

# **International Cooperation on Integrated Water Resources Management of Transboundary Rivers in China**

## **1. Basic information**

China is home to a large number of transboundary rivers, including 80 major ones and involving 13 bordering countries and 3 neighboring countries. The aggregate basin area of all these transboundary rivers amounts to roughly 1/4 of China's land area, whereas the total length of the transboundary rivers occupies about 1/3 of land boundary of China. The mean annual outflow of these transboundary rivers equals 728 billion m<sup>3</sup>— more than 34 times of the inflow. These rivers have good water quality and no more than 10% exploited rate of water and hydropower resources, which is much lower than the mean ratio of river development in China and other international rivers of the world in general. The Chinese government adheres to the principle of fair and reasonable cooperation, scientific development and effective protection of transboundary rivers, and conducts pragmatic and mutually beneficial cooperation with the neighboring countries.

## **2. Principles for development and utilization of transboundary rivers**

China adheres to the following basic principles in utilizing and protecting transboundary rivers:

(1) The principle of international cooperation. China insists on enhancing international cooperation for the purpose of seeking common grounds amid differences, coordinating development and achieving win-win in negotiating with its neighbors on the development, utilization and protection of international rivers. The

focus has been placed on establishing good cooperative relations with the neighboring countries regarding utilization and protection of international rivers. By various means and in various formats including the setup of cooperation mechanisms, China pursues better dialogue and deeper mutual trust for the joint construction of a community with a shared future for humanity in international river basins.

(2) The principle of people orientation. Both China and its neighbors are developing countries. Development remains our top priority. Rational development and utilization of international rivers not only plays a critical role for poverty reduction, livelihood improvement and development promotion, but also helps countries to realize and safeguard basic human rights such as the rights to survival and development. In handling matters relating to international rivers, China has always upheld the people-centered concept, and insisted on the supremacy of basic survival and development interests of human beings, so as to safeguard lives and properties of people and sustainable development through joint efforts with the riparian countries.

(3) The principle of sharing rights and obligations. The riparian countries of international rivers enjoy both the rights to rationally develop and utilize water resources, and the duties to consider the reasonable rights and interests of others. In addition, they should fulfill the obligation of protecting water resources. Such rights, duties and obligations should go together. On the basis of equality, China insists on fully respecting the due rights of all riparian countries, coordinating the reasonable demands of both the upstream and downstream areas and the left and right banks, balancing the respective rights and obligations, and pursuing common sustainable development in the basins.

(4) The principle of placing equal emphasis on development and protection. International rivers are valuable resources and treasures for all riparian countries. It complies with the common interests of all parties that international rivers are

developed and utilized for socioeconomic prosperity of the riparian countries, while taking into account and paying close attention to eco-environmental protection for sustainable development. China has always adhered to the principles of green development and ecological priority, by adopting sustainable approaches for transboundary river development and insisting on development amid protection and protection amid development.

### **3. Profile of International Cooperation**

China has carried out different forms of transboundary river cooperation with all neighboring countries with whom it has established diplomatic relations. In particular, China has concluded more than 40 intergovernmental and interdepartmental cooperation agreements and memorandums of understanding on integrated water resources management of transboundary rivers.

China and Mongolia<sup>1</sup> signed an intergovernmental agreement on the protection and utilization of transboundary water in 1994, whereby the two sides established a vice-ministerial level China-Mongolia Joint Committee on Transboundary Water (under which relevant expert task forces were set up). Through the Joint Commission mechanism, bilateral cooperation has been carried out in multiple fields, such as hydrological data exchange, joint study tours and researches, as well as development, utilization and protection of transboundary water.

China and Kazakhstan<sup>2</sup> unveiled an intergovernmental cooperation agreement on the utilization and protection of transboundary rivers in 2001, whereby the two sides

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<sup>1</sup> Covering the Kherlen River, the Khalkh River, the Bell Lake, the Irtysh River and the Ulungur River.

<sup>2</sup> Covering the Ili River - Balkash Lake, the Irtysh River and the Emin River - Ala Lake.

established a vice-ministerial level China- Kazakhstan Joint Committee on the Utilization and Protection of Transboundary Rivers (under which relevant expert task forces were set up). Through the Joint Commission mechanism, the two countries cooperated with each other in areas such as hydrological data exchange and comparative analysis, water allocation, flood control and disaster mitigation and joint research.

