

Populism's Influences on Environmental Governance and Countermeasures Against It

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ABSTRACT

Populism has brought many challenges to national environmental governance. It erodes the environmental rule of law, questions diversified governance of environment, and affects the order of global environmental governance. To eliminate its influences on environmental governance, we must adhere to Xi Jinping's idea of ecological civilization, achieve harmonious coexistence of human and nature, and strengthen the environmental rule of law to realize environmental justice. In addition, we should also improve multi-governance with multiple participants, improve modern environmental governance system, and stick to human community of shared destiny to construct a new order of global environmental governance.

Keywords: *populism, environmental governance, environmental rule of law, multi-governance, community of common destiny for all mankind*

1. INTRODUCTION

The unbalanced economic development, failure of democratic politics and rupture of culture have paved the path for populism, ushering it into a new stage.^[1] Now, populism is attacking environmental governance. It denies agendas of climate changes and excludes environmental laws, which greatly damages environmental governance.^[2]

2. DEFINITION OF POPULISM

The word "populism" is widely used but there is not yet any consensus on its definition. It is important, however, to delimit the connotations of populism, which is the first step to understand populism and the key to figuring out how it influences national governance. The development of populism has historical reasons. Up to now, populism has witnessed three changes: agricultural populism, Latin American populism, and new right populism.^[3] The third change continues to this day. There are three core elements in the three changes. **First**, it adheres to centering around people, and the concept of people embodying homogeneity, which refers to homogeneous integration of social groups or individuals that share same values, demands or ideas. **Second**, populism develops around the antagonistic relationship between "civilian" and "elite", and it always "advocates people to fight against established power structures and dominant ideologies and values of the society".^[4] **Third**, populism believes that politics should be established upon direct expressions of people's will and restore people's rights. That is to say, it proposes a more direct democracy, for example, majority rule or referendum, and opposes representative system and intermediaries.^[5] Moreover, from many of the most prominent cases of

populism appeared around the world, we can summarize four common features of populism that transcend time and space: emphasizing the central role of people, opposing elites, believing people are homogeneous entity, and preaching that the society is in severe crisis.^[6] Cass Mulder believed populism was "a weak ideology or political movement where the society was divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, that is, the 'pure civilians' and the 'corrupted elites' and that it proposed politics should be expressions of civilians' general will".^[7] We can see that the core idea of populism is to blame all problems on those elites who are separated from people,^[8] and earnestly advocates to reform the rebellious "elite class" with homogeneous "civilian class" so as to achieve their appeals: sovereignty lying in the people and an equal society. Based on that, in this paper, we attempt to define populism as an ideology that believes in people, proposes people's sovereignty, and advocates homogeneous civilians to fight against elites' rule to achieve social equality.^[9] We usually hold that populism has "weak ideologies", because it always combines itself with one or more other ideologies, including ecologism, nationalism or authoritarianism. The specific ideological features populism embodies depend on the social political environment where populists activate. Presently, the populism shows four distinct features: anti-globalization as its most prominent feature, followed by extreme nationalism or authoritarianism, against democracy and rule of law under the control of elites, and anti-pluralism. The impact of these characteristics is most prominent in environmental governance.

3. INFLUENCES OF POPULISM ON ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

The rise of populism in democratic countries is a reflection of people's anxiety over living in a period of rapid social

changes and economic instability.^[10] Populism holds that consequences of environmental pollutions are indirect and are not easy to be found out, and it worries that protecting environment might hinder economic progress. In environmental governance, the main manifestations of populism are anti-legalization, anti-pluralism, and anti-globalization.

3.1. Populism erodes environmental rule of law

Paul Taggart believed that populism was like a chameleon that always adapted to surrounding colors.^[11] As a weak ideology with no core values, populism has many forms in European and American countries. Both right-wing populism and extreme authoritarianism bring challenges to legally govern the environment. Populism holds no trust for the rule of law represented by elites, and it has no faith in elite-controlled governance policies proposed by experts. Right-wing populist governments rarely include environmental law into their commitments. They do not want to abide by or implement environmental regulations, or even directly repeal or withdraw from environmental regulations. For instance, the Trump administration has repealed 84 environmental regulations.^[12] Meanwhile, populism always exerts threats on legally governing environment through setting agenda, influencing policy, setting discretion and breaking conventions.^[13]

First, populism damages environmental institutions, and limits the public's access to environmental information and environmental judicial procedure. Populist political style shows an obvious impatience with environmental legal procedure, exerting heavy pressure on environmental protection. In Poland, populism attempts to radically reform its judicial institutions to undermine the rule of law and bring politics to dangerous authoritarianism.^[14] In Serbia, populism hides environmental information, limits public participation and restricts judicial institutions in the field of environmental protection, which leaves the public no access to acquiring environmental information. The operations of populism, rule of law and environmental protection in some kind of Venn diagram indicate their close connections.

