

**‘Securitising ‘Ecological Civilisation’:  
Evaluation of CCP Construction of Ecological  
Civilisation as National Security Strategy**

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**Unit: POLI31555**

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**Word Count: 9972**

**This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of BSc in Politics and International Relations (With Study Abroad).**

**I declare that this research was approved by the SPAIS Ethics Working Group on the 15<sup>th</sup> November 2025.**

## **Abstract**

I theorise that ecological civilisation is constructed by the CCP as part of national security strategy through a mechanism of selective anthropocosmicism. I define selective anthropocosmicism as the selective invocation of concepts underpinning the world view of ecological civilisation, to bring about a feasible paradigm shift, whilst simultaneously ensuring to bolster CCP political legitimacy. Using a reflexive thematic analysis of ecological civilisation construction within Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping political speeches from 2007- 2025, I constructed three distinct themes to reinforce the overall thesis. Firstly, the construction of Harmony as a Legitimiser of Anthropocentricity. Secondly, the construction of Self-Cultivation constrained within the Sociotechnical Imaginary. Finally, the construction of Holism driving a Multilateral anthropocosmic Consensus. This research is significant as it bridges a rift within the literature on Chinese environmentalism. Typically, accounts pose CCP construction of ecological civilisation as either a tool of rhetoric, or a paradigm shift. My findings from both Xi Jinping and Hu Jintao political speeches highlight both of these accounts are simultaneously true through the imposition of selective anthropocosmicism.

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## **Introduction**

The Anthropocene is defined as a geological epoch where ‘human actions are deemed the main driver of global environmental change’ (Rockström, et al., 2009: 472). The result of this human tampering is that the natural and physical are far less distinct, and that humanity can actively shape geological outcomes (Dalby, 2017). The CCP have responded to the anthropogenic climate change by embedding Ecological Civilisation (shengtai wenming) within their ideology. Ecological civilisation is a mode of more advanced human development, sustainably conducted within the anthropocene (Huang and Westman, 2022). Securitisation theorists have argued that this repositioning of anthropogenic climate change, or ecological change, as an existential threat has legitimised the use of extraordinary resources to defend China’s sovereignty (Waeber, 1995). Ecological security was explicitly integrated within the 2021–2025 NSS (Liqun, 2023). The NSS aims for the ‘securitisation of everything’ (Drinhausen and Legarda, 2022: 4), linking ecological security within holistic national security strategy (National Security Education Day, 2025). Ecological Security is explicitly defined within the NSS as ‘a state in which the ecological environment essential for a country’s survival and development is free from, or relatively free from, destruction or threats’ (National Security Education Day, 2025). Therefore, ecology has been securitised by the CCP in order to achieve ecological civilisation.

Hall claims that policymakers work within a framework of ideas and standards which dictate what the goals of policy should be, and the instruments which should be used to attain said policies (Hall, 1992: 279). Hall would argue that the need for nontraditional approaches to anthropogenic transnational threats, could lead to norms from contesting policy paradigms dictating policymaker behaviour, thus causing a paradigm shift (Hall, 1992: 280). Therefore, discursive constructions can underpin a paradigm change towards encouraging the implementing of effective ecological policy.

Anthropogenic climate change has led to an increasing ecological link within national security strategy. Securitisation theory underpins how the urgency, and nature, of a threat may constitute a paradigm shift (Waeber, 1995). However, these accounts tend to focus on securitisation in a vacuum, which can lead to analysis being overly deterministic, based upon subjective bias (Balzacq, 2005). Pragmatic acts can turn subjective biases from a hindrance, into a tool for analysis. Firstly, contextual factors uncover the cultural and historical factors which rationalise latent meanings behind ecological civilisation construction (Balzacq, 2005). Secondly, it is compatible with a constructivism, meaning I am able to foreground my subjective bias as a tool for analysis within the Reflexive Thematic Analysis used in my methodology (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

Literature analyses ecological civilisation as a national security strategy through binary accounts influenced by the collective shared understandings, which shape perception (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Chinese scholars tend to conceive that the construction of ecological civilisation as a paradigm shift (Liqun, 2023). However, typically Western scholars within critical security studies highlight the limits of such a view (Bukre, Lee-Koo and McDonald, 2016). Therefore, there is a tendency to undermine any constructions of ecological civilisation is primarily being concerned with consolidating CCP power (Hernandez and Misalucha-Willoughby, 2020), therefore primarily acting as a rhetorical tool.

The use of the pragmatic acts lens (Balzacq, 2005), overcomes this rift in the literature, through consideration of contextual factors influencing the latent meanings of ecological civilisation construction. Subsequently, I theorise that ecological civilisation is constructed by the CCP as part of national security strategy through a mechanism of selective anthropocosmicism. In this way, I bridge the rift in the literature by posing the CCP construction of ecological civilisation as both a tool of rhetoric, and indicative of a paradigm shift.

To reach this conclusion, this essay firstly touches on the conceptualisation of ecological civilisation in China. The essay then pivots to discussing the implications of the securitisation of the ecology through ecological civilisation. Then, the methodology is signposted, where a reflexive thematic analysis is conducted within ecological civilisation construction in CCP Premier speeches from 2007 to 2025. I source these political speeches using the MFA and China Daily archives (China Daily, 2025; MFA, 2025). I perceive three distinct themes as being most salient within the documents: harmony as a legitimiser of anthropocentricity; self-cultivation constrained within the sociotechnical imaginary; holism driving a multilateral anthropocosmic consensus. I argue that these themes all reinforce my thesis of selective anthropocosmicism. I summarise on the implications of my findings, and how my findings should guide future research.

## **Ecological Civilisation in China**

I use this chapter to sketch how ecological civilisation has been conceptualised today. In doing so, I hope to illustrate how the recent integration of ecological security, the precursor for ecological civilisation, into the NSS serves to emphasise latent meanings within the CCP construction of ecological civilisation. Once the context has been established, this section aims to bridge the literature between viewing ecological civilisation as a rhetorical tool, and the literature which views ecological civilisation construction as being indicative of a sincere paradigm shift.

### ***The Conception of Ecological Civilisation***

Chinese environmentalist literature argues collective shared understandings from the New Confucian Humanist epistemic community ideologically underpin ecological civilisation (Weiming, 2001). Epistemic communities are groups with a common set of norms and world views, who give meaning to social construction (Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001: 402). New Confucian Humanist thinkers such as Qian, Junyi, and Youlan, align over their perceived unity of heaven, earth and humanity (Weiming, 2001: 244), building off Zhang Zai's The Western Inscription from the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Tucker and Grim, 2024). Based off this interconnectivity, the New Confucian Humanist epistemic community requires humanity to not only cultivate the self, but to live in harmony with the wider natural world and cosmos (Weiming, 2001: 248). New Confucian Humanists represent holism as the idea that humans are part of a greater whole (Huang and Westman, 2022: 188). Harmony instead represents a balancing of multiple heterogeneous elements, to create a mutually beneficial relationship (Huang and Westman, 2022 :188). Both terms, foundational to the New Confucian Humanist epistemic community, supports an anthropocosmic worldview (Weiming, 2001: 244).

