

ECOLOGICAL CIVILIZATION AND THE PATH TO ECOLOGICAL CITIZENSHIP: A NEW APPROACH TO *VASUDHAIVA KUṬUMBAKAM*

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Abstract: Increasing ecological consciousness is a necessary response to the global environmental crisis and an important way to construct a sustainable society. China's policy of 'ecological civilization,' initiated in 2007, seeks to combine environmental protection with sustainable development but has faced challenges in practice, such as poor environmental governance and industrial pressures. In response, the principle of 'ecological citizenship' has emerged, encouraging individuals and communities to take ethical responsibility for the environment. This notion has global significance, and is in tune with the principle of *vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*, which envisions a world united in fostering sustainability and collective well-being. Integrating these principles can lead to a more cooperative and ethical approach to environmental protection on a global scale.

Keywords: Citizenship, Eco-civilization, environment, China.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development has become a central focus for many nations and social organizations which are striving to create a better future for all living beings on earth. This initiative has led to the proposal of numerous policies aimed at tackling environmental crises. One promising approach is 'ecological citizenship.' This article explores how ecological citizenship is theorized and developed in recent Chinese research, particularly within the framework of 'ecological civilization.' While this theory is shaped by China's unique context, the challenges it encounters are not confined to China alone. Examining this concept through the Chinese worldview provides valuable insights into the broader importance of cultivating ecological citizenship, advancing sustainable development, and promoting an ecologically civilized society that embraces a vision of the 'world as one interconnected family'—*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. This Indian model of an 'all-inclusive perception'—seeing the world as one family—extends beyond human society to encompass the entire cosmos. This worldview transcends all borders and boundaries, advocating for the recognition that the entire cosmic family is interconnected and should be treated as a unified ecological entity.

2. ECOLOGICAL CIVILISATION IN CHINA AND ITS RECEPTION

2.1 Background

The ecological crisis and sustainable development challenges are pressing concerns for many nations, including China (see, for example, Cann et al). For nearly two decades, the Chinese government has prioritized implementing several concrete measures to foster environmental awareness. Since 2007, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has committed to promoting 'eco-civilization' (生态文明 / *shēngtài wénmíng*).³ This concept

³ See, for example, the report on the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (2007) in *China Daily* (2007) and also in Goron (2018: 39). Concerning the 18th National Congress (2012), see, for *Journal of Dharma* 49, 2 (April-June 2024)

was reiterated at the 18th National Congress in 2012, incorporated into the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China⁴ in 2018, and stated again in 2022 at the 20th National People’s Congress.⁵ Consequently, the CPC and the Chinese government have prioritized ecological civilization alongside economic, political, cultural, and social development, under the ‘five in one’ policy⁶ framework. Over the past decade, President Xi Jinping has emphasized that building a strong ecological environment is essential for improving quality of life and enhancing China’s global image, stating that “with a better ecological environment, China will enter a new era of ecological civilization” (Xi, 1). In line with the 18th National Congress, China has implemented several laws, such as the Law of Environmental Protection, the Atmospheric Pollution Prevention Law, the Action Plan for Soil Pollution Prevention and Control, and the Reform Pilot Program on Environmental Damage Compensation System (He, 2016), providing a legal and institutional foundation for both environmental protection and the construction of ecological civilization.

The term 'ecological civilization' is admittedly somewhat

example, Deng (2012). On the 19th Congress, see, for example, *China Daily* (2017) and *Lexis China* (2018). On the 20th Congress, see *China Daily* (2022).

⁴ See the Preamble and article 89(6) of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, (2018).

⁵ Song Xin, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee and Chairman of China Energy Conservation and Environmental Protection Group, notes the presence of a key chapter on “ecological civilization in the report to the 20th National Congress of the CPC that stresses pursuing green development and promoting harmony between humanity and nature” (China Daily 2022).

