



Ear to Asia podcast

Title: Who's fighting for the environment in China?

Description: China's natural environment has paid a high price for the nation's economic success. And despite the Chinese government's aversion to collective action, there are NGOs working hard to save the environment. So how do NGOs operate in this milieu? How much of Beijing's recent concern for the environment is owed to the actions of civil society? Human geographer Professor Mark Wang and political scientist Associate Professor Fengshi Wu examine the state of environmental politics in China with presenter Peter Clarke. An Asia Institute podcast. Produced and edited by profactual.com. Music by audionautix.com.

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Voiceover:

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Peter Clarke:

Hello, I'm Peter Clarke. This is Ear to Asia.

Mark Wang:

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Fengshi Wu:

We do also observe that China because of the One Belt One Road Initiative, the state actually sometimes encourages Chinese NGOs to reach out. So actually, there is a systematic top-down initiative to, you know, incentivize Chinese NGOs to actually do some work elsewhere - help other countries along the Belt and Road regions.

Peter Clarke:

In this episode, who's fighting for the environment in China?

Ear to Asia is the podcast from Asia Institute, the Asia research specialists at the University of Melbourne.

China's meteoric economic rise has come at a huge cost to its natural environment. With the thick smog that envelops the countries north in the cooler months, serving as a reminder to inhabitants of the price they pay for the nation's success. The environmental challenges are numerous, including not just air pollution but water scarcity, soil contamination, and massive greenhouse gas emissions, to name but a few.

The Chinese Communist Party, which has governed the nation since 1949, shows little tolerance for collective action. Yet environmental protests do happen, and NGOs battling for the environment do exist. So how do NGOs operate in this milieu? What value do China's citizens place on the environment? And how much of the Chinese government's relatively recent concern for the environment is owed to the actions of civil society?

Joining me via Zoom to examine environmental politics in China, and the role of civil society is Professor Mark Wang, China environmental policy expert and director of the Centre for Contemporary Chinese Studies at the University of Melbourne. And Associate Professor Fengshi Wu from the University of New South Wales who specialises in China's environmental politics. Fengshi, welcome back to Ear to Asia and Mark welcome.

Fengshi Wu:

Thank you, Peter.

Mark Wang:

Thank you.

Peter Clarke:

Fengshi, of course, the great Chinese nation is multilayered, and it's very hard to say what individuals think about the environment, but could we try and sketch in just to open it up discussion? What, sense you and Mark have of how ordinary Chinese citizens, just the general population, feel about the environment and those environmental issues that we're going to discuss today? Just try and sketch it for us.

Fengshi Wu:

I think because they're increasingly feeling good about it and they have a natural instinct to protect it and to live with it. But on the other hand, by the time they go into their work or be part of the large, huge project, unconsciously, I think the care for environment will sort of take a back seat.

Peter Clarke:

Mark. I know that you had a long experience back much earlier in the history of China. Give us a sense how you see the key challenges around the environment facing the People's Republic of China today.

Mark Wang:

We can say major environmental problems including air pollution, water pollution, soil pollution, or CO2 emissions. I think we can talk about that one by one, but I guess the major environmental governance issue is the central-local government are not really action in one step. Let's go to one by one. The first one air pollution blue sky in China used to be problematic, and the PM 2.5, the particle of five particles in the air that is smaller than 2.5 micrometres in diameter.

To many Chinese, this is a new concept. It's a dangerous about the lung problem. During APEC period Beijing's sky was blue. So the Chinese people realised that we could have a blue sky. So that's really a starting point to try to fix the air pollution issues in China.

Water pollution is quite a serious issue because up to 40% China's rivers is seriously polluted everybody within Chinese City. Amazing new building, blah, blah, blah. If you see the river, most of the rivers are really seriously polluted. And soil pollution have similar story about 15 or 19% of farmland was contaminated based on the China's national soil survey data. And a CO2 emissions again, China has the largest CO2 emissions.