China and Russia<sup>3</sup> released an intergovernmental agreement on the rational utilization and protection of transboundary water in 2008, whereby the two sides established a vice-ministerial level China- Russia Joint Committee on the Utilization and Protection of Transboundary Water (under which relevant expert task forces were set up). Thanks to the Joint Commission mechanism, the two countries have been cooperating in various areas, such as hydrological data exchange, joint monitoring, joint research, flood control and disaster mitigation and joint action in response to emergencies.

China and India<sup>4</sup> issued the China-India Joint Statement in 2006, whereby the two sides agreed to set up an expert-level mechanism for exploration of exchanges and cooperation regarding transboundary rivers in agreed areas such as hydrological data provision and emergency response. In 2007, the two countries established such a bilateral expert-level mechanism for cooperation in areas including hydrological data provision and emergency response for transboundary rivers.

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<sup>3</sup> Covering the Heilongjiang /Amur River, the Tumen River, the Suifen River and the Irtysh River - Xingkai Hu.

<sup>4</sup> Covering the Yalu Zangbu River - Brahmaputra River, the Ganges River and the Indus River.

In 2016, China and five Mekong countries of Myanmar<sup>5</sup>, Thailand<sup>6</sup>, the Laos<sup>7</sup>, Vietnam<sup>8</sup> and Cambodia<sup>9</sup>, established the Lancang–Mekong Water Resources Cooperation Mechanism, and set up the Lancang–Mekong Water Resources Joint Working Group and the Lancang–Mekong Water Resources Cooperation Center. The six countries have worked together in transboundary river cooperation and information sharing, pursuant to the Five-Year Action Plan for Lancang–Mekong Water Resources Cooperation (2018-2022). In addition, from 1996 onwards, China has engaged in transboundary river cooperation with the Mekong countries under the China-Myanmar-Mekong River Commission dialogue mechanism.

Moreover, China has built cooperation mechanisms on hydrological data provision for transboundary rivers with Kazakhstan, Russia, Mongolia, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea<sup>10</sup>, Myanmar, Thailand, the Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, India and Bangladesh<sup>11</sup>, and carried out technical exchanges and cooperation with Nepal<sup>12</sup>, Kyrgyzstan<sup>13</sup>, Tajikistan<sup>14</sup> and Pakistan<sup>15</sup>. These mechanisms have effectively boosted communication and cooperation between China and its neighboring countries in multiple fields relating to transboundary rivers, such as hydrological data provision and flood control, emergency response, transboundary river governance, as well as the development, utilization and protection of water resources.

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<sup>5</sup> Covering the Irrawaddy River, the Nu - Salween River, and the Lancang-Mekong River.

<sup>6</sup> Covering the Lancang-Mekong River and the Nu - Salween River.

<sup>7</sup> Covering the Yuanjiang - Red River and the Lancang-Mekong River.

<sup>8</sup> Covering the Yuanjiang - Red River, the Lancang-Mekong River and the Zuojiang River.

<sup>9</sup> Covering the Lancang-Mekong River.

<sup>10</sup> Covering the Yalu River and the Tumen River.

<sup>11</sup> Covering the Yaluzangbu - Brahmaputra River.

<sup>12</sup> Covering the Ganges river.

<sup>13</sup> Covering the Sarezas - Kumarak River, the Aksay-Taushgan River, the Uzingus-Yushanguxi River and the Kyzylsuu-Kizilsu River.

<sup>14</sup> Covering the Malkansu River.

<sup>15</sup> Covering the Indus River.

The Chinese government attaches great importance to international cooperation relating to transboundary rivers. Such cooperation has become a bridge bonding China and its neighbors. China will further tap the potential of the existing transboundary river cooperation mechanisms, further enhance cooperation and exchanges, respect the reasonable concerns of relevant countries, and endeavor to make such rivers as the “ambassadors of peace, cooperation and friendship”, and turn the water of these rivers to an inexhaustible source for nourishing a community with a shared future for humanity.