⁶ At the 18th CPC National People’s Congress, the “five-in-one” initiative “was an “organic” political initiative “in which economic development is the foundation, political development is the guarantee, cultural development is the soul, social development is the condition, and ecological development is the foundation” (Xue and Li 2019: 94).

vague, and despite its widespread use by scholars and the Chinese government, it lacks a precise definition. However, it is clearly intended to guide China's national policy towards sustainability, impacting both urban and natural environments. It may be best understood as what Charles Taylor describes as a "social imaginary" – a framework that helps a society make sense of, and thereby enable, certain practices (Taylor, 2). In this case, those practices are geared toward building an ecological and sustainable community. While some critics view the term as merely a political catchphrase, its usage has grown among the Chinese scholars and has even gained traction outside of China (see Gare). Further, the notion of ecological civilization has been incorporated into law and public policy, though it has been criticised and challenged by a number of scholars. In some cases, these challenges are a product of the ongoing pressure in China to industrialize and modernize (Hu, 2020). There are, however, other significant challenges at a more local level – specifically, in people's attitudes, knowledge, and commitments to environmentalism and ecological civilisation.

2.2 Challenges in Interest and Participation in China

The promotion of the ideal of ecological civilisation in China has encountered three major challenges among the general populace: a low level of ecological interest and commitment, a low level of knowledge concerning the environment and ecology and a low level of participation in ecological practices. A brief description of these three challenges will contribute to a better understanding of the current state of ecological awareness and commitment in China, and will provide an opportunity to see where the promotion of 'ecological citizenship' might have a role to play.

2.2.1 Low Level of Ecological Concern and Commitment

When we refer to the level of 'ecological consciousness' in China, we mean, broadly, people's concern for the environment and sensitivity to nature. A high level of concern means that those involved have a greater commitment to and, arguably, a higher sensitivity to, nature, and this indicates not only a higher degree

of ecological consciousness but, potentially, of ecological citizenship – and vice versa.

Currently, there is substantial evidence suggesting that Chinese citizens exhibit relatively low levels of concern and commitment to environmental protection. Even where these traits exist, the motivation to act on them is primarily anthropocentric (see Madden). This is not surprising; it is consistent with the traditional Chinese dictum ‘*Shì bù guān jǐ, gāo gāo guà qǐ*’ (‘事不关己，高高挂起’ - ‘do not be concerned about things which have nothing to do with you’). Many Chinese citizens today still think of value and moral concern as something that focuses primarily on humans and their wellbeing, and few hold that people have a direct moral obligation to respect, preserve, and protect nature (see Madden; Liu 2004, 161). Recent studies confirm that many Chinese have a low level of practical respect for ecology and nature, and tend to regard human beings as the most important part of nature (see Jiang). This anthropocentrism is evident in some recent surveys of students (Huang, 153).⁷ Moreover, even when people do claim to have certain values, they do not always act on them; this is the so-called ‘value/action’ gap (see Howell). Further, so far as people’s appreciation of the value of nature is instrumental to their own interests, their commitment to ecological matters is also very weak. Personal and financial interests often take priority over ecological interests (see Elvin). For example, an important study of people’s commitments to ‘green’ purchases suggests that these commitments are at a rather low level (Chan, 405). Again, a study in Guangdong province shows that college students favour environmental protection measures, but only when these measures provide financial or health benefits. They are very reluctant to consider or support measures that may have a high cost or cause inconvenience (Jiang,

⁷ For example, Huang Weili notes that, in answer to the question, ‘Why should people protect the environment?’, 46.3% of those interviewed believed that the aim is to conquer nature. 77.4% of the interviewed college students believe that the aim is to permanently utilize natural resources. (Huang 2011).

10). Further, for example, villagers in certain minority areas in southwest China did not seem to show much appreciation for the intrinsic value of nature, although they depend on nature for their livelihood (Zhang, Wang and Yang, 9675). Indeed, governments in these areas focus primarily on economic development but ignore ecological protection. They seem to operate under the old practice of “construction first and protection later” (Gao, 251). For example, some local governments have sought to contribute to building ‘ecological civilisation’ by engaging in certain actions – for example, increasing the afforestation of villages⁸ – but not attempting to improve residents’ ecological consciousness. What these local governments are doing, then, is just to focus on the material aspect of ecological civilisation, and, generally, to set aside the human being’s ‘formation.’ This kind of effort for ecological civilisation, then, seems merely formal, and cannot by itself form a sustainable basis for ecological consciousness. In short, today many Chinese citizens pay only moderate allegiance to the ‘human-nature’ orientation (Chan and Ma, 605; see also Chan 2001).