Although the per capita level is still very low, only half of Australia per capita average. But major reason for water pollution is because the nine dragon are managing the rivers in China. You call it Jiǔlóng zhìshuǐ (九龙治水). So many departments that come with departments managing the river. By recently, again, the water pollution problem also improved because they introduce a new system called The River Chief System – all a local top official are responsible for that river.

So not the environmental protection bureau, it's the local top official. So that system's quite important since its introduction in 2017. So the top local official looks after river water pollution problem, not just water pollution problems, but also other river problem. And CO2 started with a carbon-neutral target by 2030, carbon neutrality by 2060. Every corner of China is making plan for the local 2030 carbon-neutral or 2060 plan.

Peter Clarke:

And Mark, just explain what APEC actually is.

Mark Wang:

APEC is Asian Pacific Economic Corporation meeting was a held in Beijing. During that period, APEC Beijing sky was blue because all the polluting factories closed down and it's the blue sky, wonderful.

Peter Clarke:

Now Mark, obviously, most of our discussion today will revolve around industrialization, the economy, and the connection of pollution and care for the environment to that. But it's a very large population. I'm just thinking about some of those other areas, for example, disposal of waste and large landfills and plastics and all that sort of area. How does that figure in your analysis of the major challenges to the environment?

Mark Wang:

Waste is a big issue. That definitely true, but in China is quite a different from here because the cheap labour. Their recycling rate is quite high. Everything's recyclable, even the plastic bottle or newspaper. Also, somebody coming to collect pay you when my Mum was living in China, she collect everything and put in the high-rise corridor as somebody coming, just like collect, okay, two kilogramme, give you 10 cents, 20 cents. And that kind of system is quite amazing.

Related to the waste things, import the e-waste or other waste including the plastic waste recycled in China. Plastic China, that video really rang a bell for me because one of my former students did some research about e-waste recycling in China, that similar story. In some of the area, local government established industrial park for e-waste recycling.

E-waste imported from Japan, America, or could be Australia as well and recycled using absolutely many of the way to recycle the e-waste because the valuable for the owners. Recently in Central Canada have a tough regulation called a Yáng Lājī (洋垃圾). This garbage is not allowed to be imported to China.

Peter Clarke:

Fengshi, what you have to add to that quick checklist, I suppose, of the key environmental challenges facing the People's Republic of China?

Fengshi Wu:

I think China will face extreme weather and all the other ecological consequences of climate change in general, just as every other country. And I think climate-related natural disaster and weather-

related disaster is really climbing up to the top of the agenda, the awareness of these events, and also the urgency of preparedness. The state needs to quickly build up the capacity in these areas.

And I don't think China is not different in these sense. There are quite a lot of China's specific environmental challenges. China has long coast Many of the coast areas during the last wave of real estate frenzy. There's lot of newly built resorts. All these things are now being rethought and being reassessed. There are much more restrictions and policy guidelines for developers to reconsider their projects.

And China's agriculture. I've seen a lot of state-sponsored scientific reports on climate impact on the agricultural sector. Also, entire Tibetan Plateau, the Third Pole of the world, significant changes in terms of glacier as well as the ecosystem on the plateau, around plateau. And also what that means for other parts of China because of the warming up of the entire Tibetan Plateau. So these are some major, I think, ecological challenges China is facing as a result of global climate change.

Peter Clarke:

Mark, the documentary Under the Dome, which I've seen a little bit of, but not the whole documentary. Maybe you can give us a more expanded idea of the content of this documentary. But this was a pivotal moment in awakening China's population to environmental issues more broadly, just give us a sense of the documentary and its influence.

Mark Wang:

Well, actually that documentary we used for my China in transition lecture. It was released 2015. I think it's awakening call. I think that this is a very trustful document, not a propaganda, not like a Chinese government of CCTV Central Chinese TV, central government propaganda. It is self-funded and also using a very plain language with kind of lots of scientific evidence. So real people talk to the real story.

