socioeconomic development in river basins, and the construction of ecological civilization. It is imbued with profound sentiments for the nation and its people, encapsulates the consistent commitment to harnessing water to benefit the people and managing water to safeguard the state, and embodies the meticulous care for clear waters and lush mountains.

Consistent Commitment to Harnessing Water to Benefit the People

In 1974, when Xi Jinping served as the Party branch secretary of Liangjiahe Brigade in Shaanxi, he led the villagers in digging wells, building dams, and reclaiming fields from silted land. In Zhengding, Hebei, he once shouldered his bicycle and waded across the silt-laden Hutuo River. He said later, "At that time, I wanted to govern this Hutuo River, to prevent floods and build dams." In Fujian, he was deeply concerned about and actively promoted the downstream flood control project on the Mulan Stream, with the aim of "turning the Mulan Stream from a scourge into a blessing in the future, to benefit the people." In Zhejiang, he earnestly urged that the Grand Canal should truly become the "people's canal." He has visited the Dujiangyan Irrigation System on multiple occasions, marveling at the ancient wisdom embedded in this monumental water conservancy and ecological engineering feat that benefits both its time and generations to come.

Consistent Commitment to Ecological Conservation

In Fujian, Xi Jinping called for immediate action, regardless of cost, to thoroughly resolve the pollution problem in Fuzhou's West Lake. In Zhejiang, he creatively put forward the scientific assertion that "Lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets," and put it into practice through ecological restoration and integrated governance efforts in Xixi Wetland, South Taihu Lake, and the Grand Canal. In Shanghai, he conducted a dedicated inspection of the water ecology of the Dianshan Lake area, calling for strengthened environmental protection and ecological governance.

Consistent Commitment to Coordinating River Protection and Governance with Economic and Social Development, and the Continuation of Cultural Heritage

In Fujian, Xi Jinping proposed the strategic vision of "revealing mountains and waters, spanning rivers and facing the sea" for Fuzhou's urban planning. Today, the "two rivers and four banks" have become the city's defining landscape axis. In Zhejiang, he vigorously promoted the restoration of historical and cultural sites around West Lake in Hangzhou, the protection and World Heritage application of the Liangzhu site, and the conservation of the Grand Canal, further enriching the flowing cultural narrative inscribed in the landscape.

The era is the mother of thought, and practice is the source of theory. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has personally planned, deployed, and advanced the protection and governance of rivers, conducting inspections

of major rivers such as the Yangtze River, Yellow River, and Yarlung Zangbo River; surveying key lakes and wetlands including Baiyangdian, Chaohu Lake, Dianchi Lake, and Chagan Lake; examining the Great Cannal and urban water systems in cities like Beijing, Fuzhou, and Nanning; and investigating major water infrastructure projects such as the Three Gorges Water Control System and the South-to-North Water Diversion Project. From the governance of rivers, he has sought the governance of the nation and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Focusing on the development strategy of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, General Secretary Xi Jinping has presided over four symposiums. Under the overarching principle of "promoting well-coordinated conservation, avoiding excessive development, and prioritizing ecological conservation for green development," the strategy has progressed, step by step, with increasing depth, from "promoting" to "deeply promoting," "comprehensively advancing," and then to "further advancing" the high-quality development along the Yangtze River Economic Belt.

Similarly, around the strategy for ecological protection and high-quality development of the Yellow River Basin, General Secretary Xi Jinping has convened three symposiums. Guided by the principle of "focusing on protection and governance," the strategy has moved steadily and persistently from "deeply promoting" to "comprehensive advancing."

These intellectual lineages and practical imprints vividly and profoundly attest to how the New Era River Strategy is continuously enriched, developed, and elevated through theoretical innovation and practical exploration.



The ecological corridor along Erhai Lake in Dali, Yunnan Province. (Drone photo taken on April 14, 2024, by Hu Chao, Xinhua News Agency.)

—Creativity

Based on profound insight into China's national conditions and water realities, General Secretary Xi Jinping has adopted a historical perspective that spans past and present, a development logic that keeps pace with the times, and a broad and far-reaching vision of civilization. With the systematic governance concept of "coordinated management of water-related disasters, water resources, water ecology, and water environment," he has broken through traditional thinking. For the first time, he clearly defined the integrated governance of these four domains and put forward a series of new ideas, new

viewpoints, and new theories. These have provided answers to a range of major theoretical and practical questions concerning river protection and governance and high-quality development of river basins in the new era, marking a milestone in the history of water governance in the Chinese nation.

The New Era River Strategy clearly affirms the vital role of rivers in advancing Chinese modernization and identifies them as an important foundation for the sustainable development of the Chinese nation. It consistently applies a new water governance principle — "prioritizing water conservation, balancing spatial distribution, taking systematic approaches, and giving full play to the roles of both government and market" — to clarify key relationships between incremental and existing water resource utilization, between water resources and economic and social development, among the various elements of water governance, and between government and market roles in water management.

The strategy calls for advancing river protection and governance through reform and innovation, cultivating new drivers of conservation and development through conceptual, technological, and institutional innovation. From the perspective of national security, it coordinates water security across river basins with food security, ecological security, resource security, and economic security, providing stronger safeguards for high-quality economic and social development.

It also emphasizes the importance of uncovering the contemporary value of the Yangtze River and Yellow River cultures, ensuring the effective protection, inheritance, and promotion of water culture, continuing the historical lineage, strengthening cultural confidence, and contributing to cultural prosperity and the building of a culturally advanced nation.

The New Era River Strategy offers a precise diagnosis of both longstanding and emerging water-related challenges. It emphasizes that "to cure the 'Yangtze illness,' we must scientifically apply the holistic approach of traditional Chinese medicine, tracing the origin, identifying the cause, and locating the root of the problem," and that "the symptoms appear in the Yellow River, but the root lies in the basin."

In terms of water ecology protection, the strategy introduces the concept of "a community of life," and promotes integrated conservation and systematic governance of mountains, rivers, forests, farmland, lakes, grasslands, deserts, and glaciers.

In water resource utilization, it proposes the principle of determining urban scale, land use, population capacity, and industrial layout based on water availability, treating water resources as the most rigid constraint. It calls for the construction of a national water network, a modern and high-quality water infrastructure system, as a fundamental solution to the uneven spatial and temporal distribution of water resources in China.

In terms of river protection and governance mechanisms, the strategy advocates for the full implementation of the river and lake chief system, establishing a new framework of responsibility for the management and protection of rivers and lakes.

——Systematic Thinking

General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized, "To govern water well, we must pursue good governance. One essential aspect of good governance is the effective use of systems thinking to coordinate the whole process of water management — clarifying priorities, understanding causal relationships, and identifying the root of the problem." Fully reflecting this principle, the New Era River Strategy clearly defines the guiding philosophy, core principles, strategic objectives, key tasks, and policy measures for river protection and governance and high-quality development of river basins. It integrates systems thinking throughout all aspects and stages of river protection and governance, forming a scientifically sound and comprehensive framework.

In terms of strategic objectives, the New Era River Strategy is closely aligned with the overarching goal of providing robust water security to support building a great country and moving toward national rejuvenation on all fronts through Chinese modernization. It emphasizes the coordinated management of flood and drought prevention, water resources conservation, water ecology protection and restoration, and water environment governance, advocating persistent and diligent efforts to achieve safe and stable flow of the rivers and their sustainable utilization.

In terms of methodology, the strategy stresses the application of systems theory to problem analysis and solution. General Secretary Xi Jinping has pointed out, "water governance must coordinate all elements of the natural ecosystem, rather than focusing on water itself. We should approach issues with systems thinking, recognizing the ecosystem as a living organism, and coordinate water governance with the governance of mountains, forests, farmland, and other elements." He further emphasized the importance of prioritization, "we must distinguish between urgent tasks and strategic reserves — what must be done now, and what can be planned for later."

In terms of capacity building, the strategy calls for a systematic enhancement of capabilities in flood and drought disaster prevention, efficient and intensive water use, optimized water resource allocation, and ecological protection and governance of rivers and lakes. It aims to build a comprehensive national water security system that effectively safeguards flood control, water supply, food security, and ecological integrity.

In terms of implementation pathways, the strategy takes the ecosystem and river basin as the starting point, strengthening overall planning, strategic coordination, and integrated advancement. It promotes comprehensive governance of mountains, rivers, forests, farmland, lakes, grasslands, deserts, and glaciers, and drives coordinated development across all sectors of the economy and society.

The systemic nature of the New Era River Strategy is further reflected in its guidance for ecological protection and high-quality development across provinces within major river basins. It emphasizes the coordination of regional reform and development, interregional policies, sectoral construction, and resource allocation, thereby enhancing synergy among regions and promoting coordinated development between upstream, midstream, and downstream areas, as well as interactive cooperation between eastern,

central, and western regions.

——People-Centeredness

People-centeredness is the defining attribute of Marxism. Ensuring the happiness of the people is a matter of fundamental national interest for General Secretary Xi Jinping. The protection of rivers and lakes is closely linked to the well-being of the people and the long-term development of the Chinese nation.

The New Era River Strategy emphasizes that "people's livelihood comes first, and water governance is essential." It adheres to the people-centered development philosophy, clearly stating that river protection and governance are for the people, rely on the people, and the fruits of protection and governance should be shared by the people. It incorporates the people's aspirations in top-level design and concrete measures, and promotes a protection and governance model featuring rivers nourish people, people protect rivers, and humanity and water achieve harmonious coexistence.

The New Era River Strategy consistently places the safety of people's lives and property as its highest priority. In the face of frequent and severe water-related disasters, it stresses the principles of putting people first and valuing life above all. It pays close attention to the complex and profound impacts of global climate change, focuses on preparedness for major floods, strong resistance to major disasters, and rapid response to critical risks, and calls for comprehensive emergency readiness and enhanced disaster prevention capabilities, continuously strengthening the protective barrier for safeguarding people's lives.

In response to the harm caused by water pollution to the public, the strategy calls for strengthened conservation of river sources, advancement of river basin ecological protection and restoration, and targeted pollution control in key river trunks, major tributaries, and important lakes. Through multiple coordinated measures, it aims to firmly uphold the bottom line of water environment safety.

The New Era River Strategy focuses on better meeting the people's growing aspirations for a better life. General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized, "we must strengthen awareness of cherishing and protecting the Yangtze River, and realize a virtuous cycle in which the people protect the Yangtze River and the Yangtze River benefits the people, so that the beautiful scene of 'a clear river flowing eastward' may soon reappear," and "let the Yellow River become a river of happiness that benefits the people."

General Secretary Xi Jinping has conducted in-depth inspections of relocation and resettlement efforts for herders and farmers in the Sanjiangyuan region (the headwaters of China's three major rivers—the Yangtze River, the Yellow River, and the Lancang River), encouraging villagers by saying, "your happy life is just beginning." He has also shown deep concern for fishermen transitioning away from fishing on the Yangtze River, urging that "they must be able to settle down and become prosperous."

The New Era River Strategy places great importance on broad public participation and the mobilization of people's strength. The river and lake chief system has been fully implemented, with 1.2 million chiefs appointed across five administrative levels —

province, city, county, township, and village — forming a dense nationwide responsibility network covering rivers and lakes nationwide. This system has driven continuous and comprehensive public involvement in water governance, shifting from "governing one river" to "governing entire basins," and from river-chief-led governance to shared governance by society. On the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, former herders have become ecological stewards, regularly patrolling water sources and grasslands, forming a grassroots defense line for implementing ecological protection policies and safeguarding the "Water Tower of China."



The Buha River on the grassland in Tianjun County of Mongolian-Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture of Haixi, Qinghai Province. (Drone photo taken on July 6, 2023, by Li Zhanyi, Xinhua News Agency.)

The New Era River Strategy is oriented toward building a modernized society of common prosperity for all. It advances the initiative of "rivers and lakes of happiness" by addressing water-related hazards, harnessing the benefits of water use, and showcasing the beauty of water. It actively promotes major water infrastructure projects, scientifically coordinates water resource allocation, and reasonably meets the needs of domestic, productive, and ecological water use. It treats a sound ecological environment as the most inclusive form of public welfare, continuously improving river water quality through effective protection and governance, and creating beautiful and pleasant riverside landscapes, making rivers a home for people's happy lives. It strives to explore a path of prosperity and flourishing driven by rivers, helping people increase their incomes, enrich their cultural life, and continuously explore pathways, accumulate experience, and provide examples for achieving common prosperity for all.

—Openness

The New Era River Strategy is fundamentally inclusive, embracing a global and forward-looking perspective and drawing upon and integrating the collective wisdom and experience of river protection and governance throughout history, both domestic and international. It is a strategy that advances with the times with a developmental perspective and improves continuously with an open mindset.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has frequently cited stories from history about how humanity has settled near water, how civilizations have arisen alongside rivers, and how cities have flourished or declined because of water, illuminating the path of harmonious

coexistence between humanity and water, and further clarifying the principles, approaches, pathways, and methods of river protection and governance. He draws inspiration from historical transitions: "The rise and fall of many dynasties in history were closely tied to water. Water conditions determined agricultural yields, which in turn affected social stability. National unity facilitates water governance, and water governance contributes to national unity." He distills lessons from the rise and fall of civilizations: "The four great ancient civilizations of Egypt, Babylon, India, and China all began in regions with thick forests, abundant water, and fertile soil," adding that "environmental degradation, particularly severe desertification, led to the decline of ancient Egypt and Babylon." He also draws on international experience: "In the 1980s, Germany and Switzerland proposed the concept of re-naturalization, aiming to restore rivers to a state close to their natural condition — a highly valuable approach worth emulating."

Rivers connect China to the world, and rivers flow toward the future. Rooted in river governance, the New Era River Strategy takes a holistic view, embraces global perspectives, and embodies a broad international vision. It is a strategy that promotes openness, win-win cooperation, and mutual benefit.

China's major rivers traverse the eastern, central, and western regions, link the north and south, and connect land, sea, and air. They play a vital supporting role in building a new development pattern that takes domestic circulation as the mainstay and promotes mutual reinforcement between domestic and international circulation. They are also of great significance to the advancement of the Belt and Road cooperation and the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.

With an open posture, the New Era River Strategy embraces the world and highlights the leading role of major rivers in enhancing both domestic and international openness and better serving the new development pattern. It requires fully leveraging the advantages of river-sea connectivity, actively advancing high-level openness and cooperation, deepening eastward opening, accelerating westward opening, coordinating land-sea opening, expanding border-area opening, and building external opening corridors that span east, central, and western China while linking north and south. It calls for harnessing the connective function of river basins to smooth further the links between production, distribution, circulation, and consumption, improve the flow of key factors, and promote the development of a unified national market. By strengthening domestic circulation, it aims to enhance the quality and efficiency of international circulation, achieving self-development while benefiting the world and providing stronger support and safeguards for modernization along the path of peaceful development.

1.4 Historic Achievements in River Protection and Governance in the New Era

Guided by the New Era River Strategy, rooted in history, grounded in the present, and oriented toward the future, China has ushered in a historic transformation in river

protection and governance, achieved historic progress, significantly bolstered flood control, water supply, food security, and ecological safety, laying a more robust foundation for high-quality economic and social development.

——Comprehensive Enhancement of Flood and Drought Defense Capabilities

Since ancient times, flooding has long plagued the Chinese nation. Today, under the intensifying impact of global climate change, extreme and anomalous rainstorms and floods are increasingly frequent and unpredictable.

Under the guidance of the New Era River Strategy, China has continuously improved its basin-wide flood control infrastructure, strengthened forecasting, early warning, simulation, and contingency planning, and refined the scientific operation of water conservancy projects. These efforts have enabled the country to successfully overcome severe flood events in major rivers such as the Yellow River, Yangtze River, Huaihe River, Haihe River, Pearl River, Songhua River, Liaohe River, and Taihu Lake, safeguarding lives and property to the greatest extent possible. The proportion of flood-related economic losses relative to GDP fell from 0.49% (2005 – 2014) to 0.23% (2015 – 2024).

——Profound Transformation in Water Resource Utilization

Adhering to the principle of "prioritizing water conservation," China has fully implemented the national water-saving initiative and enforced rigid constraints on water resources, promoting a shift from extensive and inefficient water use toward conservation and efficiency.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, while GDP has nearly doubled, total water consumption has remained stable at under 610 billion cubic meters. Water use per 10,000 yuan of GDP and per 10,000 yuan of value-added industrial output have dropped by 52% and 63%, respectively. The effective utilization coefficient of irrigation water rose from 0.516 to 0.580. With just 6% of the world's freshwater resources, China sustains nearly 20% of the global population and generates over 18% of global economic output.

——Overall Optimization of Water Resource Allocation

Taking a holistic view of river basins and spatial water distribution, China has accelerated the construction of major water diversion and source projects. The national water network is rapidly taking shape, with a preliminary water resources allocation configuration featuring "four horizontal and three vertical lines, with water transferred from south to north and mutual assistance between the east and the west."

The middle route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project now benefits nearly 118 million people across Henan, Hebei, Tianjin, and Beijing, supporting economic and social development in 27 large and medium-sized cities. To address rural water supply shortage, 4.8 million rural water projects have been completed nationwide by the end of 2024, serving 860 million people and raising tap water coverage in rural areas to 94%. Over 7,000 large and medium-sized irrigation areas have been built, providing strong support for consecutive years of bumper harvests.

——Fundamental Improvement in River and Lake Conditions

Embracing the concept that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets," China has advanced basin-wide ecological protection and governance. A comprehensive system of river chiefs and lake chiefs has been established, and restoration campaigns have been launched for 88 "mother rivers and lakes."

By the end of September 2025, the revival targets for all 88 designated "mother rivers and lakes" had been fully achieved. All 79 rivers had been reconnected along their entire lengths, and ecological water levels in 9 lakes were effectively maintained. The Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal has achieved continuous flow along its entire route for four consecutive years. The Yongding River has achieved continuous flow for five consecutive years and has maintained water throughout its entire course for two consecutive years. The West Liaohe River's main stream, which had been dry for 27 years, has now achieved full flow. Groundwater over-exploitation in key regions has been effectively curbed. Compared to 2018, shallow and deep groundwater levels in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region have risen by 3.19 meters and 8.46 meters, respectively. The "battle for clear waters" has yielded solid results, with over 3,000 black and odorous water bodies in cities at and above the prefecture level being cleaned up, and over 90% of such bodies in county-level cities cleaned up.

——Systematic Enhancement of River Protection and Governance Capacity

China has strengthened unified planning, governance, dispatch, and management across river basins. By the end of 2023, the National Flood Control and Drought Relief Headquarters approved the establishment of the Liaohe River Command, completing the institutional framework for all seven major river basins.

A series of river-related laws and regulations have been enacted, improving the legal and institutional mechanisms for river protection and governance. Reforms in key areas such as water pricing and market-based water rights trading have yielded notable results. A diversified water investment and financing landscape combining fiscal funds, government bonds, financial credit, and private capital is taking shape, with water infrastructure investment surpassing one trillion yuan. Construction of digital twin river basins, digital twin water networks, and digital twin water conservancy projects is accelerating, expanding the areas where water conservancy technology is taking the lead.

Water governance has always been a matter of paramount importance for national governance and stability. Rooted in China's excellent tradition and long history of water governance, inheriting the long-term practice and successful experience led by the Communist Party of China, and evolving from the new mission of national rejuvenation through water management in the new era, the New Era River Strategy provides a powerful intellectual framework and a scientific action guide for river protection and governance. Guided by this strategy, China is writing a glorious chapter on river governance toward Chinese modernization and on the new journey of building a great country and advancing national rejuvenation.

Chapter 2:

Protection First: Revitalizing the Rivers

We must give priority to protection, continue to carry out holistic conservation and systematic governance of mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, deserts, and glaciers, strengthen ecological protection and restoration in major river basins, and coordinate the rational development, utilization, and conservation of water resources.

—— Xi Jinping

Rivers are a vital foundation for the sustainable development of the Chinese nation. Ensuring a harmonious relationship between humanity and rivers and advancing the scientific governance and protection of the rivers in the new era are vital to long-term national stability and the well-being of the people.

Based on a deep understanding of China's national and hydrological conditions and guided by the laws of nature, General Secretary Xi Jinping has laid out a comprehensive and systematic framework for the protection and governance of major rivers and lakes, including the Yangtze and Yellow rivers. This framework provides scientific guidance for the prevention and control of floods and droughts, the conservation, efficient use, and optimal allocation of water resources, and the ecological protection and restoration of rivers and lakes, fostering a new paradigm of harmony between humanity and water and pioneering innovative approaches to river protection and governance in the new era.

2.1 Safeguarding the Safe and Stable Flow of the Rivers

The prevention of floods and droughts are vital to protecting people's lives and ensuring the overall stability of economic and social development.

Due to China's unique geographic and climatic conditions, the spatial and temporal distribution of water resources has long been highly uneven, and water-related disasters have occurred with high frequency. Historical records show that between 206 BCE and 1949, a span of 2,155 years, China experienced 1,092 major floods and 1,056 significant droughts, with such disasters occurring almost annually and inflicting profound suffering on the people.

In recent years, the frequent occurrence of extreme weather events globally has increased the risks of water-related disasters, making the task of risk prevention and safety assurance more severe and complex. The year 2024 was the hottest on record

since 1850, and global warming is expected to persist in the foreseeable future. As a result, the spatial and temporal distribution of China's hydrological cycle is becoming increasingly extreme. The growing frequency and recurrence of severe water-related disasters set higher requirements for risk early warning as well as disaster prevention and control.

The New Era River Strategy elevates water security as a vital component of national security. Upholding the principles of putting people first and putting life first, it places a strong emphasis on proactive prevention. Central to this approach are the directives to "prioritize prevention" and "address major safety risks at their source — resolving problems at the earliest stage, before they escalate into disasters." These principles provide scientific guidance for strengthening China's flood and drought disaster prevention system.