CCP implementation of ecological policy has not been a linear process, and therefore norm entrepreneurs have facilitated the incorporation of New Confucian Humanist ideas into CCP

ideology over the last twenty years. Norm entrepreneurs are individuals who dislike existing norms, and change them from either from within, or outside the state (Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001: 400). Over the course of the late twentieth century, the CCP was perceived to prioritise pure industrial development over environmental concerns (Huang and Westman, 2022: 188). Scientific evidence, such as PM2.5 levels in the atmosphere, highlighted how industrial development had led to a distribution of negative externalities (Burnett, Roumasset and Wang, 2008), contributing to two million annual deaths in China (World Health Organisation, 2024). Ye Qianji acted as a norm entrepreneur for ecological civilisation. Qianji introduced the term in 1987, working outside of the state to raise concerns from the bottom-up (Marinelli, 2018: 373). Marinelli highlighted that Qianji built off the New Confucian epistemic community, emphasising that ecological environment was deteriorating due to human activities (Marinelli, 2018: 374). Marinelli argues that ecological civilisation was a response to anthropogenic climate change, and a roadmap for a more advanced form of human civilisation, which is predicated upon sustainable development (Marinelli, 2018; Huang and Westman, 2022).

Over time, the increased salience of both ecological and anthropocosmic concepts in CCP Political speeches, highlight the normalisation of ecological civilisation within party ideology. In July 2003, Hu Jintao proposed that ‘development does not refer only to economic growth, but also to achieving comprehensive social development’ (Teng and Wang, 2021: 150). In October 2007, the Report to the 17<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress saw Hu Jintao explicitly link environmental conditions to development through the necessity to ‘pursue comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development’ (Marinelli, 2018 :372). As such, by 2007 concepts within the anthropocosmic worldview had been explicitly foregrounded within elite discourse projecting CCP ideology (Marinelli, 2018). Huang and Westman argue that politicisation of issues by the CCP is significant because ‘the party controls the state, and



party ideologies penetrate the governance of the state...the former lays down ideological and theoretical underpinnings and orientations, while the latter establishes political legitimacy' (Huang and Westman, 2021: 3). As such, Marinelli's claim that ecological concerns had now shifted from the abstract, to becoming a foregrounded political concern for the CCP, are substantiated (Marinelli, 2018).

Teng and Weng highlight that CCP foregrounding of issues is both significant, and strategic (Teng and Wang, 2021). The CCP is dependent upon performance legitimacy, dictated by the ability of the state to provide public goods (Teng and Wang, 2021). Utilising Iyengar's accessibility bias thesis, increased issue salience within political speeches would make concerns over distribution of public goods, due to ecological disruption, far more salient when the Chinese population evaluates CCP performance (Iyengar, 1990). Based off this hypothesis, the CCP would need to respond effectively to these concerns. However, Weiming points out that in order to maintain political legitimacy, the CCP must respond in ways which serve to reinforce the overarching ideological confines of the New Confucian Humanist anthropocosmic worldview, which are foundation beliefs for the Chinese population (Weiming, 2001: 244).

### ***Sociotechnical Imaginaries: CCP Soft Power?***

One way the CCP gets around policy constraints is through the construction of sociotechnical imaginaries, introduced by Jasanoff as; 'collectively held, institutionally stabilised, and publicly performed visions of desirable futures, animated by shared understandings of forms of social life and social order attainable through, and supportive of, advances in science and technology' (Jasanoff, 2015:6). These desirable futures united social communities through a collective shared understanding of what should be realised (Jasanoff, 2015). Thus, several scholars have robustly indicated that ecological civilisation has been

used as a sociotechnical imaginary by the CCP (Hansen, Li and Svarverud, 2018; Huang and Westman, 2021). The norms of utilising science and technology as the solution to achieve the desirable ecological future becomes institutionalised through the sociotechnical imaginary, making the norm both powerful, and hard to discern (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998: 904). Norms become so embedded that they appear as both normatively and epistemically sound, meaning that norms are co-produced from grassroots support (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Therefore, these norms become embedded within the ideology of the CCP.

CCP anthropocosmic ideology is enforced through deliberate mechanisms, although varying in how overt they are. Teng and Wang define the CCP as a system of ‘upwards accountability’, where the aim of each level of the CCP is to fulfil tasks assigned from above, which they are incentivised to complete through the promise of promotion within the party (Teng and Wang, 2021: 143). Upwards accountability can be applied to the implementation of policy working to pursue ecological security. The CCP Central Committee sets problem framings, which are exercised into binding emissions targets by the NPC (Teng and Wang, 2021). The State Council sets out policies to achieve the targets, working in conjunction with the National Leading group on Climate Response, energy construction and emissions reductions (NLGCCR), which is headed by Xi Jinping himself (Teng and Wang, 2021). Central Environmental Inspection teams report directly to the central government, and ensure provincial adherence to emission targets (Xiang and Gevelt, 2020). The integration of ecological security into the NSS further drives home the impetus of dealing with ecological issues, due to the positioning of ecology as a marker of both CCP legitimacy, and continual state sovereignty (Liqun, 2023). The impetus to uphold ecological security would subsequently pave the way for ecological civilisation, so as long as all the other security fields within the NSS are attended towards (Liqun, 2023).

Environmental constitutionalism is an effective explanation for how actors are overtly kept in line to pursue ecological objectives (Wang, 2024). Environmental constitutionalism is characterised by ‘the requirement to construct ecological civilisation that is realised through state-based approaches’ (Wang, 2024: 201). The strategies used to enforce environmental constitutionalism grows, when considering the hidden forms of coercion uncovered through the construction of ecological civilisation as a sociotechnical imaginary (Hansen, Li and Svarverud, 2018). Wang argues that CCP enforcement strategies effectively maintain environmental constitutionalism, binding policymakers to commit towards building ecological civilisation (Wang, 2024: 201). This chapter has outlined the key role of New Confucian Humanism in conceptualising ecological civilisation.

### ***Ecological Restoration and Beautiful China Initiative***

To achieve ecological civilisation within Teng and Wang’s robust performance legitimacy model, the CCP must adequately distribute public goods (Teng and Wang, 2021). However, within the CCP conception of ecological civilisation, the range of public goods the CCP are responsible for distributing must be broadened. Two Mountains Theory refers to the idea that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets, emphasising the harmony between humans and nature (Qi, 2023: 45). Qi highlights that Two Mountains Theory emphasises the need to develop sustainability, in tandem with the protection of the ecosystems which humanity benefits from in the form of public goods (Qi, 2023). Fu, Liu and Meadows highlighted that ,whilst concepts of Two Mountains Theory permeated CCP ideology from the onset of ecological civilisation, Two Mountains Theory as a political target becomes more salient within elite discourse through the introduction of the Beautiful China Initiative in 2012 (Fu, Liu and Meadows, 2023).

The CCP describes the Beautiful China Initiative as a target for 2035 where ‘the integration of ecosystem service supply, demand and flows for co-benefits can be realised’ (Fu, Liu and Meadows, 2023: 6). In this way, the literature argues that The Beautiful China Initiative acts as the general outline for quantifying to what extent different stakeholders in China are working in adherence with Two Mountains Theory (Guan et al., 2024). Given that passing ecological thresholds is enforced by central inspection teams (Xiang and Gevelt, 2020), lucid waters and lush mountains are positioned as public goods. Therefore, their distribution could be construed as being indicative of the legitimacy of the CCP as a whole (Teng and Wang, 2021).