Immediately after seven days release, 300 million viewers. 300 million Chinese people view the documentary generating enormous impact. That's very important signal. Secondly, it positioned China's air pollution problem in a kind of a comparative perspective, not just say this is a China problem, this is an only China problem. The Chinese audience Chinese viewer saw Great Britain had a similar story. American had the same problem, or Japan had the same problem, not just Chinese.

This is associated with the industrialization, blah, blah, blah. I guess that also make Chinese authorities say, "This is okay," at the very beginning. But after the first seven days, immediately have 300 million viewers. I think I've also closed down, locked down, I think. Also it's documented clearly the root problem is China's state-owned enterprises, so called CNPC, the most powerful state of enterprise in the world – China National Petroleum Corporation.

The dialogue with that CNPC authority, person responsible, was wonderful and very impressive. So that's very useful awakening call. Make millions and millions of Chinese people realised particular air pollution issues used to be for many Chinese people feel like all the air pollution issues, air pollution, it's just a normal weather fog. But more and more people realised that no matter who you are rich or poor, you had to breathe air.

So everybody has to breathe polluted air. So why not? If APEC can have a blue sky, why not? I'm not 100% sure this documentary directly changed the China air pollution law or release the new policy. That's something I'm not 100% sure. The Clean Air policy was implemented in 2013, and since the 2015, that documentary was release in 2015, hundreds of hundreds steel factory in the Hebei Province, which is a neighbour province of Beijing.

Quarter of the world steel manufactured in Hebei Province. So hundreds of them have been closed down to make the air quality better. So Beijing air quality definitely better. So air pollution, visible pollution problem. I think it become a focus of our media and also government and the society, which really make Beijing and most cities air quality better.

I was ashamed because 10 or 15 years ago, the 10 worst polluted cities in the world, one was Linfen which I did in my bachelor degrees in my hometown. But now Linfen has been removed to, I think the worst 50 now. And now the most polluted cities top 10, I guess seven or eight maybe in India, not in China. Air quality has improved in recent years. I think that documented fundamentally important.

Peter Clarke:

Fengshi, the way Mark describes the documentary, they seem to be those two aspects, the blue sky, but also health, which is the really obvious one, particularly when you're right in the middle of that pollution. After a few days, you can feel it affecting your lungs, et cetera. I've had direct experience of that. So how was that documentary not seen as the sort of descent that's not appreciated by the Chinese Communist Party, not seen as a blunt and offensive critique? How did that particular documentary achieve that, do you think?

Fengshi Wu:

First of all, I think it's done by a very, very experienced host. And she's worked with the state media system for years. She was one of the best communicator, I would think, between the state system and the large Chinese audience. So she was the right person to do that thing at that moment. But nevertheless, I think the response, the reaction was so much more than anyone anticipated.

And I think the state or certain departments of the state got nervous, and they never wanted anything that would be so popular among the citizens that is not 100% a state project. It's an independent project, it is funded, produced by herself. So the state quickly became quite nervous. And also wasn't sure whether this huge amount of public attention, where would that attention eventually lead to, to turn into something. So very quickly, the state decided to take it off the Chinese internet. That sort of evidences the power of it and the genuine public demand of good information on pollution.

Peter Clarke:

So it's a good moment, now, I think, having heard you say that to explore some of the history of environmental activism in the People's Republic of China, try to chart for us just when those were identifiable signs of activism actually emerged in the People's Republic of China. Were they around specific issues like, perhaps, air pollution or chemical factories, et cetera, how did the first real and tangible signs of environmental activism emerge in China?

Fengshi Wu:

Around the middle of the 1990s, a couple of years after the Tiananmen students movement, a group of scholars, as well as intellectuals, got together in Beijing and formed truly the first organised environmental association called Friends of Nature. And I would always use that as really the first instance of a modern style environmental activism in China. Before that, of course, there were lots of nature lovers, activists doing extraordinary things, but mostly individual acts. But that moment is the emergence of organised civic activities, focusing on environmental issues.