2.2.2 Low Level of Ecological Knowledge

When we refer to ‘ecological knowledge,’ we are referring to the understanding, attitudes and awareness regarding the natural ecosystem as a whole, the relationship between humans and nature, and the skills required to navigate situations where conflicts arise between human activities and the environment. Many Chinese citizens appear to have a relatively low level of ecological knowledge (Chan and Lau 2000). First of all, what many know about the environment and ecological matters is not very comprehensive or detailed. For example, a recent survey in Zhanjiang City in southwest Guangdong province indicated that although 99.7% of the respondents had heard of the greenhouse effect, acid rain and clean energy, they lacked an accurate and

⁸ See Xinhua 2019. See also ‘Regulations on the Promotion of the Vanguard in Creating Ecological Civilisation in Yunnan Province,’ Sina Mobile News (2020).

comprehensive understanding of the basic principles of the greenhouse effect, the formation and prevention of acid rain and the use of clean energy (Sheng, 89).

Again, where there was such ecological knowledge, particularly traditional or indigenous knowledge, it has frequently been devalued. After having looked at a number of case histories in the ecologically diverse south-western region of China, Xu et al. noted, for example, that, in the quest to strengthen centralization and planning, “indigenous knowledge and practices” have been rejected or ignored (Xu, Ma, Tashi, Fu, Lu and Melick, 7).

Further, while many Chinese citizens may profess that they value nature, the actual *knowledge* about nature is low. As R.Y.K. Chan and L.B.Y. Lau note, consumer marketing studies in Beijing and Guangzhou show that, even though Chinese consumers express the intention to take into account the ecological effect of their purchases, their ability to identify correctly the causes of environmental degradation and its effects are very low (Chan and Lau, 347). It is the ‘affect’ (i.e., ‘emotionality’) more than the knowledge that influences behaviours, and Chan and Lau call for the Chinese government to “carefully review existing curricula ... and try to environmentalize them” (Chan and Lau, 350).

Finally, there seems to be a general absence of necessary ‘social capital’ and ‘ecological skills’ – i.e., capabilities of protecting the environment, understanding ecological issues, and promoting ecological balance by using technics and technologies (Wang, Tong and Li; Sellamuttu, De Silva and Nguyen-Khoa). For example, in the managing of the Cao Hai wetlands reserve in southwest China, local communities ignored or rejected rules to maintain the ecosystem’s integrity, believing that such rules would prohibit them from addressing their own concerns for food security and basic needs. It took a concerted effort to develop ecological skills to enable them to adapt, but authorities also had to provide the people of the area with supports and incentives, such as raising household incomes. And even when such skills – including management skills – have been attempted to be developed, they are sometimes impeded by the “authority-based

vertical coordination of the hierarchical system”⁹.

2.2.3 Lack of Participation in Ecological Practices

By ‘ecological practice,’ we refer to activities aimed at supporting environmental and ecological protection and development, such as recycling, waste recovery, and reducing carbon emissions. Ideally, ecological practice goes beyond passive behaviour; activities such as recycling or waste recovery done merely for public recognition do not qualify as true ecological practice. Instead, it involves the intentional and thoughtful application of one’s knowledge and skills to actively protect and sustain the ecological environment.

The participation of Chinese citizens in ecological practice seems to be relatively low, and one finds that there is little initiative, creativity, and enthusiasm for it. In the private sphere, many people engage in ‘environmental-friendly’ practices only for self-interested reasons, rather than out of a conscious sense of concern for the environment. Take a case in Luoyang, a city of 7 million in Henan province, as an example. A study reports that the citizens favour environmental protection measures which can reduce living costs, but are not interested in measures that may cause involve higher expense or cause inconvenience (Zhang, Xu, Guo and Wang, 236). Or, again, as noted earlier, there is a relatively low rate of consumers making green purchases; other issues – cost and convenience – often take priority (Chan and Lau 2000), and where there is a change in practice (e.g., by companies), it may be more the result of a global campaign by international parent companies than by the initiative of citizens or local

⁹ L. Wang, J. Tong, & Y. Li (2019) note the lack of human and social capital, and the challenges to retraining rural families in ‘new ecological skills,’ but also in building an effective ‘co-management authority’ to support ‘the ecological civilisation needs essential for rural vitalization during the coming 5 to 10 years’. For example, they note that, while one sees the development since 2008 of the ‘River Chiefs System (RCS),’ which focuses on the training of local or regional river chiefs to coordinate the ‘various technical and administrative forces to achieve environmental goals,’ it is difficult to change the ‘vertical coordination of the hierarchical system.’

companies themselves (Madden 2007).