The CCP has also aimed to work towards The Beautiful China initiative through technocratic approaches. Many scholars have highlighted China’s continual interest in utilising Green Bonds as a method to achieve these targets (Krosinsky, 2020; Papapanou, 2020; Li et al., 2023). Green Bonds are a form of green finance, defined as ‘services provided for economic activities are supportive of the environmental improvement’ (Papapanou, 2020: 108). Made in China 2025 has seen a concerted effort to modernise and upgrade manufacturing (Krosinsky, 2020), which the literature argues green bonds are simultaneously effective at addressing. As such, the benefits towards Made in China 2025 may lead to an international advantage within green technology, helping boost local development (Li et al., 2023).

Quantitative research has yielded a significantly positive relationship between green bond issuance and total factor productivity (Li et al., 2023), corporate innovation performance (Khurram, 2023), and firm value in the short run (Khurram et al., 2023). Although the effect on firm value dissipates over time (Jiang, Chen and Chen, 2022), there is a robust positive correlation with green transformation (Cheng and Wu, 2024). Li suggests this is because of cheaper financing costs (Li et al., 2023), which have been argued to be more effective for SOE’s which can utilise advantageous credit access (Cheng and Wu, 2024). Therefore,

literature construes firms to be as more valuable through green bond issuance, which may help to simultaneously achieve the Made in China 2025 targets, work towards ecological civilisation, and drive Chinese firm performance to incentivise in house green technology development (Li et al., 2023).

### ***Limitations***

Climatologic evidence highlights that the CCP is still far away from securitising ecology to achieve ecological civilisation (Climate Action Tracker, 2024). Literature has attributed both failure of both technocratic, and ecological restoration schemes can be attributed to a misconception over the CCP's governance model (Chen, Fung and Sun, 2024). Cheng, Fung and Sun robustly argues that overlapping responsibilities from CCP central agencies prevent effective implementation (Cheng, Feng and Sun, 2024). Therefore, provincial governments have incentives to collude with lower levels within a system of upwards accountability (Teng and Wang, 2021). In addition, provincial leaders have heterogeneous interests, and the uncertainty surrounding green bonds as a substantive development driver may drive further collusion (Teng and Wang, 2021). Larcker and Watts modelled that US municipal investors viewed green bonds only as a direct substitute for traditional bonds, meaning that the lower prices typically associated with green bonds may not actually exist, serving to make green bonds, and less desirable for investors, limiting the opportunity for development (Larcker and Watts, 2020).

However, I argue that these limitations from the literature are not robust for explaining ineffective policy implementation. There has been a resurgence of traditional cultural activities within China through social media influencers (Huang and Westman, 2021). This is paired with a growing ecologically conscious population, driven by an obligation to the state, and practical benefits (Zhan, 2024). Widespread grassroots environmentalism means Larcker

and Watts' green bond analysis does not hold up for a Chinese context. This is because the collective shared understandings of the desirability of ecological civilisation as an end goal, would make a green bond more desirable than traditional bond, even when all risks are equal and known ex-ante (Larcker and Watts, 2020). Therefore, we would be more likely to see a relatively low price for green bonds (Larcker and Watts, 2020), driving sustainable development. Thus, the conceptualisation of ecological civilisation as a concept has led to meaningful policy change in China. However, the conceptualisation of ecological civilisation is not neutral. Throughout the implementation in elite discourse, the CCP has an active role in framing ecological civilisation to influence how the issue is perceived by the audience. Thus, consideration of contextual factors outside of the literature directly on ecological civilisation illuminates that ecological security has been directly tied to national security strategy (Liquan, 2023). Thus, analysis of the deliberate CCP construction of ecological civilisation may uncover latent incentives, which are vital to illuminate when discussing the role of ecological civilisation as part of national security strategy.

## **Ecological Securitisation and the Limits of Critical Security Studies**

I use this chapter to sketch the contours of critical security studies. Through examining the need to look at the wider context, a pragmatic act lens is shown to be most effective to understanding the latent meanings behind the securitisation of ecology by the CCP.

Securitisation theory, developed by The Copenhagen School of critical security studies, claim that the enunciation of security constructs issues as an existential threat to the sovereignty of a state, thus legitimising the use of resources outside of ordinary politics to counteract the threat (Wæver, 1995: 54). For successful securitisation, a speech act must meet the felicity conditions. This involves the authority of the speaker, the understanding of the language by the audience, a sincerity obligation, and that the speaker is intending to create a perlocutionary effect for the audience when the speech act is uttered (Wæver, 1995). Thus, the Copenhagen School reduces speech acts to a deterministic procedure, hinging successful securitisation of an issue upon the fulfilment of the felicity conditions (Wæver, 1995).

Balzacq's pragmatic acts build on securitisation theory, by reattaching said speech acts to the dynamics of world politics (Balzacq, 2005). Balzacq argues robustly that political elites successfully securitise issues contingent on both the relationship between the political elite and the audience, and based upon cultural and historical experiences (Balzacq, 2005). Whilst power asymmetries are important for successful securitisation, the power of the audience to be persuaded is equally important, and typically hinges on perceived interests from cultural, and historical, factors (Balzacq, 2005).

The Constructivist lens offers nuance into how historical and cultural factors are not neutral, and instead are dynamically shaped. Constructivists ontologically assume reality is shaped by social interactions, beliefs, and ideas (Finnemore and Sikkink, 2001: 394). When faced with unprecedented situations, the meaning of reality must therefore be constructed based upon a

culmination of historical, and cultural, factors (Wendt, 1992:398). Institutions such as states, are created to represent collective understandings, contextualising why issues are deemed more sensitive than others across regimes (Wendt, 1992: 399). Wendt reinforces this by proving that anarchy, which realists believe to be an ontological truth, can produce different interactions between states, dependent on how they perceive anarchy differently (Wendt, 1992: 400). Therefore, engaging with the idea that constructions are subjective, should shine some light into why some topics are foregrounded when an issue is securitised. Therefore, pragmatic acts are ideal to uncover the both the contextual reasons, and subsequent implications, of securitising an issue.

### ***Ecological Security as a Flawed yet Encouraging Approach***

Again relying on accessibility bias theory to assume that increased salience of an issue within discourse positively correlates with audience sensitivity to said problem (Iyengar, 1990), states are increasingly aware of anthropogenic climate change as a threat (Rockström, 2009). A splintering of discourse around has occurred. Discourses are defined as ‘specific ensembles of ideas, concepts... that are produced, preproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities’ (Burke, Lee-Koo and McDonald, 2016: 66). The mainstream discourse has been constructed around anthropocentric concerns (Barnett and Adger, 2007). Anthropocentricity is exemplified through Homer- Dixon’s environment – conflict thesis (Homer-Dixon, 1994). The environment – conflict thesis theorised how security could be threatened by the scarcities resulting from environmental degradation (Homer-Dixon, 1994). Whilst Homer-Dixon does not find any evidence which would point towards the frequently touted resource wars between states (Homer-Dixon, 1994), he claims there is substantive evidence towards environmentally induced migration causing institutional pressure, leading to group identity conflicts (Homer-Dixon, 1994). According to Barnett and Adger, the capacity for security



infringements are far broader than conceptualised by Homer-Dixon, as a security threat can occur even if institutional strain is only perceived, highlighting the role of constructions in affecting security outcomes (Barnett and Adger, 2007). Therefore, states aim to cut off the root cause of these potential security problems by making environmental concerns a more salient part of the national security agenda. However, critical security studies have highlighted how the focus on survival within a self-help international system, serve to legitimise overly national responses which revert to the protection of the status quo (Burke, Lee-Koo and McDonald, 2016). Therefore, state constructions of environmental security have been increasingly viewed as creating policy which is too limited to capture all of the effects of anthropogenic climate change, and instead serving as a rhetorical tool rather than paradigm shift.