In addition, populism damages rule of law and democracy, and brings politics to dangerous authoritarianism. If populism combines with authoritarianism to form autocratic politics, the new political form will violently suppress environmental dissidents. The latest research of global environmentalist organization finds out the number of environmental family members killed around the world is on the rise. From 2002 to 2017, there are at least 1588 environmental defenders died, including indigenous people, community activists, lawyers and journalists.^[15] For the past eight years, Honduras has the most deaths of land and environmental defenders. From 2002 to 2009, the death number is 9, and from 2010 to 2017, that number rises to 128.^[16] World Report 2018 shows that populism has proliferated as the support for the rule of law, human rights and democracy weakens.^[17]

3.2. Populism questions pluralistic environmental governance

Pluralistic environmental governance refers to a coordinated governance mechanism where many social participants cooperate for their common purpose of protecting environment, under the premise of performing their respective duties. The relationship among pluralistic participants is not a black-or-white one, but a coexistent one in which they recognize each other and hold democratic consultation. This, however, contradicts with populism's "dualism" theory. Cass Mulder believed that populism was "a weak ideology or political movement where the society was divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, that is, the 'pure civilians' and the 'corrupted elites', and held that politics should be expressions of civilians' general will".^[18] Populism often uses Manichean "dualism" of good and evil to interpret differences between the two groups, holding that there are either friends or enemies. In another word, populism believes society is not a heterogeneous combination of groups and diversified individuals, and that there are clear boundaries among groups that cannot be broken. Homogeneity is the source of civilian's political power, and it is not response of some individual civilians but a homogeneous and collective response. In this group, nobody is independent, and everyone must be a part of the whole. They have to forgo individual freedom and adopt collective actions in the name of common benefits. Environmental governance is a significant part of national governance. Currently, the influences of populism on national governance is reflected in its lack of trust for "elite class" including elites and technical experts. Populism advocates that environmental governance must be carried out by "civilian class", and it opposes any form of pluralistic governance mechanism.

3.3. Populism influences the order of global environmental governance

Although populism develops in modern society and the globalized world, it inherently possesses a tendency of anti-modernization and anti-globalization.^[19] Populism's weak ideology determines that it cannot stand alone, and that it must combine itself with elements and values from other political ideologies, such as classical left-wing or right-wing ideas. The choice of its combination depends on positions towards distributive conflicts and the world outlook of nationalism and cosmopolitanism.^[20] In principle, we can divide populism into right-wing populism and left-wing populism. The ideologies of right-wing populism, especially its ideas about the conflicts between people and international elites, shows a sharp contrast with policies about climate changes. Right-wing populist leaders and supporters are often climate skeptics who hold hostile attitudes towards policies about climate changes. Therefore, the rise of right-wing populism has posed great challenges to climate governance, and the ensuing uncertainties are also on rise.^[21] For instance, in the US, the Trump

administration is changing Environmental Protection Agency's regulations related to carbon emission, and has withdrawn the United States from the Paris Agreement.^[22] European countries, such as Poland and Hungary, are also attempting to reduce climate policies within EU limits. The "withdrawn" wave of the world right-wing populism led by the United States, is challenging the global environmental governance order. This trend has damaged the realization of goals set in 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.^[23]

4. HOW TO ELIMINATE POPULISM'S INFLUENCES ON ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

If we cannot effectively respond to populism, a global trend of anti-mainstream-politics that transcends systemic differences,^[24] populism will bring devastating influences to our national environmental governance. To prevent and eliminate its influences, we have to improve modern environmental governance system, and promote modernization of national governance system and governance capacity.