—— Enhancing Flood Control Infrastructure Across River Basins

Water infrastructure represents the "hard power" in the fight against floods and droughts. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has delivered a series of important speeches and issued key directives on enhancing flood control infrastructure systems across major river basins, including the Yangtze River, Yellow River, Huaihe River, and Haihe River.

In August 2023, General Secretary Xi Jinping chaired a meeting of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, where he emphasized the need to further strengthen China's capacity for disaster prevention, mitigation, and relief. He called for accelerating the improvement of flood control infrastructure across river basins, particularly in northern regions, while reinforcing the safety and operational management of flood storage and detention areas. He also stressed the importance of planning and building of urban flood prevention and drainage systems.

During an inspection tour of post-disaster recovery and reconstruction efforts in Beijing and Hebei in November of the same year, General Secretary Xi underscored the need to scientifically organize the construction of reservoirs, waterways, embankments, and flood storage and detention areas in accordance with their functions.

In response to these directives, local governments and relevant departments have expedited efforts to enhance basin-wide flood control systems, which are comprised of reservoirs, river channels and embankments, and flood storage and detention areas.

Strengthening the Flood Regulation Capacity of Reservoirs

To enhance the overall flood control capacity of river basins, China is advancing the construction of key control hub projects that play a pivotal role in regulating floods across major and high-risk regions. A robust mechanism for routine safety assessments and structural reinforcement of reservoirs is being established, with accelerated efforts to rehabilitate and reinforce aging and vulnerable reservoirs to ensure long-term operational safety. Unified and coordinated scheduling of reservoir clusters across basins is being strengthened to maximize the integrated effectiveness of the flood control infrastructure system.



Danjiangkou Reservoir. (Drone photo taken on March 22, 2024, by Xiao Yijiu, Xinhua News Agency.)

Improving River Discharge Capacity

Focusing on the standardization of embankment construction and river channel rehabilitation, China is expediting the upgrading of embankments along major rivers and implementing governance measures for primary tributaries and small to medium-sized rivers. For river sections located in areas of strategic national importance or key economic zones, where flood control standards must be raised or new flood control tasks have emerged, targeted upgrades are being carried out. Management of flood conveyance spaces in rivers and lakes is being reinforced, with strict approval processes for construction projects and activities involving river systems, in order to preserve the integrity and functionality of flood pathways and ensure safe and unobstructed flow.

Ensuring the Functionality of Flood Storage and Detention Areas

Guided by the principle of "effective diversion, secure storage, smooth discharge, and safety for people," China is prioritizing the development of flood storage and detention areas in key basins such as the Yangtze River, Yellow River, Huaihe River, and Haihe River. In response to persistent challenges, such as delayed construction and difficulty in timely activation, efforts are focused on areas with a high likelihood of use and significant flood mitigation potential. This includes strengthening water control gates, reinforcing embankments, and enhancing internal safety infrastructure. Management of non-flood control projects within flood storage and detention areas as well as flood-plain areas is also being tightened.

Enhancing Urban Flood Prevention and Drainage Capacity

Following the strategic framework of "external control and diversion, internal defense and enhanced drainage," urban flood control projects are being accelerated, supported by basin-wide flood control systems and regional tidal defense infrastructure. Urban flood prevention and drainage systems are being refined, with particular attention to flood-prone areas in the Yangtze River, Huaihe River, and Songhua River basins, regions that experience frequent disasters, affect large populations, incur significant economic losses, and pose risks to national food security. Drainage capacity in these critical zones is being urgently strengthened to meet pressing governance needs.

In the Yangtze River Basin, a comprehensive flood control and disaster relief system has largely taken shape. Anchored by embankments and centered on the Three Gorges Project, it integrates reservoirs, river channels, and flood storage and detention areas across main and tributary streams. This system combines structural measures, such as controlled floodplain use, farmland-to-lake restoration, and soil and water conservation, with non-structural flood management strategies. To date, 52,000 reservoirs have been constructed across the basin's main and tributary rivers, and 1,639 kilometers of the middle and lower Yangtze River channel have been rehabilitated. Progress is steadily advancing on the planned 42 flood storage and detention areas in the middle and lower reaches.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the Yellow River Basin has undergone three successive phases of flood control infrastructure development in its lower reaches. These efforts have resulted in 1,371 kilometers of standardized embankments, flood control improvements along upstream segments in Qinghai, Ningxia, and Inner Mongolia, and rehabilitation of the river stretch from Yumenkou to the Sanmenxia Dam. Embankments along the main course of the Yellow River now largely meet safety standards. Flood control infrastructure has been completed for the Dongping Lake flood storage and detention area, and resettlement plans for residents in flood-prone zones have been implemented in an orderly fashion, effectively resolving flood safety and settlement issues for over 900,000 people. Reinforcement and risk mitigation projects have also been carried out for vulnerable reservoirs, sluices, and silt dams.

The Huaihe River Basin has developed a robust flood control system composed of reservoirs, river channels, embankments, flood detention and diversion zones, and key control hubs. Flood control and drainage standards across the basin have been significantly improved. When flood detention zones are fully utilized, the system is capable of withstanding the most severe basin-wide flood events recorded since the founding of the People's Republic of China.

—Refining Rainfall and Hydrological Monitoring and Forecasting Systems

Early warning and prevention are critical tools in responding to extreme weather events. To secure the upper hand in flood control and disaster relief, General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized the need to enhance rainfall and hydrological monitoring, forecasting, and alert systems, ensuring the timely dissemination of warnings and the prompt activation of emergency responses.

In line with these directives, local governments are accelerating the development of modernized rainfall and hydrological monitoring and forecasting systems. These efforts aim to extend the lead time for flood prediction and improve the accuracy of flood forecasts.

Identifying Two Key Priorities

The first is hardware enhancement, namely, the deployment of advanced hydrological sensing and monitoring equipment. The second is software development, specifically, the creation of analytical and computational models based on modern hydrological in-

formation sensing and monitoring data, including hydrodynamic models for forecasting flood evolution.

Constructing a Three-Tiered Defense System

The first tier focuses on forecasting "rain in the clouds," extending to runoff generation, convergence, and flood evolution prediction. The second tier addresses "rain on the ground," also extending to runoff generation, convergence, and flood evolution forecasting. The third tier centers on site-specific flood forecasting, further extending to flood evolution and propagation prediction.

Supporting Four Functions

Through the development of modern rainfall and hydrological monitoring and forecasting systems, China is continuously enhancing its capacity for forecasting, early warning, simulation, and contingency planning. These improvements provide forward-looking, scientific, precise, and secure support for decision-making in flood prevention and control, and water resource management and allocation.

China has established a relatively comprehensive hydrological monitoring network, with steadily increasing capacity. The number of hydrological monitoring stations nationwide rose from 70,000 in 2012 to 133,000 in 2024, achieving near-complete coverage of major rivers, principal tributaries, and small to medium-sized rivers with flood control functions. Based on watershed units, meteorological-hydrological forecasting technologies have been continuously enhanced, extending the lead time for flood prediction in major rivers from 3 days to 10 days.

Digital water governance is advancing rapidly in river basins such as the Yangtze River and the Yellow River. The application of modern technologies, including drones and satellite remote sensing, has further supported scientific decision-making in flood and drought prevention, contributing significantly to safeguarding the security of the rivers.

Take the Yangtze River Basin as an example. In recent years, the basin has pioneered a seamless, progressive forecasting approach that integrates hydrological and meteorological data, achieving unified forecasting and scheduling of water infrastructure. For years, this system has played a vital role in supporting the coordinated operation of water infrastructure. During the major floods of 2020, the system successfully forecast Flood No. 4 six days in advance and Flood No. 5 seven days in advance. It also predicted the timing of water levels exceeding warning thresholds at stations in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River two to five days ahead, with peak flow errors often controlled within a few centimeters.

By strengthening monitoring, forecasting, and early warning for mountain flood disasters, optimizing the layout of automated monitoring stations, dynamically adjusting alert thresholds, and precisely identifying risk points and zones, local authorities have implemented a direct-to-grassroots emergency alert mechanism. This "call-and-response" system ensures that warnings reach responsible personnel and affected communities in a timely and targeted manner, where there is a call, there is a response; where a warning is issued, it must be received and acted upon.

——Improving Flood and Drought Disaster Prevention Systems

General Secretary Xi Jinping has placed strong emphasis on flood and drought disaster prevention, calling for clear accountability throughout all phases and levels of emergency response. Responsibilities must be assigned down to specific posts and individuals, with strict enforcement of inspection and defense duties for hydraulic infrastructure during flood season. Across the country, efforts are accelerating to build a comprehensive "three-in-one" system for disaster prevention — integrating responsibility enforcement, decision support, and command and dispatch.

A rigorously defined and fully covered accountability mechanism is being established at the smallest operational unit. Responsibilities are being clarified for reservoirs, embankments, river channels, flood storage and detention areas, water infrastructure under construction, mountain flood prevention, and drought response. Each responsible entity must understand why prevention is needed, who is responsible, what must be prevented, and how to prevent it, ensuring a firm safety baseline.

A scientifically and professionally grounded, robustly supported, and rapidly responsive decision support mechanism is being developed. At all administrative levels, from central ministries to provincial, municipal, and county departments, efforts are underway to strengthen personnel, foundational infrastructure, and support systems. Technological and digital empowerment are being advanced to provide scientific and professional recommendations for decision-making and operational coordination.

A unified, authoritative, and highly efficient command and dispatch mechanism with tiered responsibilities is being built. Based on the responsibilities of relevant departments, this mechanism clarifies the issuance, implementation, operation, and coordination of instructions. This involves the accurate issuance of early warning information and the strengthening of unified and joint operation of water infrastructure projects such as reservoirs, river channels, embankments, and flood storage and detention areas. Key tasks include ensuring reservoir safety during flood season, embankment inspection and defense, flood control for small and medium-sized rivers, mountain flood prevention, and emergency evacuation and sheltering, ensuring that commands are clearly issued and effectively implemented.

Over the past decade, China's capacity to prevent and respond to flood and drought disasters has significantly improved. The country has successfully managed multiple severe flood events across major rivers and lakes and ensured urban and rural water supply during years of extreme drought, safeguarding the security of rivers, the safety of the people, and the stability of society.

In the Yellow River Basin, disaster response systems and capabilities have been strengthened through the development of an information-based command platform for flood control and drought relief. Major reservoirs and hydro-power stations have been incorporated into unified reservoir cluster scheduling. A new emergency response mechanism has been established, with enhanced forecasting, early warning, simulation, and contingency planning capabilities. These measures have successfully defended against 19

officially numbered floods since 2012.

In the Pearl River Basin, the flood control infrastructure system has been reinforced through the active application of modern technologies, enabling coordinated and scientifically informed prevention and control from source to estuary. During the 2022 flood season, the basin experienced eight numbered floods. The No. 2 flood in the North River reached its highest level since 1915. By coordinating the operation of over 40 water infrastructure projects, serious flooding was effectively averted.



Partial view of the Taiyangdao (Sun Island) National Wetland Park located on the north bank of the Songhua River in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, with urban scenery in the background. (Drone photo taken on July 30, 2025, by Wang Song, Xinhua News Agency.)

In the Songhua River Basin, a coordinated, orderly, effectively dispatched, and well-managed flood and drought response mechanism has gradually taken shape. Since 2020, authorities have guided flood control scheduling for 1,196 large and medium-sized reservoirs, cumulatively retaining 81.865 billion cubic meters of floodwater and reducing inundation across 117 towns and 16.3046 million mu of farmland.

2.2 Scientifically Ensuring Water Resource Security

China is a water-scarce country, with its per capita and per mu water resource endowment far below the world average.

China's water shortage is due to two factors: inherent deficiencies and subsequent mismanagement. Inherent deficiencies are primarily due to the "highly uneven spatial and temporal distribution of water resources, which is consistently characterized by high flow in summer and low flow in winter, with scarcity in the north and abundance in the south." Subsequent mismanagement stems from a "long-term lack of sufficient understanding and improper grasp of economic, natural, and ecological laws" and a tendency to "prioritize growth while neglecting water constraints."

According to the assessment of the latest national survey, China faces a water deficit of 45 billion cubic meters, including 15.8 billion cubic meters of groundwater over-extraction, 17.4 billion cubic meters of supply shortfall, and 11.8 billion cubic meters of ecological water shortage in river channels. The imbalance between water supply and de-

mand remains pronounced, and the pressure to safeguard water security continues to intensify.

Regarding the utilization of water resources in rivers and lakes, General Secretary Xi Jinping has pointed out, "It is essential to adhere to the principles of determining urban development, land use, population size, and industrial production based on water availability, treating water resources as the utmost rigid constraint. It is crucial to plan the population, urban development, and industrial growth in a rational manner." He also stated, "We must continue to scientifically advance inter-basin water diversion projects, and coordinate demand and supply management while comprehensively strengthening water conservation and reinforcing the rigid constraint of water resources."

Since the beginning of the new era, China has prioritized the conservation and protection of ecological spaces that nurture water sources. Upholding the principle of prioritizing water conservation, the country has rigorously enforced controls on total water use and water use intensity. It has also advanced the planning of a national water network to optimize the allocation of river basin water resources. China has largely established a comprehensive system of water infrastructure, encompassing flood control and disaster mitigation, urban and rural water supply, and agricultural irrigation, and is striving to safeguard national water security at a higher level.

——Prioritizing Water Conservation to Enhance Efficient, Intensive Use of Water Resources

In the process of building a modern socialist country in all respects, and to overcome the bottleneck constraint of water scarcity facing coordinated economic and social development, China must adhere to the principles of acting according to water availability and prioritizing water conservation.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized the need to strengthen demand-side management, treating the carrying capacity of water resources, aquatic ecosystems, and water environments as rigid constraints to be embedded across all aspects of reform, development, and stability. He has made clear that "to advance new urbanization, industrialization, and agricultural modernization, we must fully account for the carrying capacity of water resources and water environments."

Xi Jinping's pioneering approach to water governance places water conservation as the top priority. He has emphasized the need to establish a rigid water resource constraint system, strictly control total water use, coordinate water used for production, daily life, and ecological needs, and vigorously promote water conservation across agriculture, industry, and urban sectors.

To implement these directives, it is essential to recognize the critical role of water in natural resource development and protection, strictly observe the upper limits of water exploitation, and improve initial water rights allocation. Water resources must be used wisely and efficiently, managed with rigor and precision. Local governments must embrace the principle of prioritizing water conservation, shifting mindsets and innovating methods to enhance the capacity for efficient and intensive water use, thereby driving a

transition from a traditional, extensive model of water usage toward a more intensive and meticulous one.

Strengthening Water Resource Regulation

Regions and departments across the country have fully implemented the principle of determining urban scale, land use, population capacity, and industrial layout based on water availability, enforcing rigid water resource constraints, strengthening water resource assessments and permitting oversight, and strictly controlling total water use and intensity. Efforts have accelerated to improve water monitoring and metering systems, establishing hydrological and water resource monitoring networks that cover water quantity, quality, and ecological parameters. Digital, networked, and intelligent technologies are being actively deployed to enhance water resource management, with credit evaluation mechanisms increasingly applied to regulate water use and maintain order. China's first administrative regulation on water conservation, the Regulations of Water Conservation, has been promulgated and implemented, providing detailed and explicit provisions for every stage of water use.

Vigorously Developing the Water Conservation Industry

Regions and departments have strengthened the provision of supportive policies for the water conservation industry, establishing comprehensive systems for policies, standards, talent cultivation, markets, and innovation to underpin its development. Integrated policy measures, spanning green technology, green finance, and modern human resources, are being introduced to support the sector. Technical standards have been developed for the entire industrial chain, including R&D and design, equipment manufacturing, engineering construction, service management, and smart water conservation. Contract-based water conservation management is being promoted, and third-party service markets are being cultivated. Strong support is being provided for the R&D and promotion of water-saving products, technologies, and equipment.

Promoting Water Conservation Across Society

Regions and departments nationwide are actively implementing the National Water Conservation Action Plan, improving mechanisms for building a water-saving society, and coordinating efforts to enhance agricultural water efficiency, reduce industrial water consumption, and minimize urban water loss. The development and use of unconventional water sources, such as reclaimed water, are being expanded. Water budgeting is being explored, quota systems refined, and zoned water-saving controls implemented. Supervision, evaluation, and incentive mechanisms are being strengthened, and digital, networked, and intelligent water-saving systems are being rapidly developed. Public education on water conservation is being deepened, making water-saving a conscious practice for every organization, household, and individual.

China's approach to water resource utilization is undergoing a profound transformation. In the Yellow River Basin, for example, the strictest water resource management system has been implemented. Water permit approvals have been suspended for 13 cities with surface water overload and 62 counties with groundwater over-extraction. In ar-

areas where water quotas are exhausted or exceed red-line thresholds, incremental water use is strictly controlled. Planning, policy-making, and industrial layout now incorporate detailed and concrete measures in line with relevant principles. By increasing water conservation efforts in industry and agriculture, the conflict between people and water resources in the river basins has been effectively alleviated.

Nationwide, water use efficiency and effectiveness continue to improve, with significant reductions in key sectors. Compared to 2014, average irrigation water use per mu of farmland dropped from 402 to 342 cubic meters by 2024. Water use per 10,000 yuan of industrial added value fell from 58 to 25 cubic meters. Water-saving levels in five major high water-consumption industries—thermal power, steel, petrochemicals, paper-making, and textiles above the designated scale—have reached internationally advanced standards.

China has vigorously developed unconventional water resources to ease the burden on rivers and lakes. 116 cities have launched pilot programs for reclaimed water use. The total volume of unconventional water use, including reclaimed water, rainwater harvesting, seawater desalination, and mine water, rose from 6.07 billion cubic meters in 2014 to over 25 billion cubic meters in 2024, becoming a stable and reliable secondary water source for a growing number of cities.

——Building a National Water Network to Enhance the Optimization of Water Resource Allocation

The National Water Network is a comprehensive system that integrates multiple functions—including optimized allocation of water resources, flood control, and disaster mitigation across river basins, and protection of aquatic ecosystems. It is built upon natural rivers and lakes, connected through water diversion and drainage projects, anchored by regulatory and storage infrastructure, and operated through intelligent control mechanisms.

Accelerating the construction of the National Water Network and strengthening the scientific allocation of water resources across basins and regions is essential to addressing the uneven spatial and temporal distribution of water, achieving broader spatial equilibrium, promoting coordinated development between northern and southern regions, and advancing the formation of a unified national market.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has placed high expectations on the development of the National Water Network, emphasizing that "We must accelerate the construction of the main framework and arteries of the National Water Network to provide strong water security support for building a modern socialist country in all respects."

In May 2023, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council issued the Outline of the National Water Network Construction Plan, which defines the overall layout of the network. It calls for strengthened coordination between the national backbone network and provincial, municipal, and county-level water networks, promoting interconnection, joint regulation and supply, and coordinated risk management, to gradually form a unified National Water Network.

The core tasks of National Water Network construction are reflected in the triad of "framework, mesh, and nodes":

Establishing the Framework

With the four major river basins (Yangtze River, Huaihe River, Yellow River, and Haihe River) as the foundation, the three South- to- North Water Diversion routes (Eastern, Central, and Western lines) as the backbone, China is accelerating the construction of the main framework and arteries of the National Water Network.

Weaving the Mesh

Based on the layout of productive forces and ecological protection needs, China is using natural river systems as the foundation and water diversion, conveyance, and drainage projects as conduits to form a crisscrossed, interconnected water flow network.

Securing the Nodes

At the junctions between natural rivers and key water diversion projects, China is constructing regulatory and storage facilities and major water source projects to enhance the network's capacity for water regulation and supply.

In line with General Secretary Xi Jinping's directives and the deployment of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, the construction of the National Water Network is steadily advancing, with growing capacity for water regulation and supply.

Accelerating Construction of the Main Framework and Arteries

Efforts are underway to accurately assess the characteristics of the Eastern, Central, and Western routes of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, and to plan scientifically and strategically. Preliminary work on follow-up projects for the Eastern and Western routes is being expedited, while the Central route's Yangtze River-to-Han River diversion project is being built to high standards. Water transfers are being executed with precision, supported by scientifically formulated dispatch plans and optimized provincial-level water allocation to meet reasonable demand in recipient areas and ensure supply security.

Accelerating the Construction of Regional Backbone Projects

Adhering to the principles of "prioritizing water conservation before water diversion, pollution control before water supply, and environmental protection before water use," major inter-basin and inter-regional water diversion projects are being accelerated in support of national strategies such as coordinated development in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. A regional water resource allocation system is being established, with strengthened integration between major diversion projects, key water sources, and regional water supply infrastructure. Construction of supply projects for key urban clusters is being fast-tracked, and connectivity between different water sources and allocation systems is being enhanced to improve regional capacity for balancing water availability across wet and dry seasons.

Improving Provincial, Municipal, and County-Level Water Networks

Sub-national water networks rely on the regulatory functions of the national back-

bone and higher-level networks, and are organized by administrative units to form integrated and interconnected urban-rural water network systems. These networks primarily address local needs for flood control, water supply, irrigation, and aquatic ecosystem protection. Key tasks include accelerating the construction of provincial water network projects, comprehensively strengthening rural water supply networks, and establishing a full-process safety framework for rural drinking water from source to tap.

Enhancing Operational and Dispatch Capabilities

This includes refining dispatch plans for water network infrastructure, implementing unified regulation of major water projects in key basins such as the Yangtze River, optimizing reservoir operations in water-scarce regions, enhancing groundwater recharge, and improving the utilization of rain and floodwater resources. Reforms in water rights and water markets are being advanced, with clearer definitions and standardized market-based trading mechanisms. From infrastructure conditions to operational management, standardized governance of water conservancy projects is being continuously advanced.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, China has completed a series of major inter-basin and inter-regional water diversion projects, leading to a fundamental optimization of the national water resource allocation pattern. The total water supply capacity of water conservancy infrastructure nationwide has increased from 700 billion cubic meters in 2012 to over 900 billion cubic meters.