Ecological Security has emerged as an alternative discourse to deal with far more of the effects of anthropogenic climate change. Robust paleoclimatologic evidence has shown human effect ecological environments, which can serve to either directly, or indirectly, increase the incidence of security problems occurring (Chakrabarty, 2014). Dalby has illustrated this how although naturally occurring earthquake did initiate the reactor meltdown at Fukushima, poor human planning accelerated the scale of the geological impact (Dalby, 2017: 238). Burke, Lee-Koo and McDonald highlight how cosmopolitan ethical principles should underpin a security perspective (Burke, Lee-Koo and McDonald, 2016: 65). They argue robustly that this is because cosmopolitan security ethics understand security as a universal good, where both human and ecosystem security all have an equal moral weight, and differentiated responsibilities, to provide security. Such a widened approach should enable the discovery of new responses which go beyond the status quo, and may help to generate collaborative international solutions (Burke, Lee-Koo and McDonald, 2016).

McDonald builds off his collaborative research to present the idea of an ecological security discourse. This discourse incorporates cosmopolitan ethics by shifting the referent object towards ecosystem resilience (McDonald, 2018: 155). In this way, interdependence is accounted for in ways which addresses the needs of both vulnerable human populations, and other species (McDonald, 2018: 168). McDonald stresses the importance of maintaining ecosystem function despite the role of change (McDonald, 2018: 155). The utterance of resilience enables a focus upon adaptability, which emphasise long term survival of all life through ethical considerations of future generations (McDonald, 2018). Advancing ecological security is seen as difficult, as solutions require trade offs with the individual security of human populations, through large social, or economic, burdens (McDonald, 2018). Geoengineering solutions can advance the resilience of isolated ecosystems as a stop gap, through intentional human interference within ecosystems (McDonald, 2018). Therefore, McDonald's account of ecological security offers an ethical alternative to environmental security, which can be considered a potent paradigm shift for adapting to life within the Anthropocene.

However, critical security studies have highlighted limitations of the ecological security discourse. Waeber fundamentally believes that nontraditional security concepts cannot exist independently of traditional security (Waeber, 1995). Under this logic, ecological security will be tied to states security, perpetuating the status quo (Waeber, 1995). Deudney also emphasises the incompatibility of framing ecology as a security threat, because environmental degradation is not intentional (Deudney, 1991). Therefore, the defensive posturing of security could aggravate tensions, as nations begin to resent the polluting power of other nations (Deudney, 1991: 25). As such, many critical security scholars strongly advocate a desecuritisation agenda (Deudney, 1991; Waeber, 1995). However, McDonald refutes said claims to fully desecuritize. McDonald emphasises the need for an ethically

backed discourse to produce international collaboration when responding to anthropogenic climate change (McDonald, 2018). Geoengineering has been championed by McDonald as a stop – gap solution for feasible ecological security (McDonald, 2018).

### ***The Implications of Understanding the Anthropocene as a Hyper Object***

However, I agree with claims which criticise geoengineering as being overly anthropocentric. This is because planetary accounts robustly claim the anthropocene is a hyperobject, which Morton refers to as something which is ‘massively distributed in time and space relative to humans’ (Morton, 2013: 1). We only experience hyper objects indirectly through our personal interpretation of the senses, effected by our collective shared understanding of the world (Morton, 2013). This means we never experience a hyperobject as it actually is, and can never account for all the effects contributing to the anthropocene because of the huge timeframes of planetary processes in comparison to human lives (Chakrabarty, 2014).

Chakrabarty supports the idea of the anthropocene as a hyperobject through palaeoclimatological evidence indicating global warming effects existing before the onset of humanity (Chakrabarty, 2014). As such, human responses are both limited in scope, and guided by ethical values which ‘will always be from a human point of view’ (Chakrabarty, 2014: 19). Therefore, modern solutions like geoengineering cannot solve issues as complex as total ecosystem resilience within the anthropocene, as they are biased by human ethics (Chakrabarty, 2014; Morton, 2013). Chakrabarty highlights how, to make sense of the world, geological concepts like force, are converted into anthropocentric terms like power (Chakrabarty, 2018). This poses serious issues for projects like geoengineering, as humans cannot assign risk values to uncertain anthropogenic processes, therefore creating an incompatibility when the cost benefit analysis of geoengineering projects are being done (Chakrabarty, 2014). Chakrabarty argues that paleoclimatologic evidence robustly argues

that population is the intrinsic cause of the greenhouse gas emissions causing anthropogenic climate change (Chakrabarty, 2014: 13). Unsurprisingly, human ethics are uncomfortable when damning oneself, as this can lead to apathetic practical responses (Chakrabarty, 2014).

Whilst these are all valid concerns, universally blaming humanity for all emissions does nothing but serve to encourage anti-political solutions, that do not address the structural inequalities which perpetuate ecologically induced security problems (Boscov-Allen, 2018).

Therefore, ecological security would be a valuable discursive step towards fostering ecological civilisation, through ensuring the protection of ecosystems, thus ensuring public good provision for future generations.

## **Methodology**

### ***Reflexive Thematic Analysis***

Braun and Clarke initially conceptualised Thematic analysis as ‘a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79). However, Braun and Clarke illustrated the limits to flexibility, as the way thematic analysis is applied depends on the epistemological assumption of the researcher (Braun and Clarke, 2019). Based on this, Braun and Clarke now explicitly refer to reflexive thematic analysis as a way to embrace subjectivity as a resource, rather than bias (Braun and Clarke, 2023). Reflexive thematic analysis aims to uncover the latent meanings behind how an individual perceives a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2023). The process of reflexive thematic analysis used is lifted from Bryne’s six stage analytical process, but adapted with a focus upon inductive coding (Bryne, 2021). Firstly, I familiarise myself with the data, before drawing out codes based on how I perceived certain constructions (Bryne, 2021). Potential themes are validated within the data, before finally each individual theme is named, and stitched together in a continually evolving report, as perceptions of different themes and codes from the data set change (Bryne, 2021).

According to reflexive thematic analysis, subjective viewpoints intrinsically affect how I perceive constructions and framings of issues (Braun and Clarke, 2023). I have struggled to disentangle myself from the realist paradigm for international relations. This is due to a year of studying Political Science at the University of Chicago, where I found that explanations of international relations were dominated by discussions of Offensive Realism (Mearsheimer, 2010). Therefore, I am sensitive towards national security strategy, over-emphasising potential linkages to ecology, to further relative international gains. I therefore believe that my subjective approach to reflexive thematic analysis may disproportionately emphasise national security linkages embedded within CCP discourse. I argue this subjectivity helps to

uncover more nuance within whether framing environmental policy through national security is purely a rhetorical tool, or a paradigm shift.