Another indicator of the dearth of practice is the low level of interest and participation among Chinese citizens in shaping policies, laws, or institutions aimed at environmental improvement. In fact, there tends to be more online public attention focused on topics such as changes to the labour code or the budget, rather than on ecological concerns.¹⁰

In short, despite the official pronouncements and efforts of public authorities in China that promote ecological civilisation, there continue to be significant challenges at the local or popular level in increasing people’s knowledge and commitment to environmentalism and to ecological civilisation. Clearly something more is needed to reinforce the “social imaginary” of ecological civilization, and for making it more than just a matter of behaviour. It is within this context that environmental scholars have made efforts to articulate the notion of ‘ecological citizenship.’

3. ECOLOGICAL CITIZENSHIP

Scholars from different countries give varying interpretations of ecological citizenship theory and the concept of the ecological citizen. For example, Andrew Dobson argues for ecological citizenship in the sense of an anthropocentric theory based on principle of justice (Dobson 2003, 2007). His goal here is to eliminate the inconsistency between citizens’ behaviours and attitudes in achieving ecological sustainability goals and, thus, to

¹⁰ For example, a standing committee of the 11th National People’s Congress reviewed a draft of the Environmental Protection Act. It solicited opinions from the public on the official website of China’s National People’s Congress; 9,528 people offered a total of 11,748 comments. This is, we note, much less than 330,000 comments for the Amendment to the Budget Act and 550,000 comments for the Amendment to the Labor Contract Law. This comparatively low response to the Environmental Protection Act may be seen as another confirmation that people do not pay as much attention to ecological policies and ecological laws as to policies and laws in other fields. See, for an example, Li, et al, 2012.

contribute to the creation of a truly sustainable society. Other scholars in the West have used the term ‘ecological citizenship’ as well, such as Peter Christoff (1996), Mark Smith (1998), Deane Curtin (1999), Piers Stephen (2004), A.V. Sáiz (2005), Carme Melo-Escrihuela (2008), C. and C.E. Dedeoglu (2020), Holmes Rolston III (2020) and Nicole Hall and Emily Brady (2023). In general, these scholars have sought to articulate an ecological citizenship theory in order to enhance the discussion of humanity’s survival in a period marked by increasing ecological crisis.

But while ecological citizenship is a notion that is found outside of China, the account that we find in China is independent of it, and distinctive. Moreover, the movement in China to promote ecological citizenship is not only popular but state supported. Yang Tongjin of Guangxi University, for example, argues for the importance of ecological *citizens* as ‘modern citizens who have an ecological civilisation-consciousness and who strive to establish ecological civilisation’ (Yang 2008). Other Chinese scholars have addressed this as well (see Xu 2014; Du and Li 2010; Zhu and Liu (2015); Zeng, Sweet, et al., (2016); and Xie, et al (2019).

3.1 *Ecological Citizenship in Contemporary Chinese Philosophy*

In general, in China, ecological citizenship theory holds the following views:

i) Human beings are not, in any fundamental way, different from other life on the planet, and even from nature as a whole. All are subject to the same laws of nature and there is, therefore, a kind of “ecological equality” (Li, 65).

ii) [Because of this], no thing has an intrinsic value greater than any other.

iii) All things are inherently related (i.e., what has been called ‘ecological holism’); one cannot affect one part of nature without concomitant effects on the others. (This reflects the ‘classical’ Chinese value of *tiān rén hé yì* [天人合一 ‘nature and mankind combined as one’] (see Zeng, Sweet, et al, 2016). The relation to nature, therefore, is fundamental. This emphasis on the interrelation of all things is consistent, some Chinese scholars argue, with a Marxist view of nature [Wang (2012) and Li, Xue, and Wang (2008)].