The Taocha Canal Head of the Central Route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project in Xichuan County, Nanyang City, Henan Province. (Drone photo taken on May 20, 2021, by Cai Yang, Xinhua News Agency.)

As of now, the first phase of Eastern and Central routes of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project has cumulatively transferred over 80 billion cubic meters of water. Since 2022, twelve major inter-basin water diversion projects, including the Pearl River Delta Water Resources Allocation Project, the first phase of the Yangtze -to- Huaihe Project, and the Hanjiang-to-Weihe Project, have been completed and brought into operation. Additionally, construction has commenced on 31 new projects for basin-wide flood control and key water resources, including the Guxian Water Conservancy Hub on the Yellow River.

During the 2021 – 2022 dry season, the Dongjiang River and Hanjiang River basins experienced the most severe drought in 60 years, compounded by a prolonged dry spell spanning autumn, winter, and spring, and aggravated by saltwater intrusion. In response, authorities carried out scientifically calibrated water dispatch operations, launching a "thousand-mile water transfer to suppress salt tides" initiative, which ensured a safe water supply for 50 million urban and rural residents in the Pearl River Delta and eastern Guangdong.

The Haihe River Basin is among the regions most severely affected by water scarcity. By the end of 2024, the Eastern and Central routes of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, including the emergency extension of the Eastern route, had cumulatively delivered 49.5 billion cubic meters of safe water to the Haihe River Basin.

Currently, China's capacity for water resource regulation and supply continues to grow, providing stronger support for residential water needs and ensuring sufficient water resources for regional development.

2.3 Systematically Governing Water Ecology and Water Environment

Rivers and lakes are vital components of natural ecosystems. They are essential to ecological security and closely tied to the well-being of the people.

General Secretary Xi Jinping attaches great importance to the ecological environment of rivers and lakes. He has emphasized the need to approach ecological protection and restoration from the strategic height of safeguarding national ecological security, ensuring the sustainable development of the Chinese nation, and fulfilling responsibilities to human civilization, to leave behind clear waters and green mountains for future generations.

China's great rivers are the principal battlefields for advancing ecological civilization. China's river strategy for the new era upholds the principle of prioritizing ecological conservation, placing coordinated protection at the heart of major national strategies such as the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the ecological protection and high-quality development of the Yellow River Basin.

Guided by this strategy, regions and departments across the country have intensified efforts to protect and restore rivers and lakes, accelerating the recovery of aquatic ecosystems. As more rivers regain vitality and more river basins are rejuvenated, a robust ecological shield is being built, creating a powerful showcase for the vision of a Beautiful China.

——Strengthening Source Control and Advancing Comprehensive Water Environment Governance

In the past, some regions pursued economic growth blindly, resulting in the direct discharge of large volumes of wastewater. This disrupted the ecological balance of rivers and lakes, and water pollution became a widespread issue across many basins, severe-

ly affecting people's livelihoods.

In 2014, among the nationally monitored sections of the seven major river basins, the Yangtze River, Yellow River, Pearl River, Songhua River, Huaihe River, Haihe River, and Liaohe River, as well as rivers in the southeast, northwest, and southwest, Class IV water accounted for 15%, Class V for 4.8%, and inferior Class V for 9%. Black and odorous water bodies became a pressing concern for public well-being.

General Secretary Xi Jinping called for the full implementation of the Water Pollution Prevention and Control Action Plan, urging decisive efforts to protect water sources, clear up urban black and odorous water bodies, improve the Bohai Sea water through comprehensive measures, and restore the Yangtze River ecosystem. These actions aim to ensure drinking water safety, eliminate urban black and odorous water bodies, and restore the beautiful scene of "fish swimming through clear rivers, shaded by lush greenery on both banks."

To ensure the persistent clarity of water bodies, China has continued its efforts to keep waters clear, implementing severe measures to reduce emissions and control pollution, thereby driving a fundamental shift in water ecological protection.

The problem lies in the water, but the root is on the shore. General Secretary Xi Jinping called for greater focus on front-end pollution control and reducing pollutant discharge from the source. Local governments have tackled this by targeting the inspection and remediation of sewage outfalls into rivers, the fulcrum point of pollution control, which in turn compels the treatment of various land-based pollution sources. By 2024, a cumulative 560,000 kilometers of river and lake shorelines had been inspected, leading to the resolution of nearly 200,000 cases of direct or improper sewage discharge.

The phenomenon of "chemical plants crowding the Yangtze River" was once a persistent affliction. In recent years, provinces along the Yangtze River and relevant departments have actively promoted industrial transformation. Thousands of chemical enterprises have been shut down, upgraded, relocated, or repurposed, curbing pollution at its source. For example, Yichang in Hubei Province accelerated the elimination of outdated production capacity and addressed chemical overcapacity, upgrading 134 riverside chemical enterprises and significantly reducing pollution risks. Nanjing has shut down or phased out 158 large-scale chemical manufacturing enterprises and restored over 10,000 mu of wetlands along the Yangtze River. Today, more than 80% of the city's Yangtze River shoreline is classified as ecological.

For years, the Taihu Lake Basin has been plagued by blue-green algae outbreaks. Provinces and cities in the basin have responded by optimizing industrial structures, implementing source control and pollution interception, strengthening the construction and protection of drinking water sources, and advancing ecological restoration and river-lake governance. As a result, the water ecological environment has steadily improved.

Driven by these comprehensive measures, China's rivers and lakes have undergone a fundamental transformation. In 2024, 90.4% of national surface water monitoring sections met good water quality standards. The main stem of the Yangtze River main-

tained Class II water quality for five consecutive years, and the Yellow River for three years. Taihu Lake reached its best recorded water quality level since monitoring began.

—— Upholding Systematic Governance to Strengthen Water Ecological Protection and Restoration

The core concept of China's New Era River Strategy is prioritizing ecological protection for green development. General Secretary Xi Jinping has pointed out that one major cause of water scarcity is the large-scale reduction of ecological space for water conservation. He vividly likened this to "a shrinking water basin in which the precipitation cannot be stored or retained."

Guided by a systems-engineering approach and a holistic perspective, the New Era River Strategy accurately grasps the intrinsic laws of ecosystems and promotes integrated protection and governance of mountains, rivers, forests, farmland, lakes, grasslands, and deserts. It emphasizes the coordination of natural recovery and artificial restoration, continuously reinforcing ecological protection and restoration to build a robust ecological shield for China's rivers.

Prioritizing natural recovery, the strategy relies on the power of nature to restore the balance of the ecosystem. By delineating ecological redlines and developing targeted restoration plans, China has reinforced its ecological security framework based on three strategic zones and four protective belts: the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau ecological barrier zone, key ecological zones of the Yellow River (including the Loess Plateau ecological barrier), the Yangtze River key ecological zone (including the Sichuan-Yunnan ecological barrier), the northeast forest belt, the northern desertification control belt, the southern hills and mountainous belt, and the coastal belt. China has formally established its first batch of national parks, including the Three-River-Source National Park, Giant Panda National Park, Northeast China Tiger and Leopard National Park, National Park of Hainan Tropical Rainforest, and Wuyi Mountains National Park, achieving holistic protection of the headwaters of the Yangtze River, Yellow River, and Lancang River.

The ten-year fishing ban on the Yangtze River is a landmark measure to allow the river's ecosystem to recuperate. After more than four years of enforcement, the aquatic biological resources in the river have shown significant recovery. In 2024, the unit resource volume at monitoring points along the main stem of the Yangtze River increased by 9.5% year-on-year. From 2021 to 2024, a total of 344 species of indigenous fish were monitored in the Yangtze River basin, an increase of 36 species compared to the period before the fishing ban (2017 – 2020).

With artificial restoration as a supplementary measure, China has implemented major projects for the protection and restoration of important ecosystems that are categorized, region-specific, and tailored to local conditions. Focusing on restoring key ecological barriers such as the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and the Three-River-Source, China has successively launched a number of ecological restoration and management projects with significant ecological impact, such as the Three-North Shelterbelt Program, the Natural

Forest Protection and Restoration Program, and the Grain for Green Program. These efforts have fortified the ecological security barrier and enhanced water conservation capacity.

In recent years, river basins across China have seen a decline in both the area and intensity of soil erosion. Compared with the first national water census released in 2013, the erosion area in the Yangtze River Basin had decreased by 68,500 square kilometers by 2024, a reduction of 17.81%. In the black soil region of the Songhua River-Liaohe River Basin, the erosion area dropped by 17.4%.

Groundwater is a crucial component of river protection and management. General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized, "We must attach great importance to the issues of water resource shortage and groundwater, and address them from the perspective of achieving long-term stability and with a sense of responsibility to history."

In response, local governments have accelerated the delineation of new groundwater over-exploitation zones and strengthened management of restricted and prohibited extraction areas. Nationwide efforts include improving groundwater monitoring networks, implementing dynamic early warning systems, and enforcing dual controls on total extraction and water table levels. Comprehensive remediation of groundwater over-exploitation is underway in key regions, alongside continued reduction in groundwater extraction in South-to-North Water Diversion recipient areas.

Compared with 2015, China's total groundwater over-extraction has decreased by 31.9%, and the area of over-exploited zones has shrunk by 6.8%. In North China, once plagued by severe groundwater depletion and falling water tables, comprehensive remediation has helped control water resource development scale and intensity, promote water conservation, and diversify water replenishment sources. By 2024, groundwater levels in the governance zone of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region had generally rebounded, and several long-dried springs had begun to flow again.

To address interrupted river flows and shrinking lakes, regions have strengthened water conservation and optimized allocation. Measures include clarifying initial water rights, enhancing ecological flow regulation, strictly observing the upper limit of water resource development, implementing ecological water replenishment tailored to local conditions, river dredging, and the construction of water transmission channels for rivers and lakes. These efforts are driving the revival of China's "mother rivers."

As the ecological environment improves, aquatic biodiversity is flourishing. In the Yangtze River Basin, the Yangtze finless porpoise, known as the "smiling angel," is increasingly sighted, the once-vanished *Ochetobius elongatus* is reappearing more frequently, and the *Coilia nasus*, one of the "Three Delicacies of the Yangtze," has returned to spawn in Dongting Lake. Rare aquatic species are making a comeback. In the Yellow River Basin, overall ecological quality has improved, with the "green line" of upstream vegetation coverage shifting westward by approximately 300 kilometers compared to 20 years ago. Wildlife populations are growing: snow leopards and white-lipped deer have reappeared at the river's source, and the number of bird species in the

Yellow River Delta National Nature Reserve has increased to 374.

2.4 Protecting, Inheriting, and Promoting Water Culture

The evolution of civilization has always been nourished by rivers. Great rivers have given rise to human civilizations. Throughout the long history of both struggling and coexisting with water, the Chinese nation has created a brilliant water culture.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has issued a series of important directives, emphasizing the need to "protect, inherit, and promote Yangtze River culture, continue the historical and cultural lineage, and strengthen cultural confidence," and to "deeply explore the contemporary value embedded in Yellow River culture, tell the story of the Yellow River well, continue the historical and cultural lineage, and strengthen cultural confidence." These instructions have guided the creative transformation and innovative development of China's outstanding traditional water culture.

In implementing the New Era River Strategy, China adheres to the principles of drawing wisdom from tradition, upholding fundamental principles, and breaking new ground. Committed to protecting water-related cultural heritage and fostering the development of water culture in the new era, China is writing a new chapter of water culture in the process of advancing harmony between humanity and water.

—Scientifically Protecting Water-Related Cultural Heritage

For millennia, the history of water governance of the Chinese nation has accompanied and supported the development of Chinese civilization. China has produced enduring and globally admired achievements in water governance and left behind a wealth of water-related cultural heritage.

Historical and cultural heritage carries the genetic imprint and lifeblood of the Chinese nation. General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized the importance of reverence for history, culture, and ecology, calling for the comprehensive protection of historical and cultural heritage and urging to "safeguard the precious legacy left by our forebears."

In the Yangtze River Basin, cultural milestones span from the Longgupo Cave site, the "Wushan hominin" fossils, and the Renzi Cave stone tools dating back two million years, to the dazzling ancient cultures such as Sanxingdui, Shijiahe, and Liangzhu, and onward to the commercial and industrial culture of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Together, they chronicle the flourishing development of Chinese civilization.

The Yellow River Basin is the cradle of China's agrarian civilization. The legendary ancestors of the Chinese people, the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors, lived here, the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties established their capitals here, and early ancestors built cities, created writing systems, cast bronze vessels, and established legal codes here. Ethnic groups interacted and integrated here, forming the pluralistic yet unified Chinese culture.

Over tens of thousands of years, the peoples of various river basins have engaged in rich and productive cultural activities, accumulating vast resources of cultural relics, his-

torical sites, and heritage remains. These have shaped distinctive natural and cultural landscapes, giving rise to nationally protected heritage sites, traditional villages, and UNESCO World Heritage sites, collectively forming a cultural treasury of China's river basins.

Balancing the protection and utilization of water-related cultural heritage, bringing it to life, is the most effective form of preservation.

The Grand Canal is a vital north-south transportation artery, an ecological corridor across China's eastern plains, and a key channel for grain transport and economic-cultural exchange between north and south. The towns, settlements, docks, and vessels along its banks are invaluable assets of water-related cultural heritage.

Since the late Qing dynasty, the Grand Canal has suffered from interrupted flow, the cessation of grain transport, the decay of facilities, and the degradation of ecosystems. Today, under the guidance of the New Era River Strategy, environmental remediation and ecological restoration of the canal system are steadily advancing. The revitalized Grand Canal, brought to life through protection, has become a shining emblem of China's water culture legacy.



A flock of birds at the Yalu River Estuary Wetland in Dandong, Liaoning Province.
(Photo taken on April 18, 2023, by Liu Haidong, Xinhua News Agency.)

A number of water conservancy and irrigation projects, such as the Karez system in Turpan, Xinjiang, the jointly nominated Huizhou weir dams – Wuyuan stone weirs, and the Fengyan Terraced Fields in Hanyin, Shaanxi, have been inscribed on the World Heritage Irrigation Structures list. The China Yellow (Bohai) Sea Migratory Bird Habitat (Phase II) has also been extended and included in the World Heritage list. These sites have attracted global attention and are receiving more scientifically based protection. Currently, additional water-linked cultural heritage sites are being actively prepared for nomination.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, regions and departments across the country have systematically conducted surveys, classification, and assessments of water conservancy heritage. Efforts have been made to improve protection and management mechanisms, and to develop scientific support systems and technical standards for heritage

conservation. Several provinces and cities have formulated plans for water culture development, gaining a clearer understanding of their water heritage resources. A number of national water conservancy scenic areas and national water education bases have been established.

——Creative Transformation and Innovative Development of Water Culture

To protect, inherit, and promote the fine traditional water culture of China, it is essential not only to safeguard heritage sites, relics, and historical remains, but also to advance its creative transformation and innovative development.

In recent years, regions along the Yellow River have actively worked to preserve and promote Yellow River culture. Efforts include launching research initiatives on the Yellow River heritage, tracing and renewing the cultural gene of water governance, integrating water conservancy projects with cultural exhibitions, and digitally reproducing and disseminating the historical and cultural heritage of the Yellow River. A vibrant tourism belt and cultural experience corridor showcasing the charm of the Yellow River is taking shape, gradually forming a cultural belt along the entire river.

Across the Yangtze River Basin, localities have delved into the rich historical and cultural connotations of Yangtze River civilization—from the Sanxingdui to the Liangzhu archaeological sites, from the legends of Qu Yuan to the poetic footprints of Li Bai and Du Fu, from the Temple of the Three Sus to the Six-Foot Alley, and from porcelain and Yixing clay teapots to Suzhou embroidery and Yun brocade. Through technological empowerment, cultural elements are being infused into modern life, fostering distinctive cultural brands centered on the "Mother River" and steadily deepening public understanding and recognition.

Along the Grand Canal, a series of thematic museums has been built and opened to the public. A large number of cultural relics related to the canal are well preserved and displayed. In Huai'an, Jiangsu Province, the China Water Engineering Science and Technology Museum is currently under construction.

In accordance with the CPC Central Committee's strategic plan to build five major national cultural parks, the Great Wall, Grand Canal, Long March, Yellow River, and Yangtze River, construction is progressing rapidly. The official Construction Plan for the Great Wall, Grand Canal, and Long March National Cultural Parks was released in 2019, and the Construction and Protection Plan for the Yangtze River National Cultural Park was issued in 2025, accelerating the formation of a comprehensive planning system for national cultural park development and protection.

The Yellow River National Cultural Park centers on the symbiosis of basin ecology and civilization, linking regional cultures such as He-Huang culture, He-Luo culture, and Qi-Lu culture. The Yangtze River National Cultural Park follows the golden waterway, connecting cultural zones including Qiang-Tibetan culture, Ba-Shu cultural, Jing-Chu culture, and Wu-Yue culture, and narrating the millennia-old cultural legacy of the Yangtze Economic Belt. Along the Grand Canal, the construction of dazzling cultural corridors, green ecological belts, and vibrant tourism zones is continuously advancing,

with increasingly diverse spaces for cultural display and public engagement.

——**Vigorously Promoting the Spirit of Water Governance**

General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized, "We should extract the cream of traditional Chinese culture, and display those elements that are still relevant in the world today."

Carrying forward the spirit of water governance is a vital part of promoting China's water culture. Since ancient times, the Chinese people have been tested by frequent floods, droughts, and other natural disasters, which demanded extraordinary courage and wisdom in the pursuit of survival and development. Through centuries of water management practice, the Chinese nation has accumulated a rich legacy of spiritual strength. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the Chinese people have engaged in a sweeping and heroic endeavor to harness water, giving rise to the Spirit of Flood Control, the Hongqi Canal Spirit, and other enduring traditions. Together, these spirits have contributed to a long line of inspiring principles for Chinese communists.

In the new era, under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee with comrade Xi Jinping at its core, China has successfully withstood major floods, defused grave risks, and responded to severe disasters. It has completed a series of large-scale water conservancy projects and reshaped the development landscape of its rivers. All these achievements have been underpinned by the Water Governance Spirit. This spirit continues to be enriched and elevated through the practices of pooling collective strength, uniting in struggle, driving reform and innovation, and overcoming formidable challenges.

Grounded in practice, telling a good story of China's river protection and governance in the new era is an essential part of vigorously promoting the Water Governance Spirit.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, a wide array of literary and artistic works reflecting the theme of river governance and embodying contemporary values have been created. Across the country, numerous exhibition halls and similar venues have been established to showcase the achievements of river management. Through international platforms such as the United Nations Water Conference, the World Water Congress, and the World Water Forum, China has actively shared its wisdom, solutions, and strength with the global community.

The great rivers of China bear witness to the spiritual heritage of the Chinese nation. They shape the spiritual homeland of the Chinese people, provide an inexhaustible source of vitality for national renewal, and inspire a deeper, more proactive spiritual force in the country's unrelenting pursuit of building a great country and realizing national rejuvenation.

Chapter 3:

Taking Rivers as Links to Promote High-Quality Development

Strong support of water resources is indispensable for advancing into a new development stage, applying a new development philosophy, constructing a new development pattern, forming a unified national market, boosting smooth domestic circulation, and promoting the coordinated development of the southern and northern regions.

——Xi Jinping

Rivers and lakes nurture life, sustain development, and carry the legacy of civilizations—they stand as irreplaceable pillars of socioeconomic progress. The philosophy guiding a country's development and the pathways adopted shape the health of these waterways and directly influence the sense of fulfillment, happiness, and security among people residing along their banks.

The New Era River Strategy represents how the new development philosophy is systematically applied in advancing river protection, governance, and China's high-quality development. This strategy maps out clear directions and offers actionable pathways for striking the balance between development and protection, aligning urban-rural spatial planning and industrial restructuring with the carrying capacity of resources and the environment, and driving the river basin economy toward meaningful qualitative improvement while securing steady quantitative growth.

Rivers flow ever forward, and vision lights the way ahead. As it is carrying out the New Era River Strategy, China is unlocking fresh vitality through innovative development, making new strides in coordinated development, delivering greater results in green development, embracing new dynamics in open development, and taking further steps in shared development. Across river basins and throughout the country, a new landscape is unfolding—one that advances the new development dynamic and propels high-quality growth.

3.1 Innovation First: Driving River Basin Development, Transformation, and Upgrading

Today, a nation's competitive edge on the global stage is increasingly defined by its capacity for innovation. For this reason, the New Era River Strategy prioritizes innovation as the primary driver of development, advances innovation-driven growth initia-

tives, and fosters an economic system and development model where innovation serves as the core catalyst.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, during his inspection tours along major rivers, General Secretary Xi Jinping—with a focus on key entities such as universities, research institutions, national key laboratories, and innovative technological enterprises—has put forward a series of important requirements and rolled out critical arrangements for accelerating sci-tech innovation and advancing institutional innovation. This guidance has steered the transformation and upgrading of economic development in river basin regions.

From the banks of the Pearl River to the shores of the Haihe River, and from the Three-River-Source to the eastern coast, a strong momentum for technological and industrial innovation is gathering across China. Breakthroughs have been achieved in basic and cutting-edge research, and major strides have been made in strategic high-tech fields. Innovation-driven development has yielded greater results in advancing high-quality growth, and reforms to the science and technology system have opened up new prospects. New technologies, new business formats, and new models continue to thrive, unlocking the full potential of development.

