

# Practice of Ecological Civilization Construction in South Africa and its Enlightenment

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**Abstract:** A relatively complete and clear management structure has been established while the scientific management has been implemented for the protected areas, whether they are state-owned or not. It is beneficial for the cooperative community management system to take people of all social standings in environmental protection. A set of legal system provides legal guarantee for the construction of ecological civilization. Some measures, such as the environmental right written into the constitution, attaching importance to environmental education, do good to improve people's consciousness of environmental protection. The practice of ecological civilization construction in South Africa provides effective reference for our country.

## 1. Introduction

South Africa is the most developed country in the African continent. In the process of industrialization, it has encountered a serious ecological crisis. In the second half of the twentieth century, approximately 35% of native coastal forests in South Africa disappeared or were severely degraded.[1] After the abolition of the apartheid system, the management concept and mechanism of the new South African government in ecological protection continued to innovate, relevant laws continued to improve, and ecological civilization construction achieved remarkable results. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between South Africa and China, the cooperation between the two sides in environmental protection has deepened. At the second Johannesburg Summit of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum in 2015, China and South Africa signed an agreement to strengthen environmental protection, control climate change and develop a green economy. On September 2, 2018, on the occasion of the Beijing Summit of the China-Africa Cooperation Forum, China and South Africa signed the "Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of South Africa on Cooperation in the Field of Climate Change". The two sides will strengthen the cooperation in the aspects such as carbon emissions trading, green and low-carbon urbanization, the technologies of carbon's capture, utilization and storage, the greenhouse gas information compilation and greenhouse gas database management, and will jointly strengthen capacity building in the field of climate change. Enhancing the understanding of the construction of ecological civilization in South Africa is an important prerequisite and guarantee for further strengthening eco-environment cooperation between the two countries. The successful experience of South Africa provides a reference and useful enlightenment for China to promote the construction of socialist ecological civilization with Chinese characteristics.

## 2. The environmental management mechanism is relatively sound

South Africa covers an area of 1.22 million square kilometers, accounting for only 2% of the world's land area, but its biodiversity is ranked third in the world. The plant species in the territory account for 10% of the world. Reptiles, birds and mammals account for 7% of the world's species, while coastal species account for 15%. [2]The achievements of the construction of ecological

civilization in South Africa are closely related to the high priority and scientific management of the South African government.

South Africa has established a relatively complete and clear management structure. According to the relevant provisions of the South African Constitution, the protection of the ecological environment is the responsibility that all levels of government must perform. In addition to the Department of Environmental Affairs, the Department of Tourism, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, the Department of Mineral Resources, the Department of Rural Development and Land Reform, the Department of Water and Sanitation, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Human Settlements all have relevant functional divisions for environmental protection. For example, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has a Branch of Climate Change & Disaster Management whose aim is to facilitate climate change mitigation and adaptation, risk and disaster management. These departments supervise and coordinate actions in the formulation and implementation of environmental standards and ecological civilization construction. Each province has an environmental affairs management department responsible for flora and fauna protection in the province, and import and export control of biological species. There are also corresponding management agencies at the local level. Private landowners, NGOs, and aborigines also participate in the management of protection zones. It can be seen that the governing body includes all levels of government, non-government agencies, private, groups, indigenous peoples and community organizations. [3]

Scientific management for the protected areas. South Africa has established national parks and special nature reserves, nature reserves, world heritage sites, marine protected areas, forest reserves and many other types of protected areas. These protected areas are state-owned or private. Up to now, there are more than 500 state-owned protected areas, including 24 national parks. There are more than 11,000 private protected areas. South Africa takes the leading position in the administration level of protected areas and manages them in accordance with the Protected Land Act. The management of national parks is especially commendable. The South African National Parks Authority (SANPARKS), which is attached to the Department of Environmental Affairs, is responsible for the management operations and overall supervision of the national parks. Each national park should make a five-year or ten-year plan in advance, in strict accordance with which the administrative staff manage all aspects of the parks, such as species, water resources, ecotourism, road construction, recreational facilities and community participation. Biodiversity is scientifically protected. The concept of absolute protection is abandoned. The population beyond the carrying capacity will be migrated or auctioned. Protection and utilization can be implemented without coming into conflict. The coordination of tourism development and ecological protection is emphasized. Functional divisions are defined according to the degree of tourists' use. The activities of tourists in wildlife protection areas are strictly limited. Private protected areas also need to be scientifically managed in accordance with a standardized plan. Whether the nature of the protected area is state-owned or private, the South African government emphasizes that the protected area must be integrated with the local aboriginal community, taking into account the interests of local aborigines and involving local residents in the construction of protected areas. The government has introduced a inhabitant security system, providing free and semi-commodity PRNR (protected residences of nature reserves) for the aborigines and solving their employment problems. In addition, the government encourages private investment in nature reserves, allowing private individuals to participate in the development of protected areas while preserving the original ecological features. In order to promote investment in protected areas and economic growth, the government has a strong sense of service, severely sanctions bribery, and has established a relatively complete banking system, legal system and a relatively mature market economy system. This cooperative community management system is conducive to absorbing social forces to participate in the construction and management of protected areas.