iv) Therefore, humanity should act in ways that maintain these

(inherent) relations and these values, such as maintaining an ecological balance and harmony with nature.

v) Over time, however, human beings have ‘accidentally’ (Schweitzer, 44) come to develop certain dispositions and characteristics (e.g., acquisitiveness) that they refer to in distinguishing themselves from the rest of nature – so that human beings become ‘insatiable, materialistic and selfish’ (Coleman, 23) – as well as having an increased desire for comfort.

vi) This ‘development’ has led to increased industrialization, depleted limited natural resources and, by extension, the devastation of the environment (e.g., as seen in modern China¹¹).

vii) Yet, human beings also have natural inclinations or instincts of ‘love of nature’ and a longing for nature (Fu and Nielsen 2023).

viii) Therefore, human beings *ought to return to and focus on these natural inclinations*, question these dispositions used to distinguish them from the rest of nature and seek to establish ecological balance (as in iv, above).

The aim of ecological citizenship is that human beings re-establish their relationship with, or ‘go back to,’ nature ([重返自然, *chóng fǎn zì rán*). This is the essence and foundation of ecological citizenship theory in China. The key values – going ‘back to nature’ [重返自然/*chóng fǎn zì rán*] and environmental holism [‘nature and mankind combined as one’ (天人合一 *iān rén hé yì*)] – draw on classical Chinese thought.¹² They suggest that humanity’s sensitivity to and love for nature should be

¹¹ Although there has been a lengthy history of exploitation of or indifference to the natural environment in China (see Marks 2017), some have argued that this accelerated significantly since 1949. Anderson (2014: 12) notes that “Mao imported to China the quintessentially Western idea of struggling against nature” and that, within a few decades, the exploitation of the environment had a major impact on ecology.

¹² An illustration of the respect or reverence for nature as a fundamental traditional value, see chapter 25, *Dao de Jing* (道德经): “Earth gives the rule for people. Heaven gives the rule for Earth. Tao gives the rule for Heaven. The rule for Tao: things as they are” (see LaFargue 1992). See also, for example, Li & Wu (2017) and Chen, Sweet, et al, (2016). For more on ‘the core values of Chinese traditional thought,’ see Liu (2018).

comprehensively awakened – and this involves not just protecting and restoring the natural environment, but returning to nature, enjoying nature, and living in ‘ecological balance.’ Thus, human beings must learn self-control and temperance in dealing with nature. It is not, however, the aim of this ‘return to nature’ to go back to living in a pre-technological state, but, rather, to live in balance with nature, albeit at a ‘higher level’ – that is, in a way that is good for all that exists – i.e., “conducive to its development, multiplication, and prosperity” (Zhao, 175).

Thus, this version of ecological citizenship theory found in China is not anthropocentric and justice-focused, as some Western authors (e.g., Dobson 2003) seem to hold. It also does not view nature as something ‘possessed’ by human beings, or over which human beings have dominion. And it is clear that this theory is not individualistic – that, in keeping with much of Chinese tradition, it is more holistic and ‘virtue based.’ While the Chinese version of ecological citizenship theory holds that the root of the present ecological crisis is anthropocentrism, the response is not to challenge the existence of human beings, but, rather, to seek to change consciousness.

Some scholars have argued that “ecological failure is clearly the inevitable result of the nature of modern technology” (Commoner 1971, 187; see Yang 2014; Xu, 1),¹³ and that “technological change after the Second World War is the culprit of modern environmental disasters” (Commoner 1990, 44-45). But this is, according to Chinese ecological citizenship theory, too simple an analysis. The underlying reason for this “failure” lies not in the use of technology, but in human insatiability, material desire and selfishness. It is this that blinds human beings to their relation to nature, and that worsens the ecological crisis. “Back to nature,” however, requires neither entirely repressing desires, nor objecting to technology. Rather, for Chinese ecological citizenship theorists, it means simply that human beings need to control their

¹³ Barry Commoner writes: “ Behind the ecological failure of modern technology lies a corresponding failure in its scientific base” and “the triumph of new technology in industry is an ecological failure” (Commoner 1971/2020: 187). See also Yang (2014).

desires and be moderate in the use of, and avoid the abuse of, technology.