——Accelerating Sci-Tech Innovation and Developing New Quality Productive Forces in Light of Local Conditions

In today's world, whoever takes hold of technological innovation as the key driver and makes the first move in this critical domain will gain the initiative and secure an edge. Advancing the New Era River Strategy and driving high-quality development demand stronger scientific and technological support, and a more robust "primary engine" of innovation, than ever before.

Practically speaking, technological innovation gives rise to new industries, new business models, and new growth drivers—and stands as the cornerstone of developing new productive forces. Regions along rivers and coasts, with their concentration of industrial factors and talent advantages, possess inherent strengths in promoting technological innovation and should thus act as the primary force and pioneer in innovation-driven development.

Located alongside the Chaohu Lake, Hefei, capital of Anhui Province, has emerged as a hub for research institutions and high-tech enterprises—most notably the University of Science and Technology of China (USTC) and iFlytek. The city has prioritized building three flagship hubs focused on quantum information, fusion energy, and deep-space exploration, and has made a number of scientific breakthroughs. At the same time, Hefei has also accelerated its push for industrial innovation. It has attracted over 300 enterprises operating in the low-altitude economy, and successfully established an end-to-end ecosystem that covers the entire lifecycle of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs)—from research and development (R&D) and testing to manufacturing and business operation.



Science Island, Hefei City, Anhui Province. (Drone photo taken on May 17, 2024, by Wang Tianhao, Xinhua News Agency.)

Hubei Province, known as China's "Province of a Thousand Lakes", boasts notable strengths in science, education, and talent. The province has built a matrix of scientific and technological capabilities anchored by national key laboratories and major science facilities, and also doubled its efforts to break through core technologies—including memory chips, Percutaneous Myocardial Ablation, and Beidou integrated positioning-navigation-timing (PNT) systems. As a result, Hubei's role in China's national innovation landscape has grown increasingly prominent. Its modern industrial clusters are expanding at an accelerated pace: three sectors—optoelectronic information, automobile manufacturing and services, and big health—have developed into trillion-yuan industries, while 19 others have reached the 100-billion-yuan scale.

Regions across the Yellow River Basin are also pursuing innovation tailored to their local strengths. In the upper reaches, Ningxia has built up a robust modern coal chemical sector, with key segments focusing on coal-to-liquids (CTL), coal-to-gas (CTG), and coal-to-olefins (CTO). What was once "a single lump of coal" is now processed into end products like "a drop of oil", "a piece of fabric", and "a strand of fiber". In the middle reaches, Shanxi Province is concentrating its efforts on advancing new-type industrialization and developing a new energy system. It has established the "Jinchuang Valley" innovation-driven platform, and secured breakthroughs in a range of core technologies, such as high-speed maglev trains and 8-inch silicon carbide (SiC) crystal growth furnaces. In the lower reaches, Shandong Province, capitalizing on its manufacturing prowess, has fostered over 1,000 little giant firms—novel elites of small and medium-sized enterprises that specialize in a niche market, boast cutting-edge technologies, and show great potential. It is focusing on seven future-oriented industries, including artificial intelligence (AI) and deep-sea and aerospace technologies, while ramping up efforts to build several pilot zones and featured parks.

All regions along China's major rivers are accelerating the development of new quali-

ty productive forces and driving deep integration between technological and industrial innovation. Cutting-edge products and services continue to emerge in large numbers, while new industries, business forms, and models—represented by the "AI Plus" initiative—are scaling up and taking root at a faster pace, fostering new growth drivers more effectively and upgrading traditional ones.

——Promoting Institutional Innovation to Unlock Innovation Vitality Across Society

The key to innovation is breaking from the old and forging the new. To put the New Era River Strategy into practice, we need to learn from the way rivers behave—pressing forward without hesitation and surmounting every obstacle. We need to tear down all institutional barriers that hold back innovation, build and refine systems and mechanisms that better facilitate the integration of industry, academia, research, and application, and unlock a steady flow of innovation.

The Qiantang River nourishes Hangzhou's booming startup ecosystem, spawning many tech upstarts like the "Six Little Tech Dragons". To fast-track its growth as a new "Tech City", Hangzhou keeps refining its systems for talent recruitment, development, assessment, and support. It deepens reforms to grant institutions rights over job-based tech achievements, and urges universities and research institutes to license these achievements to micro and small enterprises under a "use-first, pay-later" model. Municipal, district, and provincial governments have jointly rolled out sci-tech innovation mother funds to steer social capital toward early-stage, small-scale, long-term, and core-technology investments.

The Pearl River Delta (PRD) was an early pioneer of China's reform and opening-up. It has pushed ahead vigorously with reforms to sci-tech systems and mechanisms and steadily boosted the region's sci-tech innovation capacity. To further cement enterprises' role as the main drivers of innovation, Guangdong has rolled out a suite of policies: the "12 Measures for Sci-Tech Innovation", work plans to support R&D in tech-based SMEs, and guidelines on additional tax deductions for R&D expenses before tax calculation. By empowering sci-tech professionals and acting as a "broker for scientists", it has accelerated the speed and efficiency of turning sci-tech achievements into practical applications.

Shanghai has set its sights on becoming a globally influential hub for sci-tech innovation. To address the fragmentation and disconnect between industry, academia, research, and application, it's using "talent collaboration" as a key driver—rolling out reforms such as developing engineering master's and doctoral programs, establishing an industrial mentor system, and building a team of technology managers. In this way, the city has tapped university science parks as testbeds, while local governments step in to bridge gaps between these four sectors.

In advancing the New Era River Strategy, local governments have continued to deepen reforms. They focus on removing bottlenecks and pain points that hinder the development of new quality productive forces, giving full play to the market's decisive role in

resource allocation while better leveraging the government's role. Efforts are also made to build a high-standard market system, refine the way resource factors are allocated, and accelerate the translation of more sci-tech achievements into tangible productive forces.

3.2 Coordination: Addressing Development Imbalances

Coordinated development is centered on tackling imbalances in growth. China boasts an extensive network of major rivers and river basins, with stark disparities in natural resources and infrastructure across upstream and downstream regions, as well as between different basins. Advancing coordinated development is thus a long-haul, demanding task.

The New Era River Strategy is rooted in China's reality of uneven regional growth. It respects the distinct features of river basins, uses rivers as connecting links, and guides local governments to move beyond administrative divides. By linking cities across river basins, the strategy fosters the optimized allocation and coordination of resource factors.

Policies are suited to local contexts and shifting needs, with region-specific and sector-specific strategies in place. Currently, major regional initiatives are being advanced in a cohesive, highly synergistic way. Progress on building a regional economic framework—one defined by complementary strengths and high-quality growth—is picking up speed. This framework aims to narrow the development divide between the north and south, and between eastern, central, and western China, while pursuing development that is differentiated, coordinated, and seamlessly integrated.

——Taking Rivers as Links to Advance Coordinated Development of River Basins and Regions

China's sprawling network of rivers and lakes provides abundant water resources, ecological services, and convenient transportation for development across river basins. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has rolled out a series of regional development strategies. These include the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, the construction of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the integrated development of the Yangtze River Delta region, the ecological protection and high-quality development of the Yellow River Basin, and the development of the Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle. What binds all these regions together is their tight connection via rivers and lakes, which are inherent advantages for coordinated development.

The New Era River Strategy aligns seamlessly with the nation's major regional development initiatives. It zeroes in on boosting the coherence and synergy of river basin development, guiding riverfront regions to forge a path of rational specialization and optimized growth. Crucially, it advances holistic progress across regions.



Aerial view of both banks of the Huangpu River from the North Bund, Hongkou District, Shanghai. (Panoramic drone photo taken on January 10, 2023, by Fang Zhe, Xinhua News Agency.)

The Yangtze River Delta stands out as a benchmark region in China, with exceptional economic density, a sophisticated division of labor, and robust growth drivers. The three provinces Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, and one municipality, Shanghai, have paid great attention to integration and high-quality development, working together to build a top-tier public service system while smoothing the flow of critical resources—including technology, capital, and talent—across the region. They have kept advancing coordinated development of the manufacturing industry; as of June this year, they've established 26 national-level manufacturing clusters, covering sectors like large aircraft, biomedicine, integrated circuits, new materials, and high-end equipment.

Provinces along the Yangtze River Economic Belt, also focusing on collaboration, have upheld the principles of inter-provincial consultation, joint ecological governance, integrated regional development, and shared benefits. This effort has driven major progress in regional integration and strengthened connectivity across the belt. The Yangtze River's role as a "golden waterway" has seen significant enhancement, with intermodal transportation efficiency improved substantially and transport service quality enhanced consistently. For industrial development, provinces and cities along the river have leveraged their strengths while pursuing synergy. They have continued to optimize the layout of key productive forces and guided the orderly transfer of capital, technology, and labor-intensive industries from eastern regions to central and western areas, and from core cities to hinterlands. This transfer has gradually narrowed the development gap between the upper, middle, and lower reaches of the river.

Regions across the Yellow River Basin, building their development around local resources and basin-specific strengths, have pursued differentiated and coordinated growth. Areas like the Three-River-Source and the Qilian Mountains prioritize ecological protection and water conservation to deliver more ecological benefits; major grain hubs—such as the Hetao Irrigation District and the Fenwei Plain—promote growth in modern agriculture; comprehensive energy hubs, including Shanxi Province and the Ordos Basin, advance modern energy sectors; in the middle and lower reaches, where industrial foundations run deep, regions are accelerating the development of strategic emerg-

ing industries and advanced manufacturing. The push to explore and shape a coordinated development model with distinct regional traits is gathering steam.

Drawing on resources along the Pearl River Estuary and coastal shorelines, the Pearl River Delta (PRD) has boosted infrastructure connectivity, deepened supply chain collaboration, and teamed up to develop sectors like inland waterway shipping, freshwater aquaculture, and eco-tourism. For example, Shantou has launched multiple regular liner services, fostering frequent links with the PRD ports. Zhanjiang has steadily taken on industrial transfers from the PRD. Cities such as Zhuhai and Jiangmen have promoted water-land integration to jointly grow inland waterway tourism. Across the river basin, cities are tailoring their efforts to balance resource distribution and speed up the move toward a new coordinated development model where each fills a clear functional role and also uses its strengths to complement one another.

China's two "mother rivers" and its three major city clusters form economic corridors that link north to south and east to west, while also serving as key engines for high-quality growth. When integrated with the country's four major regions, they unlock a coordinated effect where $I + I > N$. From beyond the Great Wall to the banks of the Yangtze, a fresh symphony of regional economic development is unfolding.

—Advancing Integrated and Coordinated Development of Urban-Rural Areas and Regions

In China's development, the defining imbalance is the urban-rural divide, and the core inadequacy is rural underdevelopment. To build a modern socialist country in all respects, we need to develop thriving cities as well as prosperous rural areas and foster a new urban-rural dynamic—one defined by mutual reinforcement between industry and agriculture, urban-rural mutual support, coordinated growth, and shared prosperity.

To implement the New Era River Strategy, we need to tap into river and lake resources to align new-type urbanization with comprehensive rural revitalization. This involves fully advancing integrated urban-rural planning, development, and governance; enabling fair exchange and two-way flow of urban-rural factors; closing urban-rural gaps; and promoting shared prosperity across towns and villages. Notably, it is important to align river protection and governance with building more livable, business-friendly, and beautiful rural areas—carving out a new development path where ecosystems thrive, industries boom, and farmers prosper.

Along the Pearl River, uneven urban-rural and regional development remains the biggest bottleneck to high-quality growth in Guangdong. The province has focused on aligning river and coastal development, with county-level progress as a key priority. It's guiding coastal counties to vigorously boost the marine economy, helping riverfront and mountainous counties turn ecological strengths into industrial gains, and enabling counties to expand their industries beyond primary sectors into secondary and tertiary ones. In this way, all water resources can deliver maximum value.

On the shores of Poyang Lake, Gongqingcheng, a city in Jiangxi Province, has adopted an "end-to-end" approach to sewage management. It has tried three key methods: us-

ing urban resources to help rural areas handle sewage; coordinating sewage treatment across nearby villages and towns as a single unit; and building small wastewater plants close to rural communities. With more than 100 domestic sewage treatment plants now built, sewage is properly dealt with, villages are cleaner, and work and living conditions in rural areas keep getting better.

Industrial revitalization is the top priority for comprehensive rural revitalization. In Shandong Province, Linyi's Mengyin County has adjusted its peach varieties to build a well-known "sweet fruit industry". In Heze, beyond developing peony-themed tourism, the city has expanded its peony industry by creating products like peony seed oil and peony tea. Making use of its water resources, Shandong is accelerating the growth of local specialty animal husbandry and fisheries in rural areas, with tailored strategies for each sector. This effort helps boost farmers' incomes steadily.

Rivers connect urban and rural areas and sustain local communities. Across China, all regions are making the most of their river resources—addressing gaps to unlock development potential and strengthen long-term growth drivers. This has put urban-rural integration on a path of tangible progress.

3.3 Green & Low-Carbon: Fortifying Foundations for Sustainable Development

Green development is centered on fostering harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature. The New Era River Strategy underscores the concept that "lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets." This means economic activities and human behavior must operate within the capacity of water resources and aquatic ecosystems, and green and low-carbon development must be promoted. Efforts should also be made to unlock the ecological value of rivers and lakes, and actively explore pathways to materialize the value of aquatic ecological products—ultimately translating "lucid waters and lush mountains" into tangible economic gains.

The river strategy in the new era has charted a clear course for regions along rivers to prioritize ecological protection and pursue green development. Driven by dual efforts to transform ecological resources into industrial value and make industrial development eco-friendly, water quality has improved year by year, our "mother rivers" have regained their vitality, and all localities have continued to achieve new progress in advancing the transition to green and low-carbon development.

——Promoting the Ecological Development of Industries and Raising the "Green Value" in Economic and Social Development

During his inspection tours in various river basin regions, General Secretary Xi Jinping gave important instructions. For the Yangtze River Economic Belt, he called for further "advancing high-quality, green and low-carbon development"; he emphasized that "all provinces and autonomous regions in the Yellow River Basin must take the basin's ecological protection as the fundamental guideline for planning and advancing high-quality

development"; and for the management of the Fenhe River, he stressed that "efforts to strengthen the basin's ecological protection must be integrated with advancing the energy revolution, promoting green production and lifestyles, and driving economic transformation and development"...

To implement the New Era River Strategy, we must utilize river and lake resources in a balanced, controlled manner. Crucially, this requires shifting away from the long-standing model of "excessive production, excessive consumption, and excessive emissions"—a shift that will help avoid missteps in the use of natural resources. Local practices clearly demonstrate that committing to green, low-carbon development can spawn new drivers of economic growth and ultimately fuel high-quality development.

Industrial production is moving fast toward green development. Take, for example, Taiyuan Iron & Steel Group (TISCO), a company located along the banks of the Fenhe River in Taiyuan, Shanxi Province. Beyond first ensuring its own internal water recycling needs are met, the company supplies 100% of its reclaimed water to the city's wetland park, integrating its internal water cycle into the broader urban water system. It has also upgraded all production processes to achieve ultra-low environmental emissions and thus enabled efficient and clean production. This not only expands its development potential but also delivers significant social and environmental benefits. Across China, similar efforts are underway: all regions are pushing for upgrades in industrial sectors such as steel, non-ferrous metals, petrochemicals, chemicals, building materials, papermaking, and printing and dyeing. The goal is clear—cut pollution and reduce carbon emissions while driving growth through greener practices.

Agricultural production is becoming greener and more efficient. Around the Chagan Lake in Jilin Province, vast farmlands once posed a critical problem: farm runoff—contaminated with residual fertilizers and pesticides—flowed into the lake, gradually degrading its water quality. In recent years, Jilin has taken targeted action: it has stepped up efforts to tackle agricultural non-point source pollution, actively promoted the science-based application of pesticides and fertilizers, introduced green demonstration projects for pest control (such as biological control), and worked to establish recycling systems for waste plastic films and pesticide packaging. Thanks to this shift toward greener, more eco-friendly agricultural practices, the Chagan Lake's water quality has improved steadily year by year.

More and more energy sources are becoming cleaner and lower-carbon. China is tapping into its river and water resources to accelerate its green energy development. Six mega hydropower stations along the Yangtze River—Wudongde, Baihetan, Xiluodu, Xiangjiaba, Three Gorges, and Gezhouba now form the world's largest clean energy corridor. From the vast northwest to the eastern coast, the push to harness abundant solar and wind resources is gaining momentum. Provincial-level regions, like Gansu, Qinghai, and Inner Mongolia, keep installing more new energy capacity, which not only meets the growing green power needs in river basins but also bolsters the country's broader shift to a low-carbon economy.

Changes in industry, agriculture, energy, and beyond are converging to fuel a steady momentum for green development. As China shifts from pollution to protection, and from extensive to intensive practices, green development has unlocked broader markets while fostering higher quality growth.

——Promoting Ecology-Related Industries and Boosting the "Economic Value" of Lucid Waters and Lush Mountains

Natural resources, as a means of labor, are a fundamental element of productive forces. The New Era River Strategy makes it clear that a healthy ecology inherently holds immense economic value—it sustains a steady flow of various benefits and underpins the sustainable development of the economy and society. Lucid waters and lush mountains are not just natural and ecological assets, but also social and economic ones. Protecting the environment means safeguarding natural value and growing natural capital; it also means preserving the potential and driving force for economic and social progress.

Local governments need to fully capitalize on "lucid waters and lush mountains"—a key asset for sustainable growth. They should make full use of their natural resources and unique landscapes to boost the "economy of natural beauty." Through reform and innovation, factors like land, labor, assets, and natural scenery can be activated, turning the ecological value of river basins into tangible economic gains.

Ecotourism is thriving thanks to the country's rivers and lakes. Take, for example, the Baiyangdian Lake in Hebei Province—known as the "Pearl of North China." Its ecology has improved steadily in recent years: this beautiful "bird paradise" has been revived, and a vivid picture of harmony between humans and nature is unfolding. Today, Baiyangdian is a popular spot for bird watching and tourism. Local villagers are gaining the benefits of this ecological revival: they have opened rural guesthouses and built their incomes around tourism.



Tourists enjoy the beauty of the Baiyangdian Lake aboard cruise ships. (Drone photo taken on April 30, 2018, by Shen Bohan, Xinhua News Agency.)

River resources, when harnessed well, can unlock huge potential for eco-agriculture. Kaihua County, nestled at the headwaters of the Qiantang River in Zhejiang Province, got a major boost when Qianjiangyuan (source of the Qiantang River) National Park became one of China's first 10 national parks. Kaihua put this regional brand front and center to boost its eco-product business. It brought together 34 kinds of eco-goods—

like Longding tea, clear-water fish, and organic honey—and partnered with high-end supermarkets. Today, these eco-friendly foods that are grown in the mountains can go straight from Kaihua to dinner tables across the Yangtze River Delta. For local residents, this means more income in their pockets.

More efforts to better unlock the ecological value of rivers and lakes are also underway. Lishui, a city in Zhejiang Province, has rolled out a dual-system for GDP and GEP (Gross Ecosystem Product): dual accounting, dual assessment, and dual performance evaluation. It's also pioneering ways to make GEP usable—allowing it to be taken as collateral, converted into cash, and used for financing. Since launching Zhejiang's first regional eco-product trading center in 2022, Lishui has facilitated trades for various ecological resources and products. This has opened up even more possibilities to turn "lucid waters and lush mountains" into tangible value.

Protecting and enhancing the value of "lucid waters and lush mountains" has been reinforced by effective ecological compensation mechanisms. In 2012, China's first inter-provincial (Anhui-Zhejiang) ecological compensation pilot was launched in the Xin'an River Basin. As a result, Anhui's Huangshan City—located upstream—has reaped two key benefits: it has received financial compensation from downstream regions, and its eco-friendly industries have thrived. Today, 24 provinces across the country have established 30 inter-provincial trans-basin ecological compensation mechanisms. Relevant ministries and departments have also jointly released implementation plans to further advance the development of such mechanisms for the main streams of major rivers.

In implementing the New Era River Strategy, all localities are using their green mountains and clear waters to explore the development of industries like eco-farming, eco-breeding, and wellness tourism. By turning ecological advantages into development strengths, they're steadily transforming "lucid waters and lush mountains" into tangible economic gains.

3.4 Expansion of Opening-up: Forging Link Within and Beyond Basins

Opening up is a defining feature of contemporary China and an essential path to national prosperity and development. The New Era River Strategy calls for fully leveraging the advantages of major rivers, resolutely advancing high-level opening-up, making better use of both domestic and international markets and resources, and continuously fostering new competitive edges in global cooperation.

Geographically, China's rivers connect the east and the west, run through the north and the south, forming open systems by nature. Historically, where rivers meet the sea, openness has always thrived. From Tianjin in the north to Shanghai and Guangzhou in the south, these cities serve as both river estuaries and seaports, linking inland regions upstream and connecting China with the world downstream.

To implement the New Era River Strategy, regions along rivers and coasts should give full play to their geographic advantage of internal and external connectivity, carry forward the pioneering spirit, expand opening-up, deepen reform, and promote development. These efforts will help build a higher-level open economic system and inject new momentum into the new pattern of development. From the Yellow River Basin to the Bohai Rim, from the banks of the Yangtze to the shores of the South China Sea, a vivid new picture of opening-up connecting rivers and seas is unfolding.

——Rivers Interconnected: Unblocking the Circulation of the National Economy

China's vast market is a major strength. By leveraging the domestic market and ensuring the smooth functioning of internal economic circulation, China continues to consolidate the foundations for sustainable growth. Through inland waterway transport and port trade, rivers act as the capillaries of the national economy to foster and unlock the internal drivers of development.