### ***Data Sources***

Political speeches by Xi Jinping and Hu Jintao from the MFA and China Daily are chosen for analysis. I choose these speeches because of the large intended audience (Waever, 1995), and because of Tang and Zhang's analysis showing how CCP political speeches within times of an urgent crisis that would predicate securitisation, consisted 72.2% of directives (Tang and Zhang, 2024:135). The predominance of directives indicates that CCP political speeches are used as a coercive rhetorical tool. It is worth considering this to be an inherent trait of Xi's personalistic discursive style (Shirk, 2018), as Tang and Zhang's analysis focuses entirely on the COVID-19 crisis (Tang and Zhang, 2024). However, Hu Jintao, whilst orienting his political discourse around stability, was similarly attempting to construct security threats in a way that necessitated a policy response (Shirk, 2018). As such, the start date for the data set was October 2007. The start date aligns with Hu Jintao's Report to the 17<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress, which explicitly dictated the norm of pursuing sustainable development, politicising the issue (Marinelli, 2018: 372). From this stage onwards, ecological civilisation was being considered the end goal of national security strategy, guided by an anthropocosmic worldview. I have used the MFA website to source the full translation of Hu Jintao speeches, narrowing down using a search for 'Hu Jintao address' within their archive (MFA, 2025). However, China Daily keeps an updated archive of all Xi speeches from 2015 onwards, which I will be using for the vast majority of the data set (China Daily, 2025). This is because over the last decade, it has been Xi who has constructing ecological civilisation. Therefore whilst Hu Jintao has an undeniable role in integrating ecological civilisation into party discourse, the integration of ecological security into the NSS means the slight skew towards more recent speeches is justified.

China Daily is the state owned national news site, representing the attitudes and positions of the CCP, which are expressed to the domestic population (Pan and Huiwen, 2023). As the interest is within the ideological construction of ecological civilisation within CCP ideology, it does not invalidate the methodology that we have used for the collection of data from the MFA, primarily for the Hu Jintao speeches (Pan and Huiwen, 2023). Not only are these speeches unavailable on China Daily, but the MFA is a diplomatic channel which similarly represents the attitudes and positions of the CCP, but instead to an international audience (Pan and Huiwen, 2023). However, the fact both are English translations largely negates the difference in intended audience. This is because translators culturally filter policy documents for the needs for different foreign audiences (House et al., 2024). In this way, they are contributing to the national security strategy through influencing how different topics are perceived within global languages. For example, English translations of Chinese Policy have been proven to alter intended signals within English translations (Mokry, 2022). One such example is state funded interpreters reconstruct a more positive image of the Chinese government being proactive and efficient (Valdeon and Li, 2024). Therefore, the translations used within this methodology skew conceptions of ecological civilisation, as the discourse orients towards a skewed focus on CCP past environmental action and achievements (Gu, 2018). However, this is still relevant, as international actors are stakeholders in assigning meaning to national security strategy (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). By specifically using reflexive thematic analysis, I emphasise how ecological civilisation is discursively constructed towards international actors, thus directly engaging with my subjective viewpoint as an outsider to the New Confucian Humanist epistemic community. The pragmatic act lens however enables a look into the contextual nuances within the CCP, which may be glossed over by other international stakeholders.

## *Process*

The China Daily archive is extensive, and as such the first stage of data collection is cleaning the dataset. I did this based upon my perceived conception of ecological civilisation within the Report to the 17<sup>th</sup> National Party Congress by Hu Jintao. This is because it acts as the start of the timeframe of the study, given the literature denotes that this a tipping point where the concepts within ecological civilisation became explicitly conceptualised within CCP rhetoric. Marinelli identifies ecological concerns are particularly salient topics for the Chinese populous given their participation within a New Confucian epistemic community (Marinelli, 2018). Therefore, drawing on Balzacq's pragmatic act lens, these issues have the capacity to be successfully securitised through their enunciation in elite discourse (Balzacq, 2005). Therefore, to clean the data set, I searched each document throughout the China Daily archive based on these fourteen search terms: Balance, Conserve, Sustain, Sustainable, Conservation, Ecology, Environment, Ecological, Protect, Renewable, Geography, Protection, Nature, Resource. This left 97 relevant political speeches.



## **Findings**

My overall conclusion is that the CCP construction of ecological civilisation as national security strategy is defined by selective anthropocosmism – the selective application of the anthropocosmic worldview to simultaneously pursue the conceptualisation of ecological civilisation, but also alternate CCP national security strategy objectives. The conceptual map below highlights how I have reached said conclusion from my methodology:

Theme Headings	Tool of Rhetoric	Paradigm Shift
<b>Harmony as a Legitimiser of Anthropocentricity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Drives Social Control</li> <li>- Divergence from New Confucian Humanism.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Distribution of ecological resources as public goods.</li> <li>- Consideration of future generations.</li> </ul>
<b>Self-Cultivation constrained within the Sociotechnical Imaginary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Self-cultivation circumstantially drives ecological civilisation.</li> <li>- Suppression of discourse undermining legitimacy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Invocation of traditional industrial development as ecological terrorism.</li> <li>- Ethical concerns not elevated from ecological.</li> </ul>
<b>Holism driving a Multilateral Anthropocosmic Consensus</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improves CCP cultural and economic power.</li> <li>- Urgency through ‘mission’ framing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Implementation of solutions ‘beyond the horizon’.</li> <li>- Nature as new basis for international legitimacy.</li> </ul>

### *Harmony as a Legitimiser of Anthropocentricity*

Harmony was perceived to be the dominant theme. I constructed 43 separate mentions of Harmony over 97 speeches. In one way, harmony is deliberately constructed as a rhetorical tool by the CCP. Through construction as a rhetorical tool, harmony is presented as an anthropocentric concept, legitimising the CCP to use social control, in order to preserve the status quo. However, I would argue that the CCP are bound by the New Confucian Humanist epistemic community to respond effectively to anthropogenic climate change within the anthropocentric framing. Therefore, whilst not necessarily deliberate, the framing of harmony does constitute at least a partial paradigm shift. The use of pragmatic acts helps to look beyond the veneer of CCP discursive projections of security. Given the New Confucian Humanist epistemic community is simultaneously a grassroots, and top down community, the enunciation of ideas like harmony are likely to draw up significant societal support (Weiming, 2001). However, I argue that the CCP misconstrue harmony away from posing ecosystem resilience as the referent object of security (McDonald, 2018:155), to instead firmly base harmony around anthropocentric concerns through the legitimisation of the CCP construction of harmony.

*'We should protect Nature and preserve the environment like we protect our eyes, and endeavour to foster a new relationship where man and Nature can both prosper and live in harmony.'* (China Daily, 2021: Speech A).