Of course, some of them are politically aware, highly politically aware people, and as well as social elites, they had political views and ambitions probably, or, and they of course, saw environmental issue as one way to make bigger changes even to Chinese social political system. But nevertheless, they were all environmentalists. They were genuinely concerned about ecological degradation.

Right after 1978, the entire 1980s saw the first wave of economic development in China and environmental degradation was truly rapidly happening across the country. So this first group of intellectuals very quickly also, they became fully aware of the potential of seemingly very low key education, public education-oriented civic organisation.

It quickly became aware of the potential and impact of such initiatives. And they were very mindful of incubating mentoring, young generations and different birdwatching groups or nature-loving groups, clubs across the country and made a conscious effort to groom more environmentalists across the country.

For the next 10 years or so all the way up until your Olympic games, it was very much led by key environmentalists, key NGOs, but there was a steady growth of such initiatives. The major thing is to push individual environmentalist to get together and to do something together, even as minor as cleaning the beach, encouraging people to recycle batteries, planting trees in inner Mongolia, mostly very low key public education-oriented activities, but encouraging environmentalist to get together to do something beyond individual level.

And the Olympic games certainly opened China even more. And the government also, of course, had to change narratives, which opened a rare window of opportunity, structural opportunity for NGOs really to take off. And also a couple of events down the road, Sichuan earthquake unexpectedly, it was a natural disaster, but nevertheless, environmental NGOs all joined other civic initiatives joined millions of volunteers, but really because the environment of field or the environment NGO sector were probably the best self-organised sector in the larger landscape of civil society in China.

So they were really able to quickly turn this crisis into a massive opportunity for organisational development, and for NGOs to, especially urban-based NGOs, to sink into rural communities. That was a critical moment for me as a social scientist to see that happen because otherwise environmental movements and activism in China were mostly, still very much urban-based, large-city based, but Sichuan earthquake unexpectedly offered a rare opportunity for urban-based NGOs to be deeply connected with lots of rural communities.

That is crucial for a full-fledged movement to emerge rather than a still very much narrowly defined movement, only supported by middle-class.

Peter Clarke:

You're listening to Ear to Asia from Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. And just a reminder to listeners about Asia Institute online publication on Asia and its societies, politics, and cultures. It's called the Melbourne Asia Review. It's free to read, and it's open access at melbourneasiareview.edu.au. You'll find articles by some of our regular Ear to Asia guests and by many others.

Plus, you can catch recent episodes of Ear to Asia at the Melbourne Asia Review website, which, again, you can find at melbourneasiareview.edu.au. I'm Peter Clarke with guests Associate Professor Fengshi Wu and Professor Mark Wong, and we're discussing environmental activism and politics in China.

Fengshi, let's look more closely at NGOs now, and we're very aware that during the Xi Jinping era, politics are much more controlled now. The center's not appreciated much more control over collective action. So the obvious question, how are NGOs allowed to exist at all? Who funds them? Why are they allowed to exist within that environment?

Fengshi Wu:

The state is not inexperienced. because also the landscape of NGOs in China is multi-layered as well. There are grassroots NGOs and unregistered or semi-registered and commercial organisations and non-profit organisations. But on the other end of the spectrum, there are lots, lots of quasi NGOs, or there's a term called GONGO, government-organised NGOs, very ironic in its term, but it does exist and exist in large quantity in China.

These are social service providers, and they're authorised entities – they are closely related to state agencies, but they are officially of state paychecks or personnel control system. So the state has

huge amount of experience in controlling these quieter NGOs. They have no problem. They actually see them as foot soldiers.

There's a deep, fundamental level sort of changes in China's public policy sphere. So there's lots of new ways of implementing, initiating, changing public policies in China at different levels and such quasi NGOs or semi non-state or state entities play a role in the public policy sphere. Now, after that, there's just a small segment of social organisations that are truly, really innovative, independent, critical, and yes, I think after Xi Jinping came into power, state control over that space became more centralised, became securitized, became systematised as well, which means the state has enacted more laws.