Inland waterway transport is a vital pillar for strengthening domestic circulation. Since 2005, the Yangtze River has ranked first in the world in inland cargo throughput for twenty consecutive years, with the benefits of its "Golden Waterway" increasingly evident. The main corridors, such as the Xijiang River and the Grand Canal, have seen continued capacity upgrades. The Jiangnan Canal and Jianghuai Canal have been completed and opened to navigation, and by the end of 2025, China will add 900 kilometers of high-grade navigable waterways. Since 2012, the inland ports have added over ten thousand-ton berths annually. With the upgrading of inland ports and waterways, in the first five months of 2025, inland cargo throughput exceeded 2 billion tons, up nearly 4 percent year on year. Inland navigation has strengthened regional connectivity, boosted flows of goods and people, and unleashed the potential of domestic demand.

Interconnected river infrastructure facilitates the flow of resources and production factors. The Yangtze River Economic Belt is accelerating the development of a networked, standardized, and intelligent multi-dimensional transport corridor by coordinating railways, highways, air routes, and pipelines. This higher-level open transport network creates new space for factor mobility. The Pinglu Canal, a backbone project of the New Western Land-Sea Corridor, will open a new combined river-sea transport route from the main stream of the Xijiang River to the South China Sea for China's southwest regions once completed.

Major water conservancy projects form the foundation for river protection and governance, and are also key areas for expanding effective investment. Beyond the construction of the National Water Network, modernization of large irrigation districts such as Hetao in Inner Mongolia, expansion of projects like Xiangjiaba Phase II in Sichuan, and development of reservoirs including the Huangmao Gorge Reservoir in Guangdong, as well as large- and medium-scale water diversion works such as the Zhejiang Central Water Resources Allocation Project and key embankment reinforcement in Dongting Lake, are all progressing steadily. These projects will play significant roles in sta-

bilizing investment, improving livelihoods, and promoting smooth economic circulation.

——**Connecting Rivers to the Sea: Integrating Domestic and International Circulations**

China's rivers possess natural advantages in connecting domestic and international markets. Facing an increasingly complex and challenging external environment, river basins across the country are leveraging their geographic strengths to advance high-level opening-up, attract global resources and factors, and promote deeper integration between the Chinese and world markets.



A view of the container terminal at bustling Longtan Port Area, Nanjing Port.
(Panoramic drone photo taken on September 25, 2024, by Li Bo, Xinhua News Agency.)

The Yangtze River Economic Belt spans China's eastern, central, and western regions, enjoying a unique advantage for opening up in both the eastward and westward directions. In the upper reaches, Chongqing's Guoyuan Port, located at the "golden junction" of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Yangtze River Economic Belt, has been actively expanding logistics corridors and speeding up its development into a comprehensive inland hub for opening-up, with access to more than 300 ports in over 100 countries and regions. In the middle reaches, Wuhan has launched its fifth international direct waterway route via the Yangtze River, traversing the East and South China Seas to Ho Chi Minh City's Cai Lay Port in Vietnam, significantly reducing logistics costs. In the lower reaches, the Ningbo-Zhoushan Port has topped the world in cargo throughput for sixteen consecutive years, and is partnering with Hamburg, Wilhelmshaven, and Valencia ports to jointly establish three green shipping corridors. Shanghai Port, by applying digital technologies, is enhancing the efficiency of its international transshipment and consolidation services. The Yangtze River Economic Belt is thus capitalizing on its locational advantages, deepening cooperation with global ports and shipping routes, and integrating more deeply into the high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, shaping a new highland for high-level opening-up.

The Yellow River Basin is accelerating the establishment of a new pattern of opening-up that integrates domestic and international development, links land and sea, and promotes east-west coordination and multi-directional progress. Major cities along the Yellow River are exploring institutional mechanisms that align with international standards, facilitate investment and trade, and attract global high-quality factors, thereby strengthening international exchanges and building gateways of the Yellow River Basin

for external opening. Regions such as Ningxia in the upper and middle reaches of the Yellow River play their roles as key corridors and nodes of the Silk Road Economic Belt to expand trade and cultural exchanges with Central, South, and West Asia, fostering inland hubs for opening-up. Xi'an, Zhengzhou, and other hubs of the China-Europe Railway Express are expanding their service networks, opening new space for international cooperation. With the steady advancement of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, the prospects for two-way openness across the Yellow River Basin are increasingly broad.

Northeast China is working to build a new frontier for northward opening-up. The Heihe-Blagoveshchensk Highway Bridge, the first cross-border road bridge over the Heilongjiang River between China and Russia, opened in 2022, creating a new international transport corridor linking Northeast China and Russia's Far East. Heilongjiang Province is actively leveraging its position as a key node in the Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, accelerating the construction of a pilot zone for northward opening-up within the Heilongjiang Pilot Free Trade Zone.

Southwest border regions are focusing on building a hub that radiates toward South and Southeast Asia. In Yunnan, the four-level navigation project along the Lancang River has been in trial operation since 2025, significantly improving navigational conditions and capacity, creating favorable conditions for advancing the Lancang-Mekong waterway construction and fostering the Lancang-Mekong Economic Development Belt. Guangxi is continuously optimizing its route network, increasing the frequency of routes between Beibu Gulf Port and Southeast Asia. As of now, Beibu Gulf Port operates 80 shipping routes, including 49 international routes, covering major domestic ports and key ports in Southeast and Northeast Asia.

By deepening opening-up to the east, accelerating openness to the west, coordinating land-sea opening, and expanding border opening...under the guidance of the New Era River Strategy, regions along rivers and coasts are continuously deepening factor-based openness in goods and services, steadily advancing institutional openness, and fostering new advantages in high-level opening-up.

3.5 Co-building & Sharing: Extending Development Benefits to All

Shared development focuses on addressing issues of social equity and justice. Guided by the New Era River Strategy, all regions are working through the protection and governance of rivers to continually meet the people's aspirations for a better life, enabling the public to share in the ecological beauty, development achievements, and quality of life that rivers bring.

Allowing all people to share in the fruits of reform and development is the essence of socialism. In reality, China's water resources are unevenly distributed, and there remain shortcomings in meeting people's needs for a better life along riverbanks. By prac-

ting the New Era River Strategy, localities have strengthened water resource allocation and ensured safe drinking water, while leveraging river ecosystems to spur vitality and improve well-being of all.

—— **Sharing the Nourishment of Rivers: Ensuring Safe Drinking Water for All**

Rivers nourish hundreds of millions of people. Ensuring safe drinking water for the people has always been a top concern of General Secretary Xi Jinping. Recognizing China's uneven spatial and temporal distribution of water resources and the mismatch between water availability and productivity, localities have stepped up their efforts to secure water supply, achieving tangible results in safeguarding access to safe drinking water.

The ever-flowing waters from the south have become "lifelines" for residents along the receiving areas. During severe droughts in Shandong in 2017 and 2018, the Eastern Route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project played a central role in securing water for cities such as Qingdao and Yantai. In 2023, the Central Route operated at high discharge volumes to relieve persistent summer heat and drought in northern China. Meanwhile, people in the receiving regions are shifting from "having water to drink" to "drinking good-quality water." The first-phase Eastern and Central Routes now supply about 195 million people. The project has become a lifeline for optimizing water allocation, ensuring water safety, reviving river and lake ecosystems, and promoting the smooth north-south economic circulation.

In the arid northwest, where securing clean drinking water has long been difficult, General Secretary Xi Jinping has shown deep concern. The water diversion project, which diverts water from the Taohe River to regions facing water shortage in the central part of Gansu, had been awaited by locals for more than half a century. During his 2013 inspection tour to Gansu before the Spring Festival, General Secretary Xi Jinping visited a project site in Weiyuan County and urged that people be supplied with clean and sweet water as soon as possible. The first phase was completed at the end of 2014, and the second phase delivered water in September 2021, benefiting nearly six million residents in Gansu.



Yangjiawan storage facility of the Taohe River water diversion project in Tianshui, Gansu Province. (Drone photo taken on September 8, 2021, by Fan Peishen, Xinhua News Agency.)

In Fuping County, Shaanxi Province, water of higher quality from the Qinling Heihe River has been introduced to replace part of the previous water sources. In Beijing, water from both the South-to-North Water Diversion Project and the Yellow River has enabled continuous flow along the entire Yongding River. In northern Anhui and eastern Henan, the Yangtze-to-Huaihe Water Diversion Project now benefits over 50 million people and serves as a second major north-south waterway parallel to the Grand Canal.

In recent years, China has made steady progress in improving drinking water security in rural areas. The coverage rate of piped tap water in rural communities has reached 94 percent. In border ethnic regions such as Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and Xizang, most farmers and herders have bid farewell to the days of carrying water uphill or hauling it from distant sources.

——Making the Most of Rivers: Enabling the People to Share in Ecological Beauty

A sound ecological environment represents the most inclusive form of public well being. General Secretary Xi Jinping noted that the Grand Canal in Beijing, the Suzhou River in Shanghai, and the Haihe River in Tianjin have all achieved remarkable results and won public acclaim after being better managed. More such parks should be built for the people to create happy lives for all.

In implementing the New Era River Strategy, regions across China have advanced the integrated management of mountains, water, and cities, and scientifically planned urban production, living, and ecological spaces. They have built public areas for recreation, fitness, and leisure to better meet people's aspirations for closeness to water and enjoyment of water.

In Liaoning Province, Jinzhou East Lake Forest Park, which General Secretary Xi Jinping visited, is now the largest, highest-standard, and most functional urban waterscape in western Liaoning. Once a polluted and foul-smelling ditch, it has been transformed through comprehensive environmental management into a riverside green corridor for recreation and fitness, attracting 60,000-70,000 visitors daily and greatly enhancing residents' sense of fulfillment.

In Zhejiang Province, the Xixi National Wetland Park is known as the "green lung of paradise." Hangzhou has integrated the planning of its production, living, and ecological spaces, promoting the co-development of wetlands and the city. Xixi's thriving ecosystem has attracted universities, enterprises, and industrial parks to settle nearby, giving rise to the renowned brand "Travel, Learn, Live, and Innovate in Xixi."

In Anhui Province, the Xuejiawa Ecological Park in Ma'anshan City, once plagued by disorderly construction and sewage discharge, prevented local residents from enjoying the riverfront. Supported by loans from the Agricultural Development Bank of China, projects such as shoreline reclamation, wetland restoration, and ecological protection along the Yangtze River were implemented. Today, Xuejiawa has become a beautiful waterfront area where people can enjoy proximity to both the river and nature.

As river protection and management continue to advance, former "black and odorous ditches" and "polluted ponds" have been transformed into "landscape paintings"

and "public squares close to the people", becoming vivid illustrations of high-quality life.

——Revitalizing Rivers: Advancing Common Prosperity

The art of governance begins with enriching the people. To fulfill the people's aspirations for a better life, China must make more substantive progress toward common prosperity for all.

History shows that in less developed regions, water often serves as a key constraint on growth. Many former impoverished areas are mountainous and remote. In General Secretary Xi Jinping's view, such regions can achieve prosperity precisely by leveraging their natural landscapes. These areas are often rich in rivers and ecological resources, resources can be transformed into assets, capital into equity, and farmers into shareholders by activating the potential of land, labor, capital, and natural beauty, turning lucid waters and lush mountains into invaluable assets. Many once-poor regions have followed this path, ensuring access to drinking water while cultivating industries suited to their ecological conditions, thereby driving rural revitalization.

Rivers are vital material carriers in advancing common prosperity. Practicing the New Era River Strategy means upholding the principle of benefiting the people, building harmonious, stable, and beautiful environments, fostering affinity with water, and enabling people in river basins to share more fully in the fruits of reform and development, achieving both material abundance and spiritual enrichment.

Major economic provinces are expected to actively explore experience and play a leading and demonstrative role in promoting common prosperity for all. Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shandong, and Zhejiang are major economic powerhouses but also key regions for implementing the New Era River Strategy.

Guangdong has prioritized green water-centered economic activities, such as aquatic sports, water-themed tourism, riverside leisure and wellness industries, and high-value utilization of quality water resources, to pioneer additional pathways for translating lucid waters and lush mountains into tangible economic assets. By the end of 2024, cumulative investment in the province's water-economy pilot projects reached roughly 12 billion yuan, with every yuan of government outlay leveraging nearly four yuan from other sources. This green water economy is winning strong market favor and expanding rapidly. An official assessment values Guangdong's overall water-related industrial output at more than 1 trillion yuan.

In Jiangsu, local governments have cultivated industries with distinctive river-lake characteristics to advance common prosperity. Shacun Village, located in Dongshan Sub-district of Jiangning District, Nanjing, has leveraged its rich ecological endowments to revitalize the ancient village, promoting wellness-oriented homestays and leisure tourism. Kunshan has leveraged its rural resources around Dianshan Lake to build the "Dianxiao'ai" agricultural brand. In Xinghua, various water sports and "reed marsh tours" have drawn tourists, encouraging local residents to develop fishery-based hospitality services. By developing the county economy through river and lake resources, these efforts

have promoted the free flow of urban and rural factors and laid a solid foundation for integrated urban – rural development.

Zhejiang is the demonstration zone for high-quality development and the building of common prosperity. In 2024 alone, transactions in water-related ecosystem product value totaled 6.17 billion yuan, significantly supporting rural revitalization and common prosperity. Anji County completed the province's first transaction converting soil and water conservation achievements into tradable ecological product value, while advancing reforms on collective water rights to revitalize rural reservoirs. Chun'an and Jiande counties in Hangzhou concluded a water rights transaction involving 50 million cubic meters, exploring mechanisms for coordinated development through water rights trading.

On this new journey, under the guidance of the New Era River Strategy, China is advancing both material and cultural prosperity. The path of development and happiness made possible by the great rivers of China will continue to broaden and flourish.

Chapter 4:

The Chinese Wisdom in The New Era River Strategy

Yugong removing mountains and Yu the Great taming floods have long symbolized the Chinese nation's perseverance in combating natural disasters for millennia. We have accumulated valuable experience and must continue this endeavor. Our struggle is not against nature, but rather to respect nature, follow its laws, respond proactively to disasters, and live in harmony with it.

—— Xi Jinping

Since ancient times, the governance of water has been fundamental to the prosperity and stability of the Chinese nation.

The New Era River Strategy inherits the ecological philosophy of "the unity of man and nature", emphasizing "prioritizing protection and focusing on governance." It stresses respect for both natural and socioeconomic laws, and calls for the integrated advancement of high-quality development and high-level protection. Upholding the concept of the life community of mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, and deserts, it combines governance by law with governance by virtue, leverages the institutional advantages of socialism, and transforms China's water management experience into effective governance capacity plans for rivers to remain vibrant and enduring, and to better sustain high-quality development and Chinese modernization.

Illuminated by the light of truth, China's path to development grows ever clearer. Under the guidance of the New Era River Strategy, the mother rivers of China teem with vitality and their vast basins pulse with dynamism, from the powerful footsteps of innovation along the Yangtze River Economic Belt, to the thriving vigor of the Yellow River Basin, to the nourishing waters of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project sustaining the north. With rivers as its brush, China is painting a colorful new picture of governance that embodies harmony between humanity and nature.

4.1 Coordinating High- Quality Development and High-Level Protection

Civilization originates from rivers. Throughout human history, ecological prosperity has meant civilizational prosperity, while ecological decline has heralded decline. Gener-

al Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly illustrated the dialectical relationship between the rise and fall of civilizations and that of rivers, emphasizing that "water is the foundation of life and the source of civilization."

Quoting ancient wisdom such as "fishing without exhaustive trapping", "draining a pond to catch fish leaves none for tomorrow," and "fine nets should not enter small ponds lest fish and turtles be depleted"... General Secretary Xi Jinping has interpreted the dialectical logic between economic development and ecological conservation. By linking contemporary governance practices with traditional ecological philosophy, he has made clear that "Economic development should not come at the cost of exhausting resources and damaging the ecological environment, nor should ecological and environmental protection be pursued at the expense of economic growth, such an approach would be as futile as 'draining the pond to get the fish' or 'climbing a tree to catch fish'." He has charted a scientific path of jointly promoting large-scale protection and avoiding large-scale development.

It must neither act rashly nor stand idle. General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized, "Prioritizing conservation over large-scale development does not mean rejecting major development altogether, but rather means establishing clear rules—placing ecological restoration of the Yangtze River first and safeguarding the mother river of the Chinese nation. Destructive development must be avoided. By setting rules, we can compel industrial transformation and upgrading. On the premise of ecological protection, we should develop suitable industries and pursue scientific, orderly, and high-quality development." "Protecting the ecological environment is protecting productivity, and improving the ecological environment is developing productivity." These profound insights transcend the outdated dichotomy that once separated ecological protection from economic development. By incorporating environmental elements into the concept of productive forces, they enrich Marxist theory and have yielded increasingly fruitful results in the practice of the New Era River Strategy.

In August 2020, marking the 60th anniversary of the Miyun Reservoir, General Secretary Xi Jinping sent a letter to the local people who had built and protected it, commending vital contribution over six decades in closing factories and mines for the sake of water preservation, and encouraging them to "continue the good work and see it through to success." Over the past five years, Miyun has developed a "5+2" water conservation system integrating ecological economy, improved compensation mechanisms, and enhanced ecological function zones. Its water quality has remained at Class II of the national surface water standard. The area has promoted ecological agriculture and cultural tourism, producing the nationally certified "Miyun Reservoir Fish" brand with an annual fisheries output increase of 15 percent. Wetland restoration has created 36 square kilometers of new ecological space, spurring emerging industries such as ecological education and research travel.



Beijing's Miyun Reservoir. (Drone photo taken on September 1, 2020, by Zhang Chenlin, Xinhua News Agency.)

High-quality development and high-level protection are not multiple-choice options, but inseparable imperatives. Guided by scientific theory, green development has become the defining color of high-quality growth, while high-level protection provides the ecological foundation and innovative impetus for sustained economic and social progress.

Take the fishing moratorium as an example. Monitoring data from 2025 shows that the population of the Yangtze finless porpoise has increased by 27 percent compared with 2020. The porpoise population is rebounding, the Yellow River carp is returning, and aquatic life is thriving again as the waters of the Yangtze and Yellow rivers grow clearer. Alongside establishing genetic databases for fish species through modern technology, efforts are made to develop eco-aquaculture and eco-tourism industries, creating jobs as general workers, logistics staff, forest rangers, cleaners, and fishery-assistant patrols, ensuring that former fishermen are well resettled. This demonstrates a feasible pathway for transformation through "recuperation and regeneration".

The dialectical unity of high-quality development and high-level protection is both a theoretical and practical principle. In the Yellow River Basin, Henan Province has used digital twin technology to improve water and sediment management, while Xixian County in Shanxi has implemented comprehensive soil and water conservation projects and developed its signature Yuluxiang pear industry, covering an area of 3,160 square kilometers. In the Yangtze River Basin, provinces have implemented the "Three Lines and One List" system: red lines for ecological protection, bottom lines for environmental quality, ceilings for resource utilization, and negative lists for environmental access, focusing on tackling the problem regarding chemical plants along the river. New industrial clusters such as Zhuzhou's China Power Valley, Hefei's China Sound Valley, and Wuhan's Optics Valley have emerged, with the combined GDP of the Yangtze River Economic Belt exceeding exceeding 63 trillion yuan in 2024.

4.2 Upholding the Philosophy of the Life Community of Mountains, Rivers, Forests, Farmlands, Lakes, Grasslands, and Deserts

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized, "Mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, and lakes form a life community. The lifeblood of humanity lies in farmlands, that of farmlands lies in water, that of water lies in mountains, that of mountains lies in soil, and that of soil lies in trees." Rooted in China's traditional ecological wisdom and integrated with Marxist ecological thought, this important statement reveals the nature and interconnection of ecosystems and has been systematically embodied in the governance and protection of China's rivers.

From the perspective of natural ecosystems, elements such as mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, and deserts form an organic whole through the cycles of matter and the exchange of energy. Forests conserve water and prevent soil erosion. Farmlands rely on water and soil resources, and aquatic systems regulate the climate and nourish terrestrial ecosystems. Damage to any single element can trigger a chain reaction that endangers the stability of the entire system. This holistic understanding calls for integrated management and warns against fragmented, piecemeal approaches that "treat the head for a headache and the foot for a sore".

The New Era River Strategy stresses the integrated protection and systematic management of mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, and deserts. Its core is to follow natural laws and apply systems thinking to address complex ecological challenges. For example, in treating the "illness" of the Yangtze River, China applies the traditional Chinese medicine concept of holistic regulation. In the Yellow River Basin, it coordinates soil and water conservation, desertification control, and pollution prevention, ensuring synergistic efforts across the upper, middle, and lower reaches.

The life community of mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, and deserts reveals not only the complex interconnections within ecosystems, but also serves as a principle for economic and social governance. It provides a comprehensive epistemology and methodology for national governance under the principle of "acting as one chessboard" nationwide.



The Scenery of Ulansuhai Nur. (Drone photo taken on June 4, 2025, by Li Zhipeng, Xinhua News Agency.)

General Secretary Xi Jinping has pointed out that "land-use control and ecological restoration must follow natural laws. If those who plant trees only focus on planting trees, those who manage water only focus on water, and those who protect farmland only focus on farmland, it is easy to lose sight of the overall picture and cause systemic ecological damage. It is therefore essential for a single department to take responsibility for the unified management, protection, and restoration of all territorial spaces within its jurisdiction."

With a focus on coordinated policy and collective action, new measures have been rolled out, and new progress has been continuously achieved. The 2018 reform of Party and state institutions established regular coordination mechanisms among departments responsible for natural resources, ecology and environment, water resources, and forestry and grasslands. In practice, some regions have integrated multi-departmental resources and formed comprehensive "eco-guardian" enforcement teams for joint supervision of water environments. Law enforcement models have evolved beyond resource-sector dominance. The Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Public Security jointly issued the Opinions on Strengthening the Protection of Rivers and Lakes, establishing a mechanism linking administrative law enforcement and criminal justice. Since 2022, more than 12,000 related cases have been jointly investigated. Public security, procuratorial, judicial, and administrative authorities have all participated, with procuratorial organs advancing public-interest litigation to support river and lake governance.