3.2 *Being an Ecological Citizen*

What, then, is it to be an ecological citizen on the preceding model? Ecological citizenship is different from classical notions of citizenship. It does not have to do with being “a member of a political community who enjoys the rights and assumes the duties of membership” (Leydet 2023). It is not, then, being an inhabitant of a particular place who simply recognizes duties to the one’s surroundings (or, here, to the local ecosystem). Rather, ecological citizens are those who:

- i) see their place as members of a wider community – usually, humanity – rather than of a particular country or state;
 - ii) have a sensitivity to, and a concern for, nature, based on broader moral principles;
 - iii) embrace ecological values, such as: ecological holism (see Y. Zhan 2010); the intrinsic worth of nature; the value of biological diversity; the recognition that all things have value; sustainable development; and ‘minimalism’ or simplicity in (human) conduct or behaviour; and an aspiration to go ‘back to nature’ (Hu 2013, 622; Qin and He, 35);
 - iv) know of, and seek to enjoy certain ‘rights’ of ecological citizenship – e.g., to enjoy nature, to be involved in the preservation and protection of the natural environment;
 - v) have certain positive duties of citizenship, not as an individual, but as a member of this wider community – humanity – and, thus, this citizenship is exercised by human beings collectively.
- and vi) are committed to acting on these duties and exercising these rights – i.e., to constructing ‘ecological civilisation.’

In principle, all human beings may jointly enjoy the rights and duties of ecological citizenship. On this model, to be an ecological citizen is not simply to be a person who engages in certain practices for the preservation of nature or the environment. Rather it is to be a person who has and subscribes to a view of the ecosystem and the place of human beings in it, who recognises the values of “nature and mankind combined as one” (*tiān rén hé yì*) and of going “back to nature” (*chóng fǎn zì rán*) and who, together with others of like mind, is committed to the construction

of ecological civilisation.¹⁴ Ecological citizens, then, are people who have a distinctive way of seeing the world and their place in it – i.e., an ecological perspective and consciousness – and they have a commitment to certain values and to acting on them in order to build a genuine ecological civilisation.

Because the values of ecological citizenship support the goal of ecological civilisation described in CCP documents, and because the values and perspectives of ecological citizenship are similar to or are rooted in classical Chinese values, it is not surprising that some Chinese scholars believe that cultivating ecological citizens will help China in constructing a successful and sustainable ecological civilisation. As some Chinese scholars (e.g., Xu Ziqi, in his book, *Ecological Citizen*), have argued, “ecological citizens are the main body of ecological civilisation construction and the latter is the foundation of the development of the former.”¹⁵

3.3 Encouraging Ecological Citizenship

Thus, while there has been an important discussion of ecological citizenship in recent Chinese scholarship, the question is how to take this theory and find a way of applying it in a social and political context. Carme Melo-Escribuela has noted well that “ecological citizens will not emerge spontaneously; they have to be created” (128).

Encouraging ecological citizenship, however, may not be especially difficult. Note that the preceding model of ecological citizenship draws on Chinese traditional values. Even though there has been some decline in traditional values such as “nature and mankind combined as one” [*tiān rén hé yì*] and going “back to nature” [*chóng fǎn zì rán*], these values still are latent throughout

¹⁴ See above. During an address in 2013 to the 18th Central Committee, China’s President Xi stressed that China would implement “ecological civilisation reforms.” This is discussed in Zhang Chun (2015).

¹⁵ Xu Ziqi (2014) writes “Ecological citizenship is the main body of ecological civilisation construction, and ecological civilisation construction is the soil condition for the development and development of ecological citizens.” (our translation).

Chinese culture, especially in China and in the Chinese diaspora (Chan 2001; Chan and Lau 2000). Even if there must be a revival of these values, arguably such a revival will resonate with and, ideally, (re)ignite some of the basic beliefs, commitments and characteristics of ecological citizenship (see Wu and Zhu 2021).

Although we cannot detail them in the present paper, certain activities have already been used to create ecological consciousness, ecofriendly awareness, and eco centred behaviour that may serve as a prelude to ecological citizenship. For example, some scholars have found that, starting with a person’s basic value-priorities and general beliefs about nature and the environment, a connection comes to exist between such beliefs and pro-environmental behaviours (Jagers and Matti, 1061).