The state has restructured governing institutions, have streamlined mandates of different governing institutions. And they're giving public security agencies a bigger role than ever to regulate NGOs in general. And maybe the state still tolerates certain amount of NGOs as long as they are not upfront outrageously against the regime.

In the environmental field, I would say majority of NGOs are surviving, maybe not thriving but surviving and doing their regular work. But there is one particular space is collective action. Definitely, that space has been crushed and crushed and crushed. And I think the state sees that as [a] particular threat. They don't see these NGOs, particularly a lot of NGOs interested in independent research or policy advising, as a particular threat, but they really do not appreciate protests or peaceful demonstrations or any sorts of collective action by residents or potential pollution victims.

The state try different means - the stick and the carrots. I just explained they've tightened up control, but they also try to improve different channels for citizens to voice individually, they prefer you individually voice your complaints, but also individually get some compensations.

Peter Clarke:

Fengshi, even more fundamentally important, the larger NGOs within the People's Republic of China, forming linkages outside the nation with NGOs – environmental NGOs – in other countries. So I guess the CCP would see that more as a security issue rather than an environmental issue. Is that correct?

Fengshi Wu:

Yes and no. But this is a very good question. It really opens a new conversation we haven't touched today yet, but I think it's really a critical aspect of both China's urgent environmental politics, particularly increasing elements of China's role in global environmental politics. And the other is the future of environmental civil society. I think the space for China's NGOs to link up cross domestic localities as well across borders are definitely being watched. It's not a free space. Yes. It's being watched. It's being traced. It's being guided, managed, controlled.

Domestically, I think with social media, new media, and different new technologies, it's easier for NGO actors to communicate with each other. They're still doing lots of work together. But more interestingly, do Chinese NGOs go abroad? Yes, they do. But before Xi Jinping's time, they do it by accident or by personal connections by naturally grown sort of mutual interests to particular events such as the Chinese anti-dam movement.

The leaders of that got connected with many, many leading NGOs in Southeast Asia because they all concerned of the Nu river, the upstream of the Mekong River, which downstream it's the lifeline for millions of people in Southeast Asia by the nature of the problem activists got connected. Today, yes I think, we do also observe that the state, because of the One Belt One Road initiative, believe it or not, the state actually sometimes encourage Chinese NGOs to reach out.

So actually, there is a systematic top-down initiative to incentivize Chinese interest to actually do some work elsewhere. Help other countries along the Belt and Roads regions, but of course, closely align whatever NGO activities are with the central governments, particular projects in those regions.

Peter Clarke:

Mark, earlier, we mentioned the Dome documentary, and there's also another documentary that's been very influential Plastic China. And we saw that initially they were, for some extent, tolerated, then squished, squashed, shut down on social media, particularly once the temperature rose, but at the same time, Beijing did move on some environmental issues in response to those documentaries and popular response to the documentaries. What pattern do we see in the choices Beijing makes in responding to environmental issues, whether raised by documentaries or otherwise?

Mark Wang:

Yes. So central government does want to fix the environmental problems. That's absolutely the major driving force, which is very important to understand the China's environmental governance issues. I guess the major concern for central government, whether such events or environmental movement related to social stability. Generally, the big public attention if it's huge beyond the environment issues that relate to the stability central government will definitely say no and then take action. Otherwise, the central government actually want to fix the environmental problems. That's my understanding.

Peter Clarke:

That phrase that Xi Jinping used Ecological Civilization. It sounds grand, doesn't it? What does he actually mean? And what does that phrase actually entail in real politics?

Mark Wang:

Ecological Civilization now is a very popular slogan in China, similar to another term China Dream, Zhōngguó mèng (中国梦). Everyone is talking about China Dream, and media properly talk about that. It means that they consider nature to be part of life rather than something that can be exploited without restraint.