"I live at the head of the Yangtze, and you live at its end. Though we cannot see each other daily, we share the same river water." The philosophy of the life community of mountains, rivers, forests, farmlands, lakes, grasslands, and deserts is further embodied in regional cooperation. Breaking administrative barriers and achieving coordinated governance across river basins have become defining features of river protection and governance in the new era.

Eleven provinces and municipalities along the Yangtze River Economic Belt have established a mechanism for "jointly promoting great protection", collectively dismantling 12,000 illegal shoreline structures in 2024. In the Taihu Basin, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Shanghai have set unified water-quality compensation standards with a tiered penalty system based on exceedance levels. In the Yellow River Basin, an integrated "sky-space-ground water engineering" monitoring network now covers nine provinces and regions, empowering coordinated regulation through digital technologies. Nationwide, an integrated information platform for river and lake chiefs consolidates monitoring data across regions and departments, realizing "one-network unified management" and providing more precise and long-term support for water governance.

4.3 Combining Rule of Law with Rule of Virtue in Water Governance

Virtue is the foundation, and law is the means of governance. The integration of vir-

tue-based and law-based governance, a hallmark of Chinese civilization, has become a vivid practice in the implementation of the New Era River Strategy. It combines the ethical guidance of "governing water through virtue" with the institutional guarantees of "governing water through law", forming a dual-driven and coordinated framework.

The call to "make the Yellow River a river of happiness that benefits the people" and the emphasis that "people's well-being comes first, and water management is essential" directly link river governance with people's happiness, reflecting a people-centered moral vision. General Secretary Xi Jinping's profound statement that "water is the foundation of life and the source of civilization" elevates water to a civilizational and moral dimension, assigning it an ethical mission of sustaining humanity. His series of important discourses inherits the cultural genes of "governing with virtue" and "benevolence toward the people and all living things". In the practice of water governance, these ideas emphasize moral education, fostering ecological awareness, ecological consciousness, and ecological ethics across the entire society, and promoting the moral virtue of loving and protecting rivers and the natural environment.

The New Era River Strategy embodies a distinct Chinese ethical spirit and moral sense of responsibility. By regarding the Yangtze and Yellow rivers as living entities that have nurtured Chinese civilization, China's approach reflects an ethic of gratitude and intergenerational reciprocity, transforming the relationship from one of taking to one of giving back. It calls upon the people to "protect the rivers that have nourished them", providing a profound moral foundation for modern river governance. A United Nations report observes that China's personification of the Yangtze and Yellow rivers as "mother rivers" goes beyond environmental policy, serving as a powerful form of cultural restoration. The report notes that China's declaration that "our mother rivers are ill" and its mobilization for "joint protection" embody the Oriental wisdom of bringing nature into the sphere of ethical responsibility.

The unity of respecting nature and putting people first, of restoring the serenity of nature and upholding a people-centered approach, forms the moral essence of China's ecological civilization. The New Era River Strategy emphasizes individual moral responsibility within ecological civilization, shaping both ideological and behavioral consciousness toward a shared life community between humans and nature. Inspired by this strategy, the public has become increasingly conscious of the need to "prioritize water conservation and use water resources in accordance with their availability", to reject waste, reduce pollution, and protect river health, nurturing affection for their homeland's rivers and mountains and assuming the duty of "leaving our descendants a beautiful homeland with blue skies, green fields and clear waters".

"When institutions are in place, the people know where to draw the line; when people know the line, they do not transgress it." The rule of law is an indispensable instrument of governance; governing by law is the most reliable and stable form of governance. A modern state must be a state under the rule of law.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has noted that "Promoting green development and

building an ecological civilization hinges on sound institutional arrangements" and "We must improve the legal framework and advance ecological progress with the rule of law in both mind and method."

Under General Secretary Xi Jinping's personal guidance, China has creatively enacted basin-specific legislation, setting major legal benchmarks for the governance of its great rivers. The Yangtze River Protection Law, the Yellow River Protection Law, and the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Ecological Protection Law have institutionalized and legalized the implementation of the New Era River Strategy, integrating top-level design with local innovation and grassroots practice. Greater emphasis is placed on enforcement, ensuring that the law "has teeth" and carries authority, combining punishment, deterrence, and prevention, so that more people know, respect, and observe the law. The rule of law thus builds a solid and lasting safeguard for China's rivers.

The spirit of "putting people's well-being first and water management as a priority" has been incorporated into legal principles. The Weihe River Protection Regulations of Shaanxi Province include a special chapter on cultural protection and inheritance. Mechanisms such as village-level legal liaisons disseminate the virtues of water conservation and river protection, resolving over 40 water-related disputes annually in Dezhou, Shandong. Through legal institutionalization of the strategy, resource constraints, coordinated governance, and cultural integration, the combination of moral cultivation and legal guarantees provides both ethical norms and institutional foundations for river protection, making the New Era River Strategy a vivid embodiment of "law brings order to the world, virtue nurtures the people's hearts".

4.4 Giving Full Play to the Institutional Strengths of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

Only under the socialist system with Chinese characteristics can the protection and governance of rivers receive strong leadership, achieve a sound overall framework, mobilize broad participation, ensure firm implementation, and deliver lasting results.

The leadership of the CPC is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the greatest strength of China's socialist system. To fully implement the New Era River Strategy, it is essential to uphold and strengthen the Party's overall leadership over river protection and governance, ensuring that this leadership extends to every aspect and the entire process of the strategy's implementation, so that river protection and management always advance along the direction charted by General Secretary Xi Jinping.

The key is to put the Party's leadership into concrete practice. Under the centralized, unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, local Party committees and governments at all levels work together under a unified responsibility system, continuously broadening the scope of work and reinforcing synergy. Guided by the Opinions on Fully Implementing the River-Chief System and the

Guiding Opinions on Implementing the Lake-Chief System for Lakes, jointly issued by the General Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the General Office of the State Council, China has restructured governance relations by anchoring them in a clear-cut accountability system for Party and government officials. A five-tier river-and-lake-chief network, covering province, city, county, township and village, has been put in place, and the inter-provincial joint-meeting mechanism for the river-and-lake-chief system has been refined at the basin level. The River Chief System serves as a key institutional bridge, while innovative mechanisms such as "River Chief + Procurator-General + Police Chief" ensure effective supervision and unified control of the nation's water systems, demonstrating the political advantage of "acting as one chess-board nationwide".

The socialist system with Chinese characteristics enables China to pool resources to accomplish major undertakings. The South-to-North Water Diversion Project is the world's largest water transfer project. Its central route was completed in just 11 years, three years ahead of schedule, setting a record in global hydraulic engineering. To date, it has delivered over 74.5 billion cubic meters of water to northern regions. Nearly 80 percent of Beijing's and 90 percent of Tianjin's urban water supply now comes from the project, effectively alleviating the groundwater depletion in North China. The Yangtze-to-Huaihe Water Diversion Project, spanning the Yangtze and Huaihe river basins, overcame the world-class challenge of high flow at low head through the Shushan Pumping Station in Anhui. Upon completion, it became the second major north-south waterway while securing safe drinking water for 30 million people in northern Anhui. By the end of 2024, through the coordinated use of local water, recycled water, Yellow River water and water delivered by the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, a total of 7.4 billion cubic meters has been supplied to Baiyangdian Lake. As a result, the "kidney of North China" has been revived and its aquatic ecosystem is steadily improving.

The socialist system with Chinese characteristics also enables the broadest mobilization of the people and unleashes their immense strength. In a letter to environmental volunteers in the Danjiangkou Reservoir area, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized the central role of the people in safeguarding national water security. His message integrated voluntary action, daily participation, and exemplary leadership with national strategic objectives, vividly embodying the principle that the people are the principal force in building ecological civilization, and inspiring boundless public energy in river protection.

Here, hundreds of millions of people have joined in collective participation. Mechanisms such as "civilian river chiefs", "enterprise river chiefs," and "river stewards" have institutionalized public engagement. The central route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project involved the relocation of 345,000 residents. In the Weishan Lake area, 58,000 fishermen resettled to new livelihoods onshore. Since the implementation of the Yangtze River fishing ban, 231,000 fishermen have been successfully resettled, testifying to the people's dedication and sense of responsibility in river governance. In

Dongming County, Shandong Province, residents of the Yellow River floodplain completed large-scale relocation within three years. Villagers donated the "life-saving wooden stakes" once used to fight floods to the Yellow River Museum. The water-marked wood now stands as a precious testament to the enduring truth that "when the Yellow River is secure, the nation is at peace".

Here, hundreds of millions of people are also driving innovation and creativity. During the critical phase of the Yangtze-to-Huaihe Water Diversion Project in 2024, the "work-for-relief plus skills training" model was introduced, building new resettlement villages and developing smart agricultural parks along the route, achieving the goal of "building a river and enriching the people." In Yichang, Hubei Province, a "water quality contract" model was implemented in the Huangbai River Basin, rewarding farmers for water-saving irrigation and organic farming through ecological compensation, reducing fertilizer use while increasing incomes. Mechanisms ensuring that "protectors benefit" have closely aligned public interests with ecological protection. In the Pearl River Delta, the All-for-Water mobile app integrates citizen inspection data and uses AI to detect illegal discharges, substantially lowering governance costs through public participation. The New Era River Strategy is thus a great practice both for and by the people, carrying forward the spirit of Yu the Great's "joint efforts across the nation" and transforming millennia of water management wisdom into institutional innovation and historic advancement. Through its globally recognized achievements, it vividly affirms the truth that the people are the creators of history.

Chapter 5:

The Global Resonance of China's New Era River Strategy

A major country should act like one and demonstrate greater responsibility and accountability.

—— Xi Jinping

History has shown time and again that the governance and protection of rivers are vital to national prosperity and the continuity of civilizations. Under the intensifying impacts of global climate change and human activities, the world needs to re-examine the relationship between humankind and rivers.

China commands global attention with compelling data: with only 6 percent of the world's freshwater resources, it sustains nearly 20 percent of the world's population and contributes over 18 percent of global GDP. At the same time, more and more rivers in China are being revitalized, and more basins are regaining ecological vigor. In the history of global river governance, China's New Era River Strategy has written a new chapter of harmony between humanity and nature.

5.1 Creating Models for International River Governance

Sharing the same river means sharing the same destiny. Nearly half of the world's population lives in transboundary river basins. With its vast territory and long borders, China shares many international rivers with neighboring countries.

The Heilongjiang River (known in Russia as the Amur River) forms part of the border between China and Russia before flowing into the Sea of Okhotsk. Covering a vast basin rich in natural resources, the Heilongjiang River has been the focus of close and effective bilateral cooperation in pollution prevention and fisheries conservation in recent years.

Under the joint guidance of the two heads of state, the Heihe-Blagoveshchensk Highway Bridge, the first cross-border road bridge over the Heilongjiang River, was opened to traffic in June 2022. During its construction, accumulated water from the bridge deck was channeled through purification tanks before being released only after meeting the required standards. Through strict management, joint monitoring and collaborative protection, the two countries have established a series of transboundary river protection cooperation mechanisms, significantly improving ecological conditions and setting a model for international river governance.

Down in the southwest, the Lancang River becomes the Mekong River after leaving

China. In recent years, China and relevant countries have jointly advanced the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC) mechanism with water resources cooperation as a flagship area. There are year-round hydrological-data exchange, the launch of a water-resources cooperation and sharing platform, and information-based joint disaster prevention and mitigation. China works closely with Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam in the field of water resources. Through the scientific operation of cascade hydropower stations on the Lancang River, China has played the role of storing flood water to supplement the dry season, safeguarding this "river of life" together with downstream countries.



A China-Laos Railway passenger train runs on the Mekong River Bridge in Luang Prabang, Laos, May 28, 2023. (Drone Photo) Xinhua/Chen Chang

During his state visit to Laos in 2017, General Secretary Xi Jinping published a signed article in Lao media, noting that since its launch in 2016, the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation mechanism has yielded fruitful results, demonstrating "Lancang-Mekong speed" and "Lancang-Mekong efficiency", and fostering a culture of equality, sincerity, mutual assistance, and a sense of kinship.

Thong Mengdavid, a researcher at the Mekong Center for Strategic Studies of the Asian Vision Institute in Cambodia, said China is an important contributor to the water resources development and environmental protection of Mekong River. Laotian National Assembly Vice President Sommad Pholsena remarked that during recent droughts in the Lancang-Mekong Basin, China, despite its own water shortages, increased downstream water discharges from the Lancang River, helping alleviate drought impacts and earning widespread appreciation from the Lao people and government, as well as other relevant countries.

The Irtysh River, China's only international river flowing into the Arctic Ocean, originates in the Altai Mountains, passes through Kazakhstan's Lake Zaysan, and joins Russia's Ob River before reaching the Arctic Ocean. The river basin has a unique ecological environment, which is home to more than 30 precious cold-water fish species such as Siberian sturgeon, burbot, pike and perch. Since 2019, China has imposed a year-round fishing ban on all sections of the Irtysh River within Chinese territory, prohibiting any angling or fishing activities, as well as the sale and purchase of aquatic

products caught during the fishing ban period. Combined with other measures including ecological water replenishment, fish release and reservoir management in the Irtysh River, these efforts have effectively improved aquatic biodiversity, revitalized aquatic ecosystems, protected water source areas, injecting clear water into the downstream.

On the Heilongjiang River, the Lancang-Mekong, the Irtysh, and other shared waterways, China has deepened international cooperation, advancing joint protection and governance, and shared and sustainable use of water resources. Through concrete actions and tangible results, China promotes mutual dependence and shared prosperity among riparian countries, responding to global concerns and earning broad recognition from the international community.

5.2 Sharing China's Experience in River Governance

Water is the source of life, and rivers are the lifeblood of human survival and development. According to The United Nations World Water Development Report 2023, jointly released by UNESCO and UN-Water, 2 billion people worldwide still lack access to safe drinking water, and between 2 billion and 3 billion people experience water shortages for at least one month each year.

Forecasts show that without stronger international cooperation, water scarcity will intensify in the coming decades. The urban population facing water shortages is projected to rise from 930 million in 2016 to between 1.7 billion and 2.4 billion by 2050. As climate change accelerates, global water security faces mounting pressure, and river governance has become an ever more formidable challenge. "Water is in deep trouble," warned UN Secretary-General António Guterres.

Rivers and lakes are the lifeblood of the Earth, essential to the planet's health and humanity's sustainable future. Upholding a vision of a shared global ecological civilization, China's New Era River Strategy engages the world with an open and inclusive perspective, contributing to the creation of a community with a shared future for humanity.

Philippe Gourbesville, President of the International Association for Hydro-Environment Engineering and Research (IAHR), who has traveled extensively across China over the past 25 years, said he has deeply felt the wisdom embodied in China's New Era River Strategy. "I have witnessed how water quality has improved. Today, China's philosophy is to live in harmony with water and with nature."

"Rivers, as vital ecological barriers and economic linkages, play a crucial role in shaping a sustainable global future," said Shahbaz Khan, Director of the UNESCO Multi-sectoral Regional Office for East Asia, during the 2023 Yangtze River Culture Forum in Nanjing. He added that the high-quality development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt is China's wisdom and solution contributed to ancient great river civilizations. The international community generally recognizes that China's commitment to pursuing integrated objectives for the ecological, social, economic and cultural development of its rivers and its sharing of concepts, wisdom and experience with the world will con-

tinue to open up pathways and provide models for the sound development of rivers worldwide.

In Guinea, the 20,000-Guinean-franc banknote, the country's highest denomination, features the Kaleta Hydropower Station built by a Chinese enterprise on its reverse side. Known as the "Water Tower of West Africa", Guinea is the source of three major West African rivers but has long underutilized its hydropower potential. Completed by a Chinese company in 2015, the Kaleta Hydropower Station solved chronic electricity shortages in Conakry and surrounding regions and was so well-received that it appeared on the nation's currency even before it began operation.

Similarly, the Coca Codo Sinclair Hydropower Station in Ecuador, built by a Chinese enterprise, ended the country's reliance on imported electricity, spurred infrastructure development across related sectors, and created numerous local jobs.

"In recent years, China has accumulated extensive experience in major projects, innovative methods, and social management of water, all of which deserve to be shared at the international level," said Gourbesville.

China has provided online and offline training for nearly 4,000 water professionals and government officials from 112 countries in multiple languages including English, French, Russian and Spanish. It has also established five overseas technology transfer and capacity-building centers in Pakistan, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Serbia and Senegal. These programs have been widely acclaimed. Participants from Rwanda and Ethiopia, among others, wrote letters of appreciation, noting that the training has significantly boosted water-related capacity-building across developing countries.

A survey on the "Lancang-Mekong Typical Small Watershed Comprehensive Governance Demonstration Project" shows that local residents believe the project has played a positive role in improving living environments, advancing sustainability, and restoring ecosystems. Many expressed hope that the initiative would guide them toward poverty alleviation, prosperity and sustainable prosperity.

Abbas Sharaki, Professor of Geology and Water Resources at Cairo University, and other international experts believe that China has deepened the world's understanding of water management. China's innovative mechanisms and forward-looking vision have contributed significantly to reforming global water governance and easing tensions caused by the global water crisis.

Over the years, China has carried out extensive cooperation with United Nations agencies in water resources, shared advances in global water-science research, and joined hands with countries and regions worldwide to address growing water challenges. China continues to take concrete steps to advance water-related goals under the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, contributing practical actions and substantive progress.

"The international community must strengthen cooperation, work together with one heart and one mind, and jointly build a community of all life on earth," General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly emphasized this important concept on international oc-

casions.

Rivers across China surge with vitality, bringing life to the basins. They benefit the Chinese people and the wider world, helping demonstrate confidence and build consensus. The Chinese wisdom, continuously evolving in the protection and governance of China's rivers in the new era, along with the constantly improving Chinese approach and the ever-growing Chinese strength, will make even greater contributions to improving global water governance and to meeting the water-related targets of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, helping the whole world to achieve a new vision of harmony between humanity and water.

Appendix:

Xi Jinping's Stories of River Governance

"A person who loves the Chinese land is bound to cherish every stream that flows across it, every inch of its soil, and every glorious page of its history."

From the Hutuo River in Zhengding to the Yundang Lake in Xiamen, from the West Lake in Hangzhou to the Grand Canal, and from the banks of the Mulan River to the source of the Yangtze, Yellow and Lancang rivers, Xi Jinping's river governance runs through his political career. It embodies his philosophy on water management in a profound way, including coordinating the whole and the parts and balancing the present and the future, protection and development.

The rivers and the sea do not reject small streams, and thus they attain their depth. Along the way, from trickling brooks to mighty torrents, the story of the rivers reflects a clear and unwavering original aspiration.

Story I:

Hutuo River: From Sandstorm Source to Scenic Landmark

Lush green trees stretch along the riverbanks, high-rise buildings rise in the distance, asphalt roads run through villages, and tourist coaches come and go. On the northern bank of the Hutuo River, Tayuanzhuang Village attracts large numbers of visitors. Yet in the early 1980s, the scene here was completely different.

From March 1982 to May 1985, Xi Jinping served successively as deputy secretary and then secretary of the CPC Zhengding County Committee, Hebei Province. During his inspection tours, Xi often crossed the river on a bicycle. When he met the "big sand pits" in the dried sections of the river, he had to carry the bicycle and walk. In this manner, he visited every village in Zhengding. Among them, Tayuanzhuang Village was a focus of Xi's attention and the village for which he took direct responsibility in the "one-on-one assistance" program.

"Downstream from the Huangbizhuang Reservoir, the Hutuo River channel was dry and bare all year round, with exposed sand. The village had 3,000 mu of floodplain land on both banks, but almost no one farmed it; it was all abandoned," recalled Yin Jiping, secretary of the Tayuanzhuang Village's Party committee and director of the villagers committee. "The whole village of more than 2,000 people had only 760 mu of cultivated land, so life was tight. Because the riverbed was badly sandified, whenever the wind blew the air was full of dust. "On fine days, people were covered with dust; on rainy days, people were covered with mud."

After investigation, Xi concluded that the solution to the conflict between a large population and scarce land in Zhengding lies on the barren beaches. He proposed making good use of the beaches and developing forestry, drawing up a blueprint for the ecological restoration of the Hutuo River.

On November 1, 1983, Zhengding convened a county-wide meeting to arrange rural work for that winter and the next spring. Xi urged the county to add 10,000 mu of fruit trees in the next year, and to add another 10,000 mu every year thereafter, "until the entire beach land is transformed into a forest and fruit base."

Thanks to the county's policy, Tayuanzhuang Village contracted the management rights of the beach land to each household, greatly mobilizing the villagers' enthusiasm for transforming the beach.

"Rolling up our sleeves, we started at once; that winter was especially lively," Yin recalled. Using two-wheeled handcars, the villagers hauled fertile soil to cover the sand. That year, more than 100 mu of cultivated land was reclaimed from the beach, and the reclamation continued into the following years. Drought-resistant crops such as sweet potatoes, soybeans, and peanuts were planted, and the bare beach gradually changed its appearance.

Starting in 2000, Tayuanzhuang Village began planting trees on the cultivated land previously reclaimed from the Hutuo River beaches.. "We benefited from the subsidies provided by the national Grain-for-Green program and the green-belt project on both banks of the Hutuo River. The trees planted by the village not only added greenery and scenery to the river but also became a treasure trove for increasing income," Yin said.