This speech projects a strong resonance with the anthropocosmic worldview associated with the New Confucian Humanist epistemic community, which would indicate that ecological civilisation construction has resulted in a potent paradigm shift within elite discourse (Huang and Westman, 2022: 188). This is because Xi clearly projects the interdependency of man and nature within this extract. If one detached this quote from the wider context, a Copenhagen

School account would indicate that, due to the consistent enunciation of harmony over the timeframe studied, that ecological civilisation has been securitised. Thus, the increased urgency afforded to it by CCP elites would drive effective policy implementation. However, this line of thinking is totally detached from the political realities of ecological civilisation securitisation. Therefore, pragmatic acts must be used to interrogate the latent meaning behind the dominance of harmony within ecological civilisation constructions.

Hu Jintao's projection of harmony within the report to the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China in November 2012 looks at the initial framing of harmony when it entered CCP speeches.

*'We must balance the interests of all parties and keep them fully motivated so that all people do their best, find their proper places in society and live in harmony'* (MFA, 2012: Speech B).

My perception is that Hu Jintao's initial enunciation of harmony, as ecological civilisation was beginning to become embedded within the political discourse diverges from the ecological security which New Confucianism Humanists believed could bring about ecological civilisation, thus likely serving alternate goals in tandem (Weiming, 2001; McDonald, 2018). Weiming illustrates effectively that New Confucian Humanist thinkers, as a consensus, all converge around the anthropocosmic concept of the 'unity of heaven, earth and humanity' (Weiming, 2001: 244). Conversely, harmony is constructed by the CCP as being predicated on stability, which can be achieved through anthropocentric balancing. My subjective assumption is that stability is considered a driver for national security strategy, which legitimises forms of social control, as the foundational CCP task of upholding people's security is at risk (Liqun, 2023). Therefore, I perceive the anthropocentrism of harmony being as a rhetorical tool, used to slyly further social control, in tandem with ecological civilisation.

My subjective lens however is not exempt from the determinism which over emphasises national security linkages. To attempt to work around this, I have used a pragmatic act lens to look at the relationship between the state and society within CCP, which adds some nuance to my initial perception. As discussed, ecological civilisation as a norm are co-produced from the bottom-up in Chinese society (Huang and Westman, 2021), which Zhan reinforces his survey findings that individuals within China are motivated to embrace environmentalism due to a strong sense of duty to nature (Zhan, 2024: 1019). Therefore, whilst the CCP have many discursive ‘push’ factors, fundamentally CCP relies on a bedrock of ideological support, afforded to them by the New Confucian Humanist epistemic community (Weiming, 2001). Given this, pragmatic acts reinforce Huang and Westman’s analysis that within ecological civilisation conception, state and society are deeply interconnected (Huang and Westman, 2021). I previously discussed that Teng and Wang’s model denotes that effective distribution of public goods is essential for CCP legitimacy (Teng and Wang, 2021). Therefore, due to balancing ecological constraints on development, ecological civilisation construction foregrounds ecological resources as public goods to be distributed.

As discussed within the chapter on ecological civilisation conception in China, Two Mountains Theory does project ecological resources as being invaluable resources (Qi, 2023: 45). However, when Two Mountains Theory is constructed within elite discourse, ecological resources with direct anthropocentric benefits are always foregrounded. This is exemplified in the below extract:

*‘I have always said that green mountains and lucid waters are indeed mountains of gold and silver, and that environmental improvement means greater productivity’* (April, 2019: Speech C)

Natural beauty from mountains and waters are semantically projected as invaluable, as they consist of a value of gold and silver, which could not be captured by humanity. However, I construct the latent meaning as that the intrinsic value of these ecological resources is dependent on their benefits to the population, based upon their distribution as a public good. This is because the proximity of invaluable ecological objects, to direct economic outcomes, reinforces the interdependency between man and nature through an anthropocentric lens. The CCP does have genuine accountability to the people of China to ensure that nature continues to provide public good benefits, as ecology is now as a central component to national security strategy (Liquan, 2023). Whilst the motivation for this distribution is anthropocentric, ecological resources are protected, and future generations are now considered within ecological discussions. Therefore, this does represent a step towards fully implementing ecological security, as conceptualised by critical security scholars (McDonald, 2018), as a precursor for an anthropocosmic ecological civilisation.

A pragmatic lens analysis of the construction of harmony highlights how the CCP have morphed the New Confucian concept of harmony into an anthropocentric balancing alternative. Whilst this diverges from an anthropocosmic worldview required for ecological civilisation under the New Confucian Humanist epistemic community, it serves as a practical solution to enacting at least a partial paradigm shift. Therefore, I believe that harmony is a clear example of the CCP constructing ecological civilisation through selective anthropocosmism, as the construction of certain anthropocosmic concepts are selectively employed to simultaneously further the pursuit of ecological civilisation, and the pursuit of other goals within the CCP national security strategy.

### ***Self-Cultivation constrained within the Sociotechnical Imaginary***

As discussed within the chapter on the conception of ecological civilisation in China, Weiming highlights that self-cultivation is crucial to the viability of an anthropocosmic worldview (Weiming, 2001: 254). However, throughout the dataset, I perceived that the CCP was selectively constructing self-cultivation. The CCP selective construction relies upon a discursive mechanism, where only certain responses legitimised within the contemporary construction of ecological civilisation as a sociotechnical imaginary (Huang and Westman, 2021). Therefore, only self-cultivation which results in outcomes which the CCP consider a truth, are seen as the legitimate self-cultivation required to reach ecological civilisation. Given how the agency of the CCP can lead to selective filtering, it reinforces claims that ecological civilisation is just a tool of rhetoric to further political control. However, building off Huang and Westman's claim that sociotechnical imaginaries are co-produced (Huang and Westman, 2021), the CCP may be utilising this control to place ecological concerns on par with ethical concerns, which anthropogenic planetary accounts would argue is the only way to bring about a paradigm shift potent enough to feasibly induce ecological civilisation (Chakrabarty, 2014). Therefore, the CCP's selective filtering of self-cultivation is both a tool of party rhetoric, and is indicative of an attempted paradigm shift towards ecological civilisation.

Similarly discussed within the securitisation of ecology chapter, planetary accounts do utilise an anthropocosmic worldview to decentre human from the Anthropocene (Chakrabarty, 2014). Chakrabarty exemplifies this anthropocosmic worldview, claiming that rather than being distracted by attributing blame within humanity, population is uniformly responsible for the greenhouse gas emissions leading to anthropogenic climate change (Chakrabarty, 2014: 13). Anthropocosmic worldviews embedded within planetary responses thus sideline ethical concerns of marginalised communities, despite security scholars illustrating how

vulnerable groups from marginalised communities disproportionately bare the ecological burden (Bosco-Ellen, 2018). Therefore, an anthropocosmic worldview could lead to negative sentiments. Drawing on Barnett and Adger's ideals that perceived future grievances can lead to security threats today (Barnett and Adger, 2007), this means enforcing a paradigm shift towards an anthropocosmic worldview may pose other security threats in the short term.

I reinforce Huang and Westman's claim that ecological civilisation is constructed as a sociotechnical imaginary, simultaneously from the top-down, and bottom-up (Huang and Westman, 2021). A sociotechnical imaginary leads to the institutionalisation of a norm across society, leading to said norm being perceived by the audience as epistemologically right (Jasanoff, 2015: 20). Consequently, the norm is hard to shake, meaning alternate versions of the norm do not enter the public imagination (Jasanoff, 2015: 20).