Moreover, the social and political context also contributes to encouraging this sense of commitment and engagement. Civil society – for example, professional networks and the increasing number of ENGOs [‘environmental non-governmental organisations] – in China has dramatically increased in recent years. This provides a means of gathering, filtering and disseminating data independently of government activity, but it also provides a way of propagating traditional values which can, in turn, become readily available through social media.

Third, we would note that the government in China is already committed to the construction of ecological civilization. It would be a small step, we would suggest, for the government to now recognize ecological citizenship as a key approach to promoting ecological civilization. For example, government can promote traditional values such as ‘back to nature,’ that is a key value in ecological citizenship. Already, in publications such as the *Qiushi Journal*, which is an official publication of the Chinese Communist Party, there have been strong defences of the “need to take care of nature and give back to nature whilst we take what we need to survive and develop. We need to repay old debts, avoid accruing new ones, and work to prevent the occurrence of ecological deficits and irreversible ecological damage as a result of human activities” (see Kai 2013). The explicit promotion of such values by government would also serve as a way to encourage ecological

citizenship. How, specifically, this latter strategy can continue to be pursued requires further explanation and argument, but existing and future practices in China may well serve as a model for the promotion of ecological citizenship elsewhere.

4. ECOLOGICAL CITIZENSHIP MODEL OF VASUDHAIVA KUṬUMBĀKAM

Ecological civilization and the path to ecological citizenship present a powerful framework for realizing the ideal of *vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*, the belief that the world is one interconnected family. Ecological citizenship prioritizes sustainable development, harmony with nature and the cultivation of ecological values across society. By adopting the principles of ecological citizenship, individuals are empowered to take active roles in environmental protection through informed decisions and responsible actions. Beyond behavioural changes, it calls for a deeper ecological awareness that connects human activities to the well-being of the planet. Like the ancient Indian wisdom of *vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*, this model promotes global unity and shared responsibility for safeguarding the earth's future. Ecological citizenship, in this context, serves as the cornerstone for building interdependent and sustainable societies that ensure the well-being of future generations.

Moreover, ecological citizenship demands participation in the creation of policies and institutions that prioritize environmental protection. It pushes individuals and communities to move beyond passive environmental behaviours and take active steps to address ecological challenges. In the spirit of *vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*, this approach emphasizes that all living beings, as part of a global family, deserve protection and care. Societies that embrace ecological citizenship cultivate a shared responsibility that transcends borders, fostering long-term environmental stewardship on a global scale.

This vision also highlights the disproportionate impact of environmental degradation on vulnerable communities, highlighting the need for just and equitable solutions. Ecological citizenship champions fairness in the distribution of

environmental resources and responsibilities while encouraging international cooperation to address interconnected ecological issues. By merging the principles of ecological civilization with the ideals of *vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*, a more inclusive, sustainable, and harmonious world can be realized.

This model of ecological citizenship is not just a Chinese approach. It has the potential to spread across the globe and have a global impact. The cultivation of ecological citizens can become a collective endeavour, uniting nations and cultures in the pursuit of environmental stewardship. This universal approach fosters an 'all-inclusive perception' of reality, where humans, nature, and all living beings are seen as deeply interconnected. Embracing this holistic worldview shifts the focus from individualistic thinking to taking collective responsibility for the planet, a dynamic transformation for achieving global sustainability and ecological balance.

5. CONCLUSION

There is clearly a need to increase the commitment to protect and preserve the environment and to promote ecological consciousness. Yet the concern, knowledge, and participation in current environmental ecological practice still remains too low. One response that has been proposed is the cultivation of what has been called ecological citizenship. In this paper, we have looked at one model of this ecological citizenship, that which we find in recent scholarship in China. While the government as well as some Chinese NGOs have attempted to promote a greater consciousness of ecology and “ecological civilisation,” this has met with mixed results, and so a turn to the cultivation of “ecological citizenship” has been advocated. Such a model draws on traditional Chinese values and beliefs which, it has been argued, makes it better placed to encourage personal commitment among Chinese citizens. This model, we suggest, is also instructive outside of the Chinese context, for, as noted at the beginning of this paper, there are similar values and principles to be found in other cultures and traditions, such as the principle of *vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam*.

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