### **3. The environmental and ecological protection legislation is relatively perfect**

South Africa has developed a relatively complete legal system for environmental resource protection, which provides a reliable and strong legal guarantee for the construction of ecological civilization. The government has joined in various international conventions such as Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, Convention for the Protection of Wetlands of International Importance, Convention on Biological Diversity and World Heritage Convention etc, and has enacted and promulgated important legal documents such as National Environmental Management Act, National Water Act, Marine Ecological Resources Act, National Forestry Act, Mining Management Environment Act, National Grassland and Forest Fire Protection Act, National Parks Act, Wetland Conservation Act, Endangered Species Protection Act, and Biodiversity Act etc. The legal means are actively used to protect the ecological environment.

The National Environmental Management Act establishes the basic principle of environmental management in South Africa, that is, the state has the responsibility to respect, maintain, improve and enforce the social and economic rights conferred by Article 3 of the new Constitution. [4] As the fundamental law of water resources management, the National Water Act has eliminated various classifications of water and given all waters the same legal status. The act emphasizes the planning of water use and stipulates that anyone who does not have the right to use water can apply for a water permit, which fully reflects the principle of fairness and protection. The Mining Management Environmental Act includes a series of laws and regulations such as the South African Mining Act, the South African Minerals and Petroleum Resources Mining Act, the Mine Health and Safety Act, which continuously strengthen the environmental management of mines so that the environmental protection system should be run through the entire mining industry. The Biodiversity Act, introduced in 2004, is the basic law for biodiversity conservation, covering almost all areas of biodiversity conservation, including the integrated management of biodiversity frameworks, the protection of threatened or protected ecosystems and species, and acquisition and benefit sharing of biological resources development, as well as licensing requirements.

South Africa has not only established a fairly advanced environmental legal system, but also developed a strict public interest litigation system that has played an important role in implementing public participation, monitoring the government and fulfilling environmental responsibilities. The new constitution passed in 1996 stipulates that everyone has the right to an environment that is harmless to their health and well-being. It requires reasonable legislation and other measures to protect the environment for the benefit of present and future generations. If the listed rights are violated or threatened, anyone has the right to bring a lawsuit to the court which should give appropriate remedies, including confirmation of rights. The National Environmental Management Act stipulates two ways of individual public interest litigation: administrative public interest litigation and criminal public interest litigation. The former gives individuals the right to file an administrative public interest litigation against the environmental protection authority. Even citizens or organizations that have no direct interest can urge the state to take action against the offender. Criminal proceedings allow anyone to initiate criminal proceedings against any violation of environmental protection legislation for the public good or to protect the environment.

In short, the environmental and ecological protection legislation is relatively complete and specific in South Africa, highlighting the protection of human rights, establishing environmental rights as a basic human right, organically combining environmental legislation with human rights protection, and emphasizing the environmental rights of every citizen.

#### **4. The public has a strong sense of environmental protection**

From a macro perspective, building an ecological civilization is the responsibility of the government, but from a micro perspective, it is actually the responsibility of every citizen. In South Africa, developing an ecological civilization is not only an obligation of the government, but the people are also actively involved in environmental protection and improvement activities. Most people in South Africa have a strong sense of environmental protection and regard environmental protection as an unavoidable responsibility of individuals. In order to cultivate active citizens with

environmental consciousness, the South African government has always paid attention to environmental education. The "White Paper on Environmental Protection Policy", published by the government specifically, requires local education departments to include ecological and environmental protection knowledge in formal and informal courses in schools, so that environmental awareness should be deeply rooted in the hearts of the people. Environmental education has become a compulsory course in the basic education stage. Environmental science is offered in both elementary and secondary schools. Environmental education is a professional elective course for continuing education. Normal schools focus on cultivating the trained teachers' knowledge of the environmental education and the ability to develop students' sense of environmental responsibility. [5]In addition to the environmental science courses as independent disciplines, the South African schools also require teachers for the subjects such as chemistry, physics, biology, history, etc., to impart environmental knowledge, which is concerned with the course, according to the actual situation in the region. Some official institutions, non-governmental organizations also participate in environmental education. The Education Centre of the National Park of South Africa accepts a large number of children every year, enabling them to receive nature education in a wide range of activities.