*'The Party should free up the mind, seek truth from facts'* (MFA, 2011: Speech D).

I construct the above extract highlights how the CCP has constructed certain topics as normative truths to the audience. Whilst the above extract highlights this mechanism very explicitly, ecological civilisation still is embedded within the CCP construction of normative truth claims.

*'Realizing the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation requires joint endeavors of all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation at home and abroad. We should consolidate and develop the broadest possible patriotic united front, unite all the people as one, pool their strength and rally their wisdom, so as to create a powerful synergy to realize the Chinese Dream'* (China Daily, 2022: Speech E).

In the context of ecological civilisation, hinted at through the direct enunciation of the *'Chinese Dream'*, I perceive that the primary role of unity and wisdom in achieving the Chinese goal pertains to the need for self-cultivation to achieve ecological civilisation.

Ecological civilisation is constructed above as a collective action problem. However, if individuals do fragment, they are directly forfeiting the construction of ecological civilisation for the rest of the New Confucian humanist epistemic community, which embeds itself within the collective shared identity of the Chinese people (Marinelli, 2018). Given how Zhan proved that the Chinese population are ecologically conscious largely because of practical benefits, and obligation to the state (Zhan, 2024), this may cause conflict for those who raise concerns about the implementation of CCP solutions to reach ecological civilisation. Therefore, my perception is that the above extract illuminates how self-cultivation is foregrounded as the method to achieve ecological civilisation. However the CCP construction of ecological civilisation as a collective action problem dissuades critique against the co-produced normative truth claims embedded within the sociotechnical imaginary of ecological civilisation.

The securitisation of ecological civilisation, within the NSS, has served to further dissuade critique from constructed truth claims. I perceive that the will of the people is emphasised within the CCP construction of ecological security, as if it were traditional security.

Therefore, fragmentation is constructed as a direct threat to the sovereignty of the state.

*'We must find proper solutions to traditional and non-traditional security issues and, in particular, deal firmly with terrorism in all its forms. We must take effective preventive measures of various sorts to eradicate the breeding ground of extremist ideology, and explore a regional security architecture suited to Asia's realities, one that will enhance universal security for us all'* (China Daily, 2019: Speech F).

The construction of terrorism as a broader topic, akin to security, is evident in the extract above. Whilst ecological terrorism is implicit within this extract, the positioning of extremist ideology as something which inhibits universal security, legitimises the labelling of alternate



discourses as existential threats. Whilst a pragmatic lens does illustrate that terror is only explicitly broadened in three separate political speeches within my data set, the strong imaginary associated with terrorism, given my intersubjective overemphasis of national security linkages, makes the broadening of terrorism to ecology a very salient theme. Traditional industrial models of production are constructed by the CCP as being equally damaging to the pursuit of ecological civilisation as terrorism. Whilst Liqun has argued that the NSS does illustrate an equality of all security types (Liqun, 2023), I would argue that constructions like Source F do drive a securitisation of different discourses. Given the power I argue the CCP has over setting the bounds of the sociotechnical imaginary, compared to within Huang and Westman's analysis (Huang and Westman, 2021), a pragmatic act lens would highlight how this legitimizes the use of extraordinary resources to silence these other groups (Balzacq, 2005). The above extract also foregrounds the necessity of a strong central voice to drive ecological change, which I would argue is the result of harmony, which I previously perceived as being constructed through the necessity of balance and stability. To create a strong central voice, CCP can selectively filter what manifestations of self-cultivation feed into the central projection of the sociotechnical imaginary. The CCP control thus ensures that critique stays within the ring fenced bounds of the normatively right solutions, suggested within the sociotechnical imaginary of ecological civilisation. Therefore, the CCP can control the bounds of critique, which is intrinsically a rhetorical tool.

However, whilst not adhering to the cosmopolitan ethics which Burke believes underpins ecological security (Burke, Lee-Koo and McDonald, 2016), the sidelining of anthropocentric ethical concerns may be a necessary to institute a paradigm shift (Weiming, 2001). Planetary accounts would be inclined towards such a view, as the CCP ecological civilisation construction in Source E and F, appears to forfeit artificially elevating traditional human ethics over an anthropocosmic worldview. Given how Chakrabarty argues that human ethics

act as a distraction to enacting global solutions to anthropogenic climate change (Chakrabarty, 2014), planetary accounts would be inclined to support the CCP use of discursive constructions to enforce certain stable conditions. Without such stable conditions, a paradigm shift towards the anthropocosmic worldview underpinning ecological civilisation could not feasibly take place, as competing discourse paradigms may serve to breakdown (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998) the ecological civilisation paradigm, by re-orienting discourse towards smaller scale ecological solutions, focusing around ethics (Burke, Lee-Koo and McDonald, 2016).

In summary, the CCP does construct ecological civilisation as a rhetorical tool to support social control in light of ecologically induced grievances. However, whilst not fully in line with anthropocosmic ethics, planetary security scholars would highlight that this may be a sacrifice in order to dislodge anthropocentricity. This is because it pragmatically creates the conditions for a paradigm shift, where anthropogenic concerns are held with the same urgency as anthropocentric concerns.

### ***Holism driving a Multilateral Anthropocosmic Consensus***

Whilst less dominant than harmony within ecological civilisation, holism is still very salient within elite discourse. As discussed as part of the New Confucian epistemic community, Holism assumes humans are part of a greater whole (Huang and Westman, 2022: 188). I have emphasised how robust climatological evidence has indicated that anthropogenic climate change will affect all of humanity (Rockström, et al., 2009: 472), with transnational effects which suggest that no state can combat anthropogenic climate change unilaterally (Burke, Lee-Koo and McDonald, 2016). In light of the claims of both security scholars, and climatologists, I believe holism is constructed by the CCP to drive multilateral co-operation.

The existence of a multilateral consensus would indicate ecological civilisation underpinning a paradigm shift. I have previously illustrated how planetary approaches illustrates how elevating ethical concerns over ecological concerns may prevent real change. A multilateral consensus would work as a central voice, imposing transnational stop-gap solutions to overcome ethical constraints of ecological policy implementation. Geoengineering is an example of such a solution which McDonald highlights could be an effective stop-gap solution to securitise ecology (McDonald, 2018). Within a multilateral consensus, the overwhelming costs, and likely dissent from marginal groups, could be overcome via pooled resources and enforcement (McDonald, 2018). However, my subjective stance does orient me towards suspicion. A multilateral consensus, denoted by Chinese New Confucian Humanism, would lend some geopolitical benefits to the CCP. Building off Liqun's analysis, political security can continually advanced as the foundational task of the CCP (Liqun, 2023: 9), whilst international security is constructed as a method to achieve the foundational goal (Liqun, 2023: 10). Therefore, my subjective over emphasis of national security linkages means that I would be inclined to view the multilateral consensus brought about through the CCP construction of holism as simultaneously, the pursuit of feasible paradigm shift, whilst serving as a rhetorical tool.

The urgency for said multilateral world order has been constructed within Xi Jinping's address to the 20<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation:

*'Humanity lives in a global village where the interests and destinies of all countries are intertwined. People across the world increasingly yearn for a better life. The trend toward peace, development, cooperation and mutual benefit is unstoppable'* (China Daily, 2020: Speech G).