In early 2008, Xi visited Zhengding. County officials reported to him the plan to rehabilitate the Hutuo River. Xi proposed properly reshaping the river course to create a sound flood-control system, using land economically, greening both banks and building parks where people could relax

Since 2017, Shijiazhuang City has held the ecological restoration of the Hutuo River as a concrete practice of the concept that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets. Coordinating water security, water ecology, water resources, water culture and the water economy, the city has invested more than 18 billion yuan to advance systematic river management.

Coordinating the upper and lower reaches and both banks, Shijiazhuang has continued to deepen systematic management: in the main urban section, the river was "expanded into lakes" to create continuous broad water surfaces; in county and district sections, the "small water, big green" concept was adopted to build a wetland-type river alternating between stream-wetland channels and small lakes. On both banks, farmland and floodplains serve as the matrix, continuous river and road systems as corridors, and islets, ponds, and parks as patches, forming a healthy and sustainable river ecological pattern.

In May 2021, during an inspection of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project in Henan, Xi mentioned the Hutuo River again. When he worked in Zhengding, "the groundwater level dropped every year by about half a meter," he recalled. "Reading the county annals, I found the Hutuo River once had abundant water and lush grass, but on the spot, I saw only a dry sandy riverbed. I could carry my bicycle and cross it."

Today, having shifted from anti-seepage to reduced-seepage and from piecemeal "landscaping" to restoring the vitality of the entire basin, Shijiazhuang coordinates water from the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, ecological releases from upstream, and groundwater recharge, allowing surface water and groundwater to "interact" closely. Since 2018, the Hutuo River has received a total of 3.93 billion cubic meters of water, creating 2,922 hectares of ecological water surface and restoring a mighty 100-kilometer scenic reach in the Shijiazhuang section that had been dry for years. Within 10 kilometers of both banks, the groundwater level has risen markedly. As of August 2024, the groundwater level in Zhengding County had risen 6.77 meters compared with the same period in 2018.

The sky is high, the waters vast, the greenery lush, and flocks of birds soaring across the scene. Citizens stroll through seas of flowers, jog along greenways, or camp on meadows, enjoying a renewed closeness to the water.

From a sandstorm source to a "scenic line," the revived river has also enabled residents of Tayuanzhuang Village along its banks to ride on the wave of rural tourism and develop modern agriculture, wellness tourism, and other industries. Yin said that villagers' annual per capita income now exceeds 30,000 yuan.

Story 2:

Yundang Lake: From a Malodorous Pond to the City's Parlor

Today, at Yundang Lake in Xiamen, lush greenery lines the shores, egrets dot the shimmering waters, and people enjoy the beautiful scenery of the "city's parlor."

Yundang Academy on the lakeside is surrounded by dense groves and bamboo, exuding a serene, timeless elegance. In September 2017, on the occasion of the ninth BRICS Summit, Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Russian President Vladimir Putin here.

However, Yundang Lake was once far from the "city's parlor" as it is today. In the 1980s, due to land reclamation from the sea, embankment construction, and direct sewage discharge, the lake was piled with garbage, infested with mosquitoes and flies; its deteriorating water quality emitted a foul odor, driving away citizens.

In 1985, Xi moved from Zhengding, Hebei, to Xiamen to take up the post of a member of the Standing Committee of the CPC Xiamen Municipal Committee and vice mayor. "When will Yundang Lake no longer be dirty and stinky?" After hearing the public's call for action, Xi kept the issue on his mind with great foresight.

On one side was economic development; on the other, ecological protection. Behind the Yundang Lake problem stood a developmental dilemma: should economic growth take precedence, or should ecological protection be given priority?

After in-depth investigation and reflection, Xi resolved the issue with finality: "Can we carry out construction by means of partial destruction? I believe the answer is clear. Xiamen cannot afford to develop at such a price."

"Every step, from sewage interception, dredging, to building a wastewater treatment plant, was a tough nut to crack. At that time, Xiamen had just been designated a special economic zone; they had to make every cent go twice as far. It was extremely difficult!" said Zhang Yihe, now in his eighties and one of the participants in the clean-up. He witnessed the lake's transformation from an outlet of foul water devoid of fish and shrimp to a haven for gulls and egrets.

On March 30, 1988, Xi convened a special meeting on strengthening comprehensive Yundang Lake governance, firing the opening shot in Xiamen's hard battle against environmental pollution.

At the meeting, the municipal government set up a leading group for the lake's rehabilitation, with "the mayor taking personal charge", and pledged to provide 10 million yuan a year for two consecutive years. The strategy was summed up as "govern the lake by law, intercept and treat sewage, dredge and fortify the banks, revitalize water, and beautify the environment."

"Allocating 10 million yuan was unprecedented, which was about one-tenth of the city's annual investment in infrastructure." Zhang recalled, "It gave everyone confidence

that better days would come for Yundang Lake."

Governing by law provided the safeguard. Wang Yanyan, chief engineer of Xiamen's bureau of gardens and parks, noted that more than 30 years ago, public environmental awareness was still weak. "Xi's forward-looking insistence on rule-of-law governance became the key to the lake's success."

Intercepting and treating sewage removed the root cause. All industrial enterprises around the lake were closed or relocated, sewage treatment plants were built, and a sewage-interception project around the lake was carried out. By upgrading the sewage pipes for stormwater-sewage separation and pumping stations and reconstructing outlets of several flood-discharge ditches, water quality in the lake was improved.

Dredging and bank-building were carried out to cure chronic ills. After years of pollutant deposition, the water quality could not be improved without dredging. Large-scale dredging began, and the silt was used to build banks and create an island in the middle of the lake, which not only improved water quality but also greatly enhanced flood-control capacity.

Revitalizing water helped unblock "channels". Technicians adapted measures to local conditions and created a "tide-induced flushing" technique. By constructing a sluice gate and a training dike, they used the natural tidal differences to channel seawater from the western sea area into the lake to revitalize the water body.

In 1992, a long-absent dragon-boat race was held on Yundang Lake. "That day, Xiamen citizens gathered along the banks, cheering not only for the race but also for the success of the lake's treatment," recalled Zhang.

Over the past 30-plus years, successive Xiamen municipal Party committees and governments have followed the working guidelines set by Xi and carried out five rounds of comprehensive Yundang Lake remediation, investing about 2 billion yuan in total. An ecological transformation has been achieved, from single-point to full-coverage, from underwater to shore, and from sole management to joint governance.

Today, Yundang Lake is clear and green, with fish swimming in shallow water. Citizens and tourists linger along the lake to watch migrating birds and enjoy the ecological beauty.

Yundang Lake epitomizes the changes in Xiamen's ecological environment. Since that comprehensive-treatment meeting, the city has gradually launched remediation of sea areas, as well as coordinated management of the Jiulong River basin. An all-area ecological restoration from mountain tops to the ocean has unfolded, painting a picture of a modern, international city with high ecological value.

Story 3:

Two Rivers, Four Banks in Fuzhou: An Ecological Metamorphosis within One Master Plan

At dawn, reed beds sway on the mudflats of the Minjiang River estuary wetland while flocks of birds wheel overhead. At dusk, high-rises on both banks change into dazzling "evening gowns" of light that mingle with the moonlight... A stroll along the banks of the Minjiang and Wulong rivers in Fuzhou offers scene after scene of elegant landscapes that invite visitors to linger.

Yet the "two-rivers-four-banks" of the past presented a very different picture. On a sweltering day in June 1990, Xi Jinping, who had just become Party secretary of Fuzhou, boarded a small passenger boat and slowly cruised down the Minjiang toward the sea.

At that time, the banks were desolate and the tidal flats littered with debris. Xi spread the city map on the table, comparing it with what he saw and heard, thinking all the way. His entourage later realized this was not an ordinary inspection, but the starting point of a strategic project and a turning point for Fuzhou's opening-up.

After full investigation and deliberation, Xi formally put forward the "3820" strategic project, which set development goals for Fuzhou for 3, 8, and 20 years. Over the decades, the city has been transformed, from "sitting in the back row" to striving to be first, from a "paper-thin Fuzhou" to a livable, happy city, realizing the tremendous changes envisioned by the "3820" project.

Fuzhou's downtown is threaded by dense river networks. In the 1990s, the city was plagued by frequent waterlogging and foul, black water. Xi put forward a 16-character water strategy, "mobilize the whole Party, enlist the whole people, combine vertical and horizontal efforts, and tackle the problem in a concerted way". He launched a six-year inner-river improvement plan, pushed for the comprehensive rehabilitation of West Lake and the dredging of the Jin'an River, and carried out integrated water-environment treatment of the Minjiang basin. These pragmatic steps brought back "green hills, clear waters, and red tangerines" and returned peaceful, crystal-clear rivers to citizens.

"Thanks to systematic water management, Fuzhou's inner rivers have become clean, free-flowing, green-banked and picturesque, an ecological metamorphosis," said Xue Yubin, deputy director of the Fuzhou Urban Water System Joint Dispatching Center. All black-and-odorous water bodies have been eliminated. More than 500 km of tree-shaded riverside greenways, 379 "bead-string" pocket parks, and over 5,000 mu of riverside parkland have been built, turning the dream of "seeing green when you open the window and entering a park when you step outside" into reality.

Xi also advanced the strategic vision of "let the hills show and the waters appear, and stride across the rivers to face the sea." With the Minjiang and Wulong rivers as its axis, Fuzhou should first cross the Minjiang southward to develop Nantai Island, then

cross the Wulong and become a beautiful city with four "bund" waterfronts, while every hill inside the urban area should be turned into a park.

Scientific planning and strategic guidance have since become the basic principles of Fuzhou's urban development.

Leveraging its scenic mountains and waters, Fuzhou has built more than 1,300 kilometers of greenways that link hills and rivers. The coastal new-city section has been selected as a national "beautiful bay" best-practice case, the Minjiang River estuary wetland has been listed as a Ramsar site and included on China's World Heritage tentative list, and the city's Mountains-Rivers-Forests-Fields-Lakes ecological restoration project has been promoted nationwide by the Ministry of Natural Resources. Today, every corner of Fuzhou showcases the finishing touches of a landscape city.

During his inspection tour of Fujian in March 2021, Xi, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee noted, "Fuzhou was positioned to be a coastal city and a landscape city. The current development fully aligns with that direction, and even exceeds our original vision. I hope this 'city of good fortune' will bring greater well-being to its people."

With this earnest encouragement, the city has forged ahead. "The 'two rivers, four banks' form the landscape axis running through Fuzhou," said Yu Xintian, director of the Fuzhou Urban Planning & Research Center. "To enliven the waterfront and upgrade the skyline, we have launched 485 quality-enhancement projects in 12 categories, including shoreline revamps and façade improvements." In recent years, Fuzhou has accelerated the "two rivers, four banks" upgrading program, striving to "paint" an even more beautiful landscape scroll for residents and visitors.

On the water, cruise boats glide gently. Along the banks, broad promenades bustle with pedestrians. Ashore, flowers and birds present a riot of color. After the upgrade, spots like the Minjiang Heart and Flower-Sea Park have become social-media check-ins and "golden name-cards" that display Fuzhou's landscape-city character.

In August 2024, the 12th Fuzhou municipal Party congress resolved to keep improving the "two rivers, four banks" environment and to turn the riverside urban living room into a venue of even higher quality. A landscape city, "green hills, clear waters, rich culture and beautiful scenery", is drawing ever closer.

Story 4:

Mulan Stream: From a Flood Menace to a Safe, Clear Stream

Mulan Stream, originating in the Daiyun Mountains of Fujian, has a natural drop of 784 meters and a total length of 105 kilometers. It is known as the "mother river" of Putian City. On its banks, lush lychee groves thrive, and egrets glide gracefully over the water... The scenery along the Mulan Stream is picturesque, with beauty in every direction.

However, in the 1990s, the river presented a starkly different picture. Despite the existence of the 200-meter-long, piano-shaped Mulanpi (ancient weir) that kept saltwater out and stored freshwater, the river remained prone to frequent flooding due to its winding course and narrow cross-section.

On Oct. 9, 1999, Typhoon No. 14, a super typhoon, struck Fujian. Coupled with an astronomical high tide, seawater surged inland, submerging large areas along the Mulan Stream. In Putian alone, nearly 60,000 houses collapsed, and 450,000 mu of farmland were flooded. The disaster deeply affected Xi Jinping, then Deputy Secretary of the Fujian Provincial Party Committee and Acting Governor. He immediately traveled to Putian, visiting villages and comforting victims. With his deep understanding of the river's flooding patterns, he declared emphatically, "It is time to consider a permanent solution to the flooding of the Mulan Stream!"

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Party and the government have made continuous efforts to manage the river, but with limited success. Statistics from 1952 to 1990 show that major floods occurred every 10 years, medium floods every 4 years, and minor flooding happened almost annually.

The frequent disasters instilled fear in local residents. "We lived on fertile plains, but life was hard," recalled Zheng Renming, a septuagenarian from Puban Village, Xindu Town, Licheng District, Putian. In the past, due to recurring floods, villagers only dared to plant early rice with a two-month growth cycle, flood-resistant sugarcane, and fast-maturing vegetables that could be harvested before the rainy season.

Forethought prevents later confusion.

In fact, long before this, when Xi was in charge of agriculture, forestry, and water resources as Deputy Secretary of the Provincial Party Committee, the feasibility report for the Mulan Stream management project had already landed on his desk. Faced with the complex challenge, he had been contemplating a scientific and comprehensive treatment plan.

Chen Dongfeng, former Deputy Director of the Putian Water Affairs Bureau, who participated in the flood-control project, explained the difficulties: Mulan Stream's management was hindered by unique geological conditions. First, the lower reaches of the river were extremely winding, impeding flood discharge. Straightening the course while resisting erosion was a huge challenge. Second, the river lies in a coastal muddy

geological zone, and building embankments there was akin to "constructing dams on tofu."

The scientific approach comes first in flood control. Xi made repeated field trips to Mulan Stream, listened to reports and on-site inspections of the treatment plan and technical preparations, stressing the need for "scientific water management", both to control flooding and to protect the ecosystem, to ensure water security, and to achieve comprehensive management.

"Large-scale flood-control projects can only be implemented based on thorough preliminary investigation and scientific demonstration," said Tang Jinhua, then Director of the Fujian Provincial Department of Water Resources. "To solve the world-class problems of building embankments on 'tofu-like' soft soil and resisting erosion, Xi Jinping invited leading domestic hydraulic experts and finally adopted the 'soft mattress' technique, which passed the technical appraisal of the Ministry of Water Resources."

To minimize the impact of "cutting bends and straightening" on the natural ecosystem, under Xi's guidance, domestic water-resources authorities designed the country's first physical model for the Mulan Stream project and conducted trials in the Zhangzhen reach. On Dec. 14, 1999, Xi inspected the trial results, confirmed the feasibility, and construction conditions were met.

On Dec. 27, 1999, Xi arranged the province's winter-spring voluntary labor for water conservancy at the Mulan Stream, joining more than 6,000 local officials, residents, and officers in the work. He said, "Today is the first day of the Mulan downstream flood-control project. We are here to launch a province-wide upsurge of winter-spring water-conservancy work, to support the Mulan Stream transformation so that the river will turn harm into benefit and bring well-being to the people."

Driven by Xi, the downstream flood-control works advanced rapidly. By 2003, the river's 16-km meandering course had been shortened to 8.64 km. In 2011, the flood-control levees on both banks were closed, confining floods to the channel and raising the downstream protection standard from less than a 2-year to a 50-year frequency, ending the history of an undefended downtown Putian.

From water to land, from downstream to upstream, from the main stem to tributaries and the whole basin, from single flood works to systematic comprehensive management... Over the past 25 years, successive Putian Party committees and governments have stuck to the blueprint and worked term after term, continuously advancing the integrated treatment of the Mulan Stream, realizing its functions of flood control, ecology, recreation, and sightseeing.

Turning harm into benefit and benefiting the people. In 2023, the proportion of Grade I-III water quality sections in the Mulan Stream basin reached 100 percent for the first time. Putian's regional GDP and general public-budget revenue in 2023 were 10.7 times and 19 times those of 1999, respectively. Today, the Mulan Stream has metamorphosed from the former "river of floods" into a "river of safety," a "river of ecology," a "river of development," and a "river of happiness."

Story 5:

West Lake: Letting Cultural Heritage Benefit the Public

In 2016, when China hosted the G20 Hangzhou Summit, General Secretary Xi Jinping came to the banks of West Lake and recalled, "I worked here for six years. I know every mountain, every stream, and the local customs by heart. I have walked every slope and every shore of Hangzhou, and I witnessed and took part in the city's development."

At the turn of the century, the lake covered only 5.6 km², the smallest area on record. At around 2001, its transparency was barely 40 cm, and water quality had fallen to Grade V-minus, the lowest level.

In 2002, the city launched the West Lake Comprehensive Protection Project, including a "West Lake Westward Expansion" designed to restore its full surface. The plan caused concern that West Lake had been on China's UNESCO World Heritage tentative list since 2006, and people feared that major construction might damage the scenery and jeopardize the bid.

On Nov. 28, 2002, barely a month after taking office in Zhejiang Province, Xi made Hangzhou his first stop and chose West Lake for his first field visit. Standing at the construction site, he studied the master plan and the surroundings carefully. "West Lake is the lifeline of Hangzhou," he said. "This protection project is a virtuous, popular deed." His words settled the debate; three days later, the westward-expansion works began.

With strong support from the provincial Party committee and government, the project gathered momentum. In 2003 alone, West Lake saw more construction than in the previous ten years combined, and investment equaled the total of the preceding decade.

Successive rounds of protection raised the lake's water quality and achieved a complete change of water every month. More than 180 natural and cultural sites were restored or repaired, and 0.9 km² of water surface was regained. The classic pattern, "cloud-capped hills on three sides, the city on the fourth", was preserved, and the full panorama of "one lake mirroring twin pagodas, three isles set like gems, three causeways skimming green waves" reappeared.

On the banks, time-honored events such as the King Qian Festival, the Yue Fei Memorial Ceremony, and the Wushan Temple Fair have regained their vitality, embodying the cultural beliefs of many generations.

On June 24, 2011, the West Lake Cultural Landscape of Hangzhou was inscribed on the World Heritage List, becoming China's 41st World Heritage property and its third "cultural landscape" entry expressed in Article I of the World Heritage Convention as "works of man or the combined works of nature and man".

Nineteen days after the inscription, the Hangzhou West Lake World Heritage Monitoring and Management Center was established. It built a real-time monitoring system

covering the entire 33.23 km² property and its buffer zone, enabling round-the-clock dynamic management and instant risk detection.

"Every plant, every bird, every fish, and every ancient building at West Lake needs careful care. We also have an important duty to spread West Lake culture, so that more people will fall in love with the lake and learn about China," said Chen Yunfei, director of the center.

In 2003, Xi proposed the establishment of the West Lake Museum: "We will gather and display various elements related to West Lake. This new destination in Hangzhou will enable visitors to gain the most knowledge about West Lake in the shortest time." During an inspection of the museum's construction in 2005, he emphasized that its architectural style should reflect the unique characteristics of West Lake and adhere to the principle of highlighting the natural landscape while making the man-made structures blend in harmoniously.

Today located beside Liulang Wenying Park and adjacent to the King Qian Temple, the museum is only about 50 meters from the lake shore. Built as a sunken, grass-covered slope, it blends subtly into the surrounding landscape.

Pan Cangsang, Director of the museum, explained that the exhibitions present the natural scenery of Hangzhou and the humanistic culture of West Lake, displaying the full panorama of "one lake, two pagodas, three islets and three causeways", allowing visitors to feel the lake's geological evolution over hundreds of millions of years and to experience its changing seasons and shifting skies.

On Sept. 23, 2023, as the Hangzhou Asian Games opened, Xi, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, introduced the city's landscape to the world: "For thousands of years, Hangzhou has been renowned for the beauty of its mountains and waters and the prosperity of its people. Marco Polo praised it as 'the finest and most splendid city in the world.'"

Story 6:

Taihu Lake: Singing the Beauty of Taihu in the New Era

The beauty of Taihu lies in its water.

Huzhou, Zhejiang, source of roughly 30 percent of the lake's inflow, has stayed the course since 2006, and the south shore has been transformed, wave after wave of ecological dividends rolling in.

At the start of the century, the shoreline was a wilderness of reeds. The surface was choked with fish-cages and house-boats, while cement plants, dye-works, and textile workshops thundered day and night. The lake turned black. "Beside Taihu, you could not see Taihu. Beside Taihu, you had no water to drink" was the grim reality.

On Aug. 2, 2006, Xi Jinping boarded a patrol vessel at Huzhou's Changdou Harbor, crossed the lake to Wuxi, returned, and inspected the Changxing shore. That afternoon, at the Changxing administrative center, he told local cadres: "We must achieve a win-win, protect ecology, and develop the economy. Growth cannot come at the expense of the environment; a sound ecology can itself become a new driver of growth."

Liu Guofu, then Party Secretary of Changxing, recalls the heat and cramped boat, shirts clung to skin, yet Xi carefully checked water quality.

Xi demanded three things: a sound plan, a quality product, and a genuine win-win solution, "South Taihu is the last pristine reach of the lake. We will develop it actively, but we must not create new pollution or leave any blot on the landscape."

Changxing immediately revised its approach, switching to pristine protection. First, protection and development of South Taihu were completely redesigned, and a new landscape plan for the whole lakeshore was drawn up. Liu said, "Planners visited Xiaomen to learn the concept of 'sharing with the public' and redesigned the lakeside boulevard for proximity, access, openness, and ecology."

Since 2007, Huzhou has invested more than 3 billion yuan, removed every fish-cage, closed all polluting industries, and achieved zero industrial discharge. In South Taihu Lake, seven early-warning sections monitor algae; the province's first algae-water separation station turns algal blooms into harmless waste. Twenty-four floating restaurants were dismantled, cutting 100,000 tons of sewage a year.