The concept Ecological Civilization try to achieve the three dimensions, including sustainable development, the environment, economic and social dimensions. So it's three-dimension. I would say Xi Jinping, I guess tried to correct the mistake, the Deng Xiaoping, and a post-Deng Xiaoping two or three decades, economics-focused. Black white cat theory – doesn't matter black or white, as long as it catches mice. All GDP driven, attract foreign investment, all these is economics development driven idea.

I guess that this generated so much issue, including environmental disaster we are talking about today, including the inequality, rich-poor gap polarised China. So the Ecological Civilization, I guess, is something brings Chinese authorities to think about. Do we have to [be] only GDP-driven? Or can we think about GEP? Which is another term – gross ecological products, which is a new term, and used by the local officials. That makes Chinese office realise [that] GDP-driven is over, not just GDP-driven. Should consider ecological costs.

Peter Clarke:

Fengshi, what is the generational dimension to all this? We know that currently, the top echelons of Chinese leaders tend to be former Red Guards at the time of the Cultural Revolution. So I guess we can we'll expect that hard-line approach to governance, that's their hallmark, but what about the often only children of the burgeoning middle class? Van we detect in them distinctly different approach to the environment? is it generational?

Fengshi Wu:

All generations have their collective features or characters. And so are the single child generation in China – they're post-Mao. It's not particularly about family structure in today's discussion, but it's

more, the post-Maoist kind of collectivization of the country and they are the generation experienced, rapid economic taking off their degeneration in a sense experienced a generally a more positive despite of the Tiananmen. Many of my peers, we do have memories of that and some of us choose to remember that more. The others have decided to put that behind and move forward.

But then there is also the slightly down the road, for example, my younger cousins' generation, they have no memory of the 1980s. I used to joke at least to remember being hungry, have chocolate once a year, those memories. They've only experienced materialistic sort of abundance or well being and really carefree in the sense, but then they got connected with global values.

They are exposed to a lot of new values at very, very young age. So by nature, recyclists. They recycle way more than their parent's generation. They understood the language of energy efficiency and green lifestyle, vegetarianism, and also animal welfare. All these, in a way, kicked in fairly early on. So China has old problems, but also China has a significant sort of a young generation that are behaving and endorsing values worldwide.

They think similarly as a lot of young people outside China. Again, as I said, a green lifestyle sort of really kicked in. But nevertheless, I think things are changing as well as I think that state control over media over social media really now tightened up during COVID pandemic and all of that. And China increasingly being targeted by lots of non-Chinese media, and people's frustration with other countries' finger-pointing that China as the cause of the global disaster.

Public psychology being manipulated, and people start really just referring to official sources about issues and problems in general. So I see a turning point in a way. I see since things are changing. I see even the younger generation are gradually becoming very cynical and critical about so-called global values. This is a result of complicated sort of sequences of events ever since the pandemic. Really we're in a very strange and critical moment of history, I think.

Peter Clarke:

A word we haven't used in our discussion so far in this podcast is transparency. And I know transparency probably means a very different thing in that environment compared to what it might mean here in Australia. All governments deal with transparency in various ways, I suppose. In practical terms, for example, how reliable is the data that environmental agencies attach to the Chinese government? How accurate is that data, do you believe?

Fengshi Wu:

It depends on exactly what data. There are certain data, accuracy is not an issue because such data can be validated through globally sort of satellite-based data, but there is issue of transparency. I am pretty sure that Chinese authorities have good data as themselves, but whether they are willing to share, when to share what to share, how to share. Is constantly negotiated and being decided on the spot.

In some areas such as air pollution, civil society actors or NGOs managed to have a totally different system amazingly. And now the system being expanded to water as well as land pollution. This is championed by NGO called Institute for the Environment and Public based in Beijing. And they really utilise app – cell-based app. Save champions as practise core to Citizen Science, good or bad you can debate about it, but this has been working in the Chinese context. And they encourage local community-based citizens and NGOs to upload the data that they firsthand collected. So everybody's sort of put in to this.