I construct this underscoring how individual needs are intertwined, and to reach collective a collective goal, multilateralism is required. Tang and Zhang analysed that emotive language is sparsely used within Xi speeches (Tang and Zhang, 2024: 135). The enunciation of ‘*destinies*’ in the above extract evoke strong feelings of urgency, which are reinforced with continual mentions in other speeches of treating ecological civilisation as a mission for China. The construction of holism does imply that ecological civilisation is constructed as a mission for humanity in general.

China has attempted to foreground holism through emphasising the role in nature when forming a judgment of another country. There were eighteen different instances of nature being the first thing mentioned as part of a political speech, within my dataset. All of these speeches were either directly delivered to other nations, or delivered in response to a state visit to another country. Examples of this emphasis are highlighted in the two extracts below:

*‘In this lovely season of early Summer when every living thing is full of energy, I wish to welcome all of you, distinguished guests representing over 100 countries’* (China Daily, 2017: Speech H).

*‘I am delighted to pay a state visit to Finland in this beautiful spring season of budding plants and blooming flowers. I have been to Finland twice before’* (China Daily, 2017: Speech I).

Both of these extracts foreground nature as the primary positive characteristic of a country. Drawing on the media accessibility theory, the positioning of both extracts at the start of both speeches make nature the most salient topic for the audience (Iyengar, 1990). By emphasising the value of nature within elite discourse, the CCP constructs ecological resources as being equivalent to economic, or military resources, for international powers. Valuing nature as equal to economic factors is in alignment with the anthropocosmic ideals which underpin the

implementation of the NSS domestically (Liqun, 2023). Therefore, international legitimacy is constructed around ecological protection, providing strong incentives to partake within ecological protection. Thus, anthropocosmic norms may become institutionalised within the consensus as a norm of the international system. Therefore, I perceive the CCP construction of holism aiming to lead to a institutionalisation of anthropocosmic norms. My perceived mechanism would simultaneously illustrate the construction of holism as, both a strategic rhetorical tool for the CCP, and a feasible first step towards a sincere international paradigm shift.

I believe this tension to be salient because, utilising pragmatic act lens, both of these extracts were enunciated far before COVID–19. This would illustrate nature as a fundamental common shared value, rather than a pragmatic response to improve China’s international perception after the pandemic (Tang and Zhang, 2024). Therefore, construction of holism serves to do more than pragmatically maintain CCP soft power through embedding their centrality within a new multilateral consensus. Whilst these CCP geopolitical benefits cannot be entirely excluded when discussion holism construction, I do perceive a paradigm shift occurring through the implementation of ecological solutions not seen without said consensus.

*‘Facing a new wave of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation, we should look beyond the horizon, seize the opportunities, and move along with the trend to promote transition to digital, smart and green development. (China Daily, 2023: Speech J).*

*‘The horizon’* is constructed as a distinct tipping point, where ecological security could be enacted through the shared perception of the importance of ecological resilience. An international institutionalised norm would align perceptions of the anthropocene (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998). Therefore, institutionalisation of holism as a multilateral norm would

converge interests, meaning solutions previously deemed too costly (whether economically or culturally), are no longer deemed beyond the horizon (McDonald, 2018). Solutions like geoengineering are emphasised by McDonald as a stop gap solutions, helping build ecosystem resilience in the isolated spaces where such geoengineering schemes are deployed (McDonald, 2018: 172). Geoengineering thus acts as a feasible first step towards an ecological security concept (McDonald, 2018: 160), which aligns with the anthropocosmic worldview embedded within the CCP conception of ecological civilisation (Weiming, 2001: 244). Therefore, holism is conceptualised as encouraging a pivot towards a multilateral anthropocosmic consensus, which whilst pertaining some elements of being a CCP rhetorical tool, serves to enact a paradigm shift as the first step towards achieving ecological civilisation.

## **Conclusion**

To summarise, through a reflective thematic analysis of CCP political speeches from 2007 – 2025, I constructed selective anthropocosmicism as the key characteristic of the CCP construction of ecological civilisation as national security strategy. Selective anthropocosmicism is the selective invocation of concepts underpinning the world view of ecological civilisation to bring about a feasible paradigm shift, whilst simultaneously ensuring to bolster CCP political legitimacy. I reinforced this thesis through three distinct themes. Firstly, harmony was constructed as an anthropocentric concept, morphing the invocation of harmony as being predicated upon stability. Simultaneously, the reframing of ecological resources as public goods effectively creates a paradigm shift, as the concerns of future generations are addressed within a conception of ecological security. Secondly, I perceived the construction of self-cultivation as driving the suppression of marginal discourses. However, this suppression elevates ecological concerns to the same level as ethical concerns, constituting a paradigm. Finally, I argue holism is constructed to drive a multilateral anthropocosmic consensus. Such a consensus would have both cultural and economic benefits for the CCP. However, international legitimacy is constructed within this consensus as being dependent on nature, incentivising co-operation which is currently not feasible. The selective imposition of all three of these concepts embedded within the worldview of ecological civilisation indicates the prevalence of selective anthropocosmicism.

A key limitation would be the skew towards latter documents, given the availability on the MFA and China Daily websites. Therefore, I acknowledge that there is an underlying assumption of CCP ideological consistency from the original politicisation of ecological civilisation, to its current integration within the NSS. Although I justified the methodology with Tang and Zhang's analysis that during a crisis, Xi is far more directive than emotional within the discourse (Tang and Zhang, 2024). Whilst I have assumed that ecology poses a

crisis, the years before integration into the NSS could highlight this mechanism having a lag, causing Xi's personalistic style to discursively shine through more (Shirk, 2018). Therefore, future research could attempt to overcome this limitation through a triangulation of different data sources, rather than a reliance on speeches from Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. Despite this limitation, my research opens the door for further research to test subjective anthropocosmicism outside of a Chinese context. Extended research would have deep implications for uncovering latent incentives of international policymakers within ecological policy construction.



## **Appendix**

**Source A:** <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202104/22/WS60819863a31024ad0bab9b58.html>

**Speech B:** [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zwbd/202405/t20240530\\_11353767.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xw/zwbd/202405/t20240530_11353767.html)

**Speech C:** <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201904/28/WS5d9c58b8a310cf3e3556f384.html>

**Speech D:** [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2011-07/01/content\\_29714325.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/19thcpcnationalcongress/2011-07/01/content_29714325.htm)

**Speech E:** <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202212/31/WS63afe528a31057c47eba71f3.html>

**Speech F:** <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201906/16/WS5d9d2b78a310cf3e3556f484.html>

**Speech G:** <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202011/12/WS5fac9c7ea31024ad0ba93a16.html>

**Speech H:** <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201705/14/WS59bbe0bda310ded8ac188e0b.html>

**Speech I:** [https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017xivisitsfinlandandus/2017-04/03/content\\_28785603.htm](https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2017xivisitsfinlandandus/2017-04/03/content_28785603.htm)

**Speech J:** <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202311/17/WS6556d85ea31090682a5eebb6.html>

## **Abbreviations**

- **CCP** = Chinese Communist Party
- **NSS** = National Security Strategy
- **MFA** = Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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