"The water is clear and people smile." The changes in South Taihu are most deeply felt by local residents. In the past, entire fishing families lived on their boats, catching fish for a living. When algal blooms raged, it was like living in a garbage dump. Fisher families who once lived aboard boats moved into white-wall, black-tile new apartments in Xiaomei Village in 2012. Pensions followed. Recently, elevators were installed free of charge. Life keeps getting better.

"Following the principle that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets, south-shore development has adopted two hard rules for investment: 'No polluting enterprise, however profitable' and 'High-end eco-projects are always welcome.' Every proj-

ect is screened and checked at multiple levels," said Liu.

The lake's transformation mirrors China's ecological campaign.

During the 2023 Two Sessions, Xi, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, asked the Jiangsu delegation, "Is Taihu better? No more algae?"

Xi recalled the song "Taihu is beautiful, so beautiful," but added, "When I thought of the algae, it turned my stomach. Industrial and domestic discharge once did great damage; we spent a huge effort cleaning it up. If ecology fails, lucid waters and lush mountains are not 'invaluable assets' but a loss of money. I have always demanded that we keep a firm grip on ecology."

Story 7:

The Grand Canal: Millennium Waterway, New Life Today

Stretching from Zhejiang in the south to Beijing in the north, the Grand Canal flows through eight provinces and municipalities. It is the earliest, largest, and longest artificial river in the world.

Accompanied by a long whistle that cut through the air, a tourist boat slowly left Gongchen Bridge pier in Hangzhou, the southernmost section of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal, and a golden route for river tourism.

On the shuttling water-buses, the city's poetry and its everyday vitality merge. The sight moves veteran Hangzhou boatman Mo Haoquan. Once the captain of the "West Lake" water-bus, he made thousands of trips along the canal, but one voyage 19 years ago remains his most vivid memory.

On Dec. 31, 2006, the canal welcomed a special passenger: Xi Jinping boarded the "West Lake" to inspect Phase I of Hangzhou's comprehensive protection project. Mo Haoquan was at the helm.

Ancient yet renewed, the canal links the landscapes of the south. Through the windows of the water-bus, scenery on both banks unfolded like a scroll. From the Gongchen Bridge to the Genshan Gate pier, Xi asked in detail about protection and construction. Hearing that a comprehensive protection project was underway, he nodded approvingly.

"Hills flank the lake to greet visitors, and a half-moon city mirrors the canal." Since it was first built, the Grand Canal has connected north and south, kept goods flowing, and served as an economic artery as well as a cultural bond. Yet by the late 20th century, rapid urbanization and industrialization had brought unprecedented threats.

Born and bred beside the canal, Mo felt the change keenly, "In the 1990s, the water was filthy and foul. The 'Ten-li Silver Lake Villa' was on the verge of becoming 'Jiangsu's Longxugou.'"

Action was urgent. In early 2003, Hangzhou set up the Canal Comprehensive Protection Command. A 10-km trunk sewer and 80 km of branch lines were laid. In districts where sewage interception was difficult, including Gongshu, the former Jianggan, Xihu, and the former Xicheng, the city then rolled out small rural sewage-treatment plants, mobilizing 109 administrative villages (communities) and more than 240,000 residents.

When Phase I was completed in 2006, Xi took the inspection trip.

"He asked about everything, from water-network protection, shipping to the water-front landscape," recalled Wang Shuifa, then director of the Hangzhou Transport Bureau. "While sailing, he watched, questioned, and instructed, endorsed our efforts to improve the canal's ecological and cultural environment and the living conditions along its banks, and set even higher expectations."

At the end of the inspection, Xi pointed out that the comprehensive improvement, protection, and development project of the canal highlights the requirement of returning the river to the people and benefiting the people. He hoped that Hangzhou would make good use of the canal's "golden name card" to truly build the canal into a landscape river, ecological river, and cultural river with contemporary characteristics and Hangzhou features, making it the "people's canal" and "tourists' canal".

"The most tangible change for us citizens is the opening of the pedestrian paths along both banks of the canal," said Mo . Since 2003, ecological green belts and pedestrian paths on both sides of the canal have been connected, adding 22 kilometers of ecological corridor for more than 2 million residents along the banks.

As the intersection city of the Yangtze River and the Canal, Yangzhou in Jiangsu has been prosperous since ancient times and has accumulated a profound cultural heritage.

On the afternoon of Nov. 13, 2020, Xi, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, visited the Canal Sanwan Ecological and Cultural Park located in the south of Yangzhou.

"We were very excited at that time, and our hands were red from clapping," recalled Yan Kouhua, director of the Jiulong Garden Community in Yangzhou. Watching the people of the canal at the scene, Xi pointed out that for thousands of years, the canal has nourished the cities and people on both sides, and is the wealth river and happiness river for the people on both sides of the canal. He hoped that everyone would work together to protect the Grand Canal so that it would benefit the people forever.

Nowadays, Yangzhou has implemented river dredging, bank revetment transformation, and other projects on the Sanwan section of the canal, and a number of enterprises with good benefits have also been relocated. After several years of governance, the Sanwan section of the canal has been transformed into a scenic wetland park and is open to the public for free.

Promoting tourism through culture and highlighting culture through tourism. Jiangsu has successively selected 20 high-quality canal-themed cultural tourism routes, and created a batch of artistic masterpieces such as the opera "River of Destiny", the large-scale symphony chorus "Grand Canal", the dance drama "Millennium Canal", and the real-scene performance "Canal in Four Seasons". The cultural tourism brand "Millennium Canal□ Water Charm Jiangsu" is gaining an increasing reputation.

The thousand-mile water vein continues, and the thousand-year-old ancient "canal" is rejuvenated. Thanks to the care and attention of Xi, the ancient Grand Canal has been revitalized. The areas along the canal adhere to the purpose of protection, inheritance, and development, creating a vibrant landscape, river, ecological river, and cultural river, and the ancient Grand Canal has truly become the "people's canal."

Story 8:

South-to-North Water Diversion: For a Perpetual Flow of Clear Water to the North

On May 13, 2021, General Secretary Xi Jinping boarded a boat at the Danjiangkou Reservoir -- the headwater of the middle route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project -- to inspect the project on site.

"I have long wanted to come here. I have been following the construction, operation, and resettlement work of the project, and I am delighted to see it this time."

Local staff drew a cup of water from the reservoir. Holding it up to the light, Xi smiled and said, "The quality of the headwater looks good!"

The southern water now travels over 1,000 km, benefiting Henan, Hebei, Tianjin and Beijing. Once, one in three glasses of water in Beijing came from the local Miyun Reservoir. Today, 70 % of the city's tap water is supplied by the middle route. In the past, some places along the route had tap water "salty enough to pickle vegetables" or "making tea taste bland". Now, the clear, sweet diverted water has replaced the brackish, high-fluoride supplies in parts of the north. Xi summed it up vividly, "It's like swapping steamed cornbread for steamed buns."

Water is not only about drinking safety. It is also closely related to ecology and development. Xi recalled that when he was working in Zhengding County, Hebei Province, the Hutuo River's groundwater level "dropped year by year" and "the riverbed was all dry sand."

Times have changed. Thanks to the southern water, Zhengding's groundwater level has stopped falling, and the Hutuo River now glitters in the sun. Its banks have become a popular waterfront for leisure and tourism, helping make Zhengding a popular tourist destination.

During the inspection, Xi stressed that the water diversion project is a major strategic infrastructure that benefits the present and future generations. "To protect this lifeline, we must safeguard the safety of the project, and the safety of water supply and water quality." He demanded that "the ecological protection of the water-source area be placed as the top priority, with hard-and-fast rules to keep this reservoir water crystal clear."

Xi's concern for the project is consistent.

When the eastern and middle routes were officially opened, Xi gave important instructions, affirming the achievements and urging "stronger operation management, deeper water-quality protection, stricter water conservation, better support for resettled people, and sound planning of follow-up projects so that the project will continue to benefit the nation and the people."

On May 14, 2021, the day after inspecting the Danjiangkou Reservoir, Xi chaired a symposium that summed up six lessons from building large inter-basin water-transfer

projects: uphold a systematic approach, follow objective laws, give top priority to water conservation, ensure economic rationality, strengthen ecological and environmental protection, and accelerate the construction of a national water-network, to advance future diversion schemes in a scientific manner.

In May 2023, while listening to the work report of the Shaanxi provincial Party committee and government, Xi stressed the need to "reinforce protection of the water-source area of the middle route of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project and ensure 'a perpetual flow of clear water to the north'."

Two months later, he visited Hanzhong, Shaanxi, to inspect cultural inheritance and ecological protection along the Hanjiang River basin, emphasizing that the Hanjiang River and its tributaries are the main gathering and supply area for the middle route and that protecting wetlands in this region is a task of great responsibility and far-reaching significance.

In August 2024, on the occasion of the second National Ecology Day, Xi replied to environmental volunteers in the Danjiangkou Reservoir area of Shiyan, Hubei, "The South-to-North Water Diversion Project bears on strategic priorities, long-term development, and people's well-being. Safeguarding the ecological environment of the water-source area and ensuring 'a perpetual flow of clear water to the north' require everyone to fulfill their duties and make unrelenting efforts. I hope you will continue to promote the spirit of volunteering and encourage more people to consciously protect, conserve, and cherish water."

The completed eastern and middle routes of Phase I have transferred more than 83 billion cubic meters of water, providing a stable, high-quality water supply to 48 large and medium-sized cities along the routes and benefiting 195 million people. The project has effectively eased water shortages in recipient areas, promoted industrial restructuring, and fostered ecological improvement.

The decades-long decline of groundwater levels in North China has been fundamentally reversed. Rivers such as the Hutuo, Daqing, and Fuyang have been reconnected from source to sea. All state-controlled surface-water sections in Beijing have eliminated Grade V-minus water, and the city's five major rivers, including the Yongding, have been restored to "flowing rivers" that run all the way to the sea.

Story 9:

Erhai & Dianchi: Let Natural Beauty Stay on Earth

Towering, sacred snow-capped mountains, surging rivers and tranquil, crystal-clear lakes... General Secretary Xi Jinping has always paid special attention to the green mountains and clear waters of Yunnan Province.

On the afternoon of Jan. 20, 2020, winter sunshine bathed Dianchi Lake as flocks of gulls wheeled above. Xi, who was inspecting Yunnan, visited Xinghai Peninsula Eco-Wetland to check the protection and treatment of the lake.

"Xi asked in detail about the lake's protection and water-quality improvements," said Zhao Xuenong, then vice-mayor of Kunming, the provincial capital. "He walked along the boardwalk, raising questions and gaining a thorough understanding of the lake's condition."

Xi was unequivocal: "We must avoid the old path of 'pollute first, treat later' and firmly reject the mindset of sacrificing the environment for short-term economic gains."

Following his guidance, Kunming has made great efforts in curbing pollution. By the end of August 2025, 29 urban sewage-treatment plants in the Dianchi basin had cut annual discharges by 166,000 tons of COD, 18,400 tons of total nitrogen, and 4,400 tons of total phosphorus. Tailored "one-river-one-policy" remedies have been pushed for all inflow rivers. Since 2024, 25 of the 35 inflow rivers have reached Grade III or better, giving a 90.9 % compliance rate and eliminating all minus V stretches.

"Flocks of ducks and geese that used to be seen only on the south shore of Dianchi, far from downtown, can be spotted on the east and north shores near the city center during the 2023 migration season," said Li Weiwei, senior engineer at the Kunming Institute of Zoology, Chinese Academy of Sciences. Aquatic plants such as sea-cabbage that had vanished for years, native fish like the golden-line barbel, and the rare glossy ibis have all reappeared. To date, Dianchi hosts 26 fish species, 303 aquatic-plant species, and 175 bird species.

"We fully implement Xi's thinking on promoting ecological progress and treat Dianchi as a touchstone for green development," Zhao said. Thanks to years of unremitting, comprehensive treatment, water quality in all nine of Yunnan's plateau lakes, including Dianchi, has improved overall.

On January 20, 2015, exactly five years before the Dianchi inspection, Xi made a special trip to Gusheng Village, Wanqiao Town, Dali City, to learn in detail about the ecological protection of the Erhai wetland.

Beside the rippling blue water of Erhai, after posing for a photo with local officials, Xi urged them to "keep this moment as proof, come back in a few years, and I hope the water will be even cleaner." He repeatedly emphasized that Erhai must be well protected so that the natural beauty of Cangshan Mountain and Erhai Lake will remain for all time.

Dali is a famous tourist city. Since the 1980s, rapid economic growth around the lake has caused water quality to deteriorate quickly, shifting from an oligotrophic to a eutrophic state. Xi's important instructions on Erhai protection and governance have ushered in a new phase of lake management.

At present, 20 sewage-treatment plants have been built around Erhai, capable of handling wastewater for one million permanent residents and about 65 million tourists each year. After treatment, water quality in all 27 inflow rivers has reached a good standard. The construction of 40,000 mu of wetlands, 58,000 mu of afforested hills, and a 129-km ecological corridor has markedly improved functions such as water purification by wetlands, water-source conservation by forests, and physical separation by the corridor.

"We always bear in mind Xi's requirement and give top priority to protecting and governing Erhai," said Zhang Sheneng, director of the eco-environment service center of Dali Town in Dali City, who has guarded the lake for more than 30 years.

In midsummer, sea-cabbage flowers bloom across Erhai.

"When the flowers appear, it means water quality is getting better," Zhang said with emotion. The return of sea-cabbage flowers mirrors the rebirth of Erhai's beauty, and we will cherish it all the more, he said.

Story 10:**Qinghai Lake: Polishing the Sapphire of the Plateau**

"General Secretary Xi, please take a look. These photos were taken recently in my hometown."

During the 2021 March session of the National People's Congress, Kong Qingju, a deputy from Haibei Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture on the northern shore of Qinghai Lake, held out two photos to Xi across the table.

One photo showed a desert cat strolling through grassland, the other a snow leopard moving among trees; both are wildlife under first class state protection. "Rare animals that were seldom seen before now appear frequently," said Kong, who grew up at the foot of the Qilian Mountains and used the pictures to illustrate her hometown's ecological transformation. In recent years, as ecological protection has been strengthened, mountains have turned greener, deserts smaller, and water clearer.

"It shows that ecological protection is working," Xi replied, studying the images carefully. "Public awareness of ecology has grown, and people now see its economic value."

Deputies to the political session at the scene extended an invitation to Xi: "Please come to Qinghai again!"

Three months later, Xi left Xining, capital of Qinghai Province, by train, transferred to a car, and on the afternoon of June 8, 2021, arrived at Fairy Bay on the shore of Qinghai Lake, more than 3,200 meters above sea level, to inspect ecological protection on the spot.

Officials told him the lake's level has risen more than three meters in the past 15 years and its surface has expanded by over 300 square kilometers.

"How deep is the water now?" Xi asked.

"Average 18 meters, maximum 28 meters," came the answer.

The higher level has increased humidity and temperatures around the lake, improving habitat for wildlife and vegetation along the shore.

Walking along a boardwalk, Xi looked out on the sapphire-like water, herds of yaks, and flocks of birds.

Xi stressed that ecology is a resource and a treasure for us. Looking around, he repeatedly urged local Party and government officials that Qinghai holds a very important strategic position and carries great weight in ecological civilization. It is imperative to build Qinghai's ecological civilization well and protect its ecological resources.

In recent years, Qinghai has introduced and implemented a master plan for accelerating the creation of a highland of ecological civilization, carried out actions to consolidate and enhance its status of a pilot province of national parks, and comprehensively advanced the establishment of the Qinghai Lake National Park. Qinghai Lake is embracing the era of being a national park.

Du Pinggui, director of the Qinghai Provincial Forestry and Grassland Administra-

tion, said the national park initiative has become the cornerstone of biodiversity conservation, safeguarding key habitats and providing refuges for wildlife, while ecological resources are gradually becoming "happy real estate" for local people.

In early 2024, rangers conducting spring-migratory-waterbird surveys in Haiyan County on the northern shore of Qinghai Lake spotted the oriental white stork, a bird dubbed "national treasure among birds."

As an important node on international migratory flyways, the lake now hosts 606,000 waterbirds year-round, making it the largest and most concentrated breeding ground for migratory birds in China. Every year, more than 30 percent of the global breeding populations of bar-headed geese, brown-headed gulls, Pallas's gulls, and great cormorants reproduce at Qinghai Lake.

Today, a balanced "grass-river-lake-fish-bird" ecosystem has taken shape. Walking along the shore, one invariably encounters sapphire-like water, soaring birds, migrating fish, and smiling herders.

"When I see such scenes, I always think of the folk song *In That Faraway Place* written by Wang Luobin here in Qinghai," Xi said during his visit. "It was by fully absorbing the essence and nourishment of this land that he added such a beautiful work to humanity's artistic treasury."

The words of Xi still echo today. The once distant legend is now a vivid image right in front of us.

Conclusion

Since ancient times, humans have settled where water flows. It is in the nurturing embrace of rivers that civilizations first took shape and have been able to endure through the ages. For every nation, family, and individual, there is a "mother river" that holds deep meaning. This river is more than just a source of water for survival -- it is the well-spring from which a culture is born and a symbol that anchors people's sense of identity.

"Mother river" is a deeply emotional and vivid metaphor. Yet the relationship between humans and rivers is far more complex. Water has a dual nature: it can "nourish all living things" to foster civilizations, but it can also "flood and bring disaster" to wreak havoc. Industrial civilization and urbanization, in particular, have led to the over-exploitation of natural resources and unregulated development, which in turn dries up rivers and disrupts ecosystems. How to achieve harmonious coexistence between humans and water and how to balance the growth of the economy and society with the lasting vitality of rivers have long been important questions in the evolution of Chinese civilization. From ancient hero Yu the Great's taming of the floods to today, the quest for better solutions has never ceased.

Always bearing river governance in mind, China charts its development course and looks to the future.

Rivers are crucial to the destiny of a nation and its people. In the 21st century, humanity faces a shared question about rivers: When development reaches a certain stage, where will the relationship between humans and rivers go? The New Era River Strategy goes beyond the traditional approach of "turning flood hazards into benefits." It reflects humanity's conscious commitment to giving back to our mother rivers and nature itself. What it pursues is no longer extraction, conquest, or confrontation, but the dialectical unity of harmony between humans and nature and a people-centered philosophy, as well as the seamless integration of a love for nature and care for the people.

Development is an eternal theme. With its far-sighted vision and steady, long-term commitment, the New Era River Strategy makes river governance a key component of national governance. It has become a crucial driver for advancing coordinated regional development, promoting ecological progress, and sustaining and carrying forward the Chinese nation's water governance tradition. This strategy is more than just a Chinese solution for fostering harmony between humans and nature through a systems-based approach -- it is also a defining answer of the era to writing a new chapter of high-quality development, with rivers as our "pen." It is a response to history, a pursuit of progress in the present, and a commitment to the future.

Only with sound river governance can there be effective national governance and global governance. China has long held the wisdom that "managing water is tantamount to governing a nation" -- and this wisdom is now taking on far deeper, more far-

reaching meaning for our times, thanks to China's relentless efforts and practices in the new era under the leadership of the Communist Party of China Central Committee with Xi Jinping at its core. The New Era River Strategy, characterized by its theoretical depth, temporal and spatial breadth, historical weight, and profound sincerity, makes it clear that rivers not only nourish us materially, but also shape our culture and identity. It embodies the inspiring vision of Chinese modernization, which features harmony between humans and nature. Let us put this strategy into practice so as to see that rivers flow unceasingly, people live in contentment, and civilizations flourish for long.

Note

This think tank report, "Harnessing Rivers for National Prosperity, Public Wellbeing—A Study on China's New Era River Strategy", is a collaborative product of the research team jointly established by Xinhua News Agency National High-Level Think Tank and China Institute of Water Resources and Hydropower Research (IWHR) under the Ministry of Water Resources. The team is led by Fu Hua, president of Xinhua News Agency and chairman of the academic committee of National High-Level Think Tank of Xinhua News Agency. Lyu Yansong, editor-in-chief of Xinhua News Agency and vice chairman of the academic committee of National High-Level Think Tank of Xinhua News Agency, acts as the deputy team leader. Ren Weidong, deputy editor-in-chief of Xinhua News Agency, and Huo Xiaoguang, vice president of Xinhua News Agency, are the executive deputy team leaders. Members of the IWHR research team include Peng Jing, Wang Kai, Wang Jianhua, Chen Meng, Zhang Yuefeng, Liu Changshun, Chen Genfa, Wu Jiapeng, etc. Members of the Xinhua News Agency research team include Liu Gang, Zhang Xiaosong, Zou Wei, Cui Feng, Hu Lu, Wang Libin, Gao Jing, Liu Shiping, Shi Weiyan, Zhu Jichai, Zhang Yan, Wei Yukun, Yang Liu, Chen Gang, Shang Yiyi, Ma Caoran, Qiu Bingqing, Gong Zhihong, Liu Jinhui, Ding Yiquan, Zhu Han, Li Linhai, etc.

The English version of the report has been reviewed and revised by Jiang Tingting, Fang Dong, Wang Yaguang, Qiang Lijing, Wang Aihua, Yu Xiaohua, Zhao Xiuzhi, Wang Xiaopeng, Rong Jiaojiao.

The charts and diagrams in the report are designed by Xu Sheng, Jia Xiquan, Bai Xinyu.

Launched in November 2023, the research project was completed after two years of joint investigation, drafting, revision, and review by the team.

The New Era River Strategy carries profound implications and far-reaching significance. The research team will continue to deepen its research in this area and looks forward to further guidance, support, and valuable insights from all sectors. Together, we will advance the research, interpretation, and dissemination of this major strategy, thereby fully demonstrating its truth and practical power.