So we know this technology, and most of the time, the instantaneous availability of these bottom-up data presents not just a map, a processed demonstration of data. But really is a strong point without saying it. The different fragmented pieces coming together and together it presents a different pattern from what's reported through the official media system. That's one way to deal with this transparency issue or lack of transparency and no public access to environmental data.

Peter Clarke:

Now, a final question to both of you, we've just seen the Chinese Communist Party celebrated centenary with great pomp and ceremony. And we also heard a maitre address from Xi Jinping. You have to say it was belicose in many ways, stern, "don't mess with us" sort of tone to that address. So I want to ask both of you, which way, in your opinion, is the arc bending in terms of the government becoming more accommodating to the views and voices of China's populace regarding the environment in the foreseeable future? Which way is that arc bending, Mark, do you think?

Mark Wang:

First, Chinese government is doing something perhaps similar to our Western government. Public concern are becoming the government concern. The environmental issues, [the] government wants to do something that's definitely true. The environmental issues it's on our list politicalized item in China compared with the other issues. So the Chinese government, I would say, a little bit tolerant about a social media, public opinion. However, the Chinese government they are not elected. So they believe this is of long-term benefit then do it. We don't have to be everybody agree.

So if the right thing to do that, we do it. And we do it as a tough way. Another point is that I feel like regarding environmental management, environment governance, I think Chinese government have some sought of capacity, recently demonstrated capacity to fix some of the problems. One example is the River Chief System.

I mentioned that in the previous discussion, there was a new system used to be top-down. Now it's the local top office to look after the river pollution problem. I just take an example, like Suzhou Creek used to be polluted, heavily polluted. People travel to Suzhou maybe 10 years ago, smell the Suzhou Creek – mile away you can smell. But after three or four years, Suzhou Creek, and no smell and clean.

So what I'm saying is the Chinese government if they want to fix certain environmental problem, they can get down very quickly. The government is so important to understand the environmental governance, environmental, management issues in China.

Peter Clarke:

Fengshi, you got the final word.

Fengshi Wu:

It's quite a moment, for sure. And nothing is particularly surprising. Xi Jinping has demonstrated that he is a strong leader, he's different from his immediate predecessors, and that he has done a lot to put himself in the same stage as Deng and Mao. The world should expect China will be assertive, and today's China is not 30, 40 years ago.

And China's aware of its own economic capacity and power and global weight as well. So I think he's increasingly sees himself a global-level leader. And I also think that in some areas, the Chinese State is ahead of the public. The more politicised environmental issues are at the global level, when climate change was marginal, the state is not particularly keen, but everybody knows climate change is really on top of global political agenda. Energy shift, renewable energy is really everyone's agenda. Every major government will make that shift at some point.

And the carbon-neutral is new policy reality and utilise different resources. The state is super interested in excelling in all these hybrid technologies. Hybrid technology infrastructure, hybrid technology in ocean resources, and all of these. In these areas, the state, as a way ahead of Chinese public, if not public everywhere.

So we need to really actually encourage more monitoring of state policies from all angles and reflect on this super enthusiasm to utilise natural resources overseas. Yes, I do think there's a need to really

follow closely what the Chinese State is aiming at, and monitor the consequences, immediate consequences impact of such policies.

Peter Clarke:

Fengshi, Mark, thank you so much for being with us on Ear to Asia.

Fengshi Wu:

Pleasure.

Mark Wang:

Thank you.

Peter Clarke:

Our guests today have been experts in China's environmental affairs, Professor Mark Wang from the University of Melbourne and Associate Professor Fengshi Wu from the University of New South Wales. Ear to Asia is brought to you by Asia Institute at the University of Melbourne. You can find more information about this and all our other episodes at the Asia Institute website.

Peter Clarke:

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