The environmental rights written into the constitution in South Africa also contributes to raising the environmental awareness of citizens. Article 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996 states that "Everyone has the right to: (a) enjoy an environment that is not harmful to their health and well-being; and (b) to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that(i)prevent pollution and ecological degradation; (ii) promote conservation; and (iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development. It gives every South African citizen the right to "environment that is harmless to their health and happiness" and actually declares that destroying the ecological environment is equivalent to infringing on the individual's environmental rights, thus granting everyone the rights and obligations that stop or pursue responsibility for act of damage happiness and health. This provision helps to raise the environmental awareness of South African citizens and to establish the right environmental values. [6]

In South Africa, it has formed a good social atmosphere to protect nature and the flora and fauna. The Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve still maintains its original appearance when the Portuguese navigator Dias arrived 500 years ago. The grass and trees in the reserve aren't be taken away by tourists. It is rich in kelp resources in South Africa, which is the food of abalone and a fertilizer of wood grass. In order to avoid breaking the balance of the marine ecological environment, the locals will not pick up the wild kelp that is washed by the waves to the shore. The South African government does not develop rich kelp resources. [7]In the town of Simon, on the east coast of Cape Town, the local residents' voluntary protection of penguins attracted many of them going there. The number of penguins has increased. More than 3,000 have settled there, forming a famous tourist attraction. Cape Town also has the seal island of Hout Bay, another resort that the world's tourists yearn for. It also benefits from the love and charity of the local fishermen. They used the caught small fish to feed the seals that sunbathed on the island. This environmental action attracted a large number of seals, so that on the island of less than half a square kilometer, thousands of seals have flourished. In South Africa, you can often get close to wild animals, you can see ostriches strolling along the road, baboons playing beside the tourist car, giraffes cuddling between the trees. The reason why they live in harmony with people is inseparable from the kindness and protection of the people.

Due to the government's attention, the guarantee of legislation and the consciousness of the people, this country, despite its disparity between the rich and the poor, has a significant gap in inter-ethnic income, its animal and plant resources are among the best in the world, and the plant varieties come first on the list in the world, with a wide variety of animals. There are more than 800 species of birds, making it a kingdom of flora and fauna worthy of the name. In this "Rainbow

Country", the scenery is pure, the air is fresh, and the ecological civilization construction has achieved remarkable results.

## 5. The enlightenment to China

At a time when the global ecological crisis is becoming more and more serious, South Africa's successful experience shows that developing countries have achieved practical results in solving ecological and environmental problems and achieving sustainable economic and social development, and have also provided useful enlightenment to promote socialist ecological civilization with Chinese characteristics.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the new government has attached great importance to environmental protection, put forward the concept of "green development", strengthened system construction, and gradually improved the environmental protection legal security system. So the ecological civilization construction has been increasingly promoted. However, China's environmental pollution and serious ecological damage have not been completely changed. The whole people have not yet firmly established a socialist ecological civilization that respects nature, conforms to nature, and protects nature. South Africa's national conditions, systems, culture and geography are different from those of China, but its exploration and practice in ecological environment protection is worth learning. In terms of management mechanism, in South Africa social forces have been fully mobilized to participate in the construction of ecological civilization, and local residents, private land owners, other organizations or personnel have been absorbed to participate in the construction and management of nature reserves, which is conducive to the employment of local residents and further shorten the poverty, to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor, as well as to solve the lack of funds for the construction of nature reserves, to avoid the fragmentation of environmental zones in protected areas. This cooperative community management system provides a useful reference for the construction of China's ecological civilization system. South Africa's national park management experience also has reference to China's national park system construction.

Article 26 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China stipulates: "The State protects and improves the living environment and ecological environment, and prevents pollution and other hazards." This provision indicates that China's environmental protection field mainly emphasizes state responsibility, rather than directly granting citizens environmental rights. South Africa's relatively complete environmental protection legal system, especially the design and textual connotation of the environmental right written into the constitution is worth learning from. In addition, South Africa fully utilizes the role of zoology and botanical gardens in collecting, researching and protecting flora and fauna, and the people's strong environmental awareness is worthy of emulation.

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