4.1. Adhere to Xi Jinping's idea of ecological civilization and realize harmonious coexistence of human and nature

Adhering to Xi Jinping's idea of ecological civilization asks us to firmly establish the concept of green development and stick to the idea that human and nature share the same destiny. First, establishing the concept of green development requires us to set up a system where resources can be effectively employed so as to achieve sustainable utilization of natural resources, which can deal with populism's resistance to environmental governance that caused unbalanced distribution and unreasonable use of natural resources, and reveal populist political parties' negative attitudes towards environmental governance. In addition, sticking to the concept of harmonious coexistence of human and nature asks us to realize that human and nature share the same destiny and internal values, that is, human is part of nature and human cannot be independent from or superior to nature. In nature, the life community is made up of mountains, water, lands, lakes and grasses.^[25] In 2010, Bolivia's Universal Declaration on the Rights of Mother Earth stipulates that "human beings are a part of mother earth. Mother earth is a living existence. Human beings and the earth are living communities that share the same destiny."^[26] Article 71 of the Constitution of Ecuador stipulates that "nature or *pakama* is the place where life breeds and exists, and nature has life."^[27] Such laws about nature coincides with the concept of community of common destiny for mankind. Third, we should improve the system of ecological civilization, bringing the idea of ecological civilization into the system of ecological civilization, so that the construction of ecological civilization can better satisfy people's demands for a good ecological environment, and

eliminate root causes of people's dissatisfaction with environment. Moreover, we should consolidate the guiding position of Marxism, and effectively respond to challenges brought about by populism's ideological risks. Only by adhering to Xi Jinping's idea of ecological civilization, worshipping nature, respecting nature and adapting to nature, can we achieve the harmonious co-existence of human and nature, and eliminate populism's damages to China's environmental governance.

4.2. Improve "pluralistic co-governance" mechanism and modern environmental governance system

Environmental governance is a complex and comprehensive task. In report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, we put forth that "it is necessary to build an environmental governance system led by the government, with enterprises as the main body, and social organizations and the public as participants"; In Guiding Opinions on the Construction of Modern Environmental Governance System issued by the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, we put forward four principles: adhering to the leadership of the party, to multi-party governance, to market-oriented governance, and to the rule of law.^[28] Adhering to "pluralistic-governance" system, we have got remarkable achievements. The fact proves that "pluralistic-governance" is the way for environmental governance. It is a testified and correct path, so we have to resolutely stick to it. Our achievements also show that cooperation between different heterogeneous groups can achieve "one plus one greater than two" effect, which overshadows populist's anti-pluralism "dualism". Therefore, fighting against populist's "dualism", we must uphold the leadership of the party, and guide the diverse and changeable social thoughts with socialist core values.^[29] We should strengthen the party's absolute leadership over environmental governance, and implement the accountability system of "the party and the government share the same responsibility, and one position holds two responsibilities".^[30] Besides, we should adopt a consulted democracy where the government leads enterprises, and society and the public equally participate into the governance process. In particular, we should highlight market's decisive role in allocating resources, improve environmental constraints upon and incentive policies for enterprises, and promote the marketization process of ecological environmental protection. Moreover, we should constantly improve the price mechanism for resources and environment, internalizing the cost of ecological environment and avoiding the tragedy of the commons. It is also necessary to establish the mechanism for preventing environmental damages and solving conflicts, responding to all sorts of group environmental events. Smoothing communicating mechanism can resolve people's distrust of technical experts, and bridge the gap between the public and technical experts.

4.3. Enhance environmental rule of law, and achieve environmental justice

Populism's damages to environmental rule of law reflects its anti-legalization characteristics and one inherent problem of current environmental law. It is a common choice for every country to use legal means to conduct environmental governance.^[31] Legalization is one main power to fight against populism. Since 1970s, eighty-eight countries have given people rights of living in healthy environment through constitutions, and sixty-two countries have written environmental protection into their constitutions. Altogether, there are 150 countries around the world that have constitutional rights or environmental provisions.^[32] Without environmental law and implementation of legal obligations, environmental governance and protection might be arbitrary, subjective and unpredictable.^[33] Environmental rule of law can reduce corruption and irregular behaviors in natural resource management, avoiding regional conflicts caused by fighting over resources. It can facilitate inter-generational equity and intra-generational equity. Therefore, to enhance environmental rule of law, firstly, we should give people equal access to environmental information, guaranteeing their effective participation into environmental judges and judicial procedure, and their obtaining of judicial relief for environmental damages. Universal public participation can satisfy populism's political appeal for environmental governance. With strong legal force, we can incorporate the public and other stakeholders into formulating government decisions, and hold decision-makers responsible for their actions. Second, we should perfect legal system that guarantees the public's environmental rights and respects human rights and people's rights of protecting environment. Combining key environmental demands with legal elements can lay a solid foundation for environmental governance that protects rights and fulfills basic obligations. We have to bring governments, courts, the public and various media together to eradicate populism's damages to the judiciary. Strengthening environmental rule of law can guarantee the realization of environmental justice, curbing populism's dissatisfaction towards environmental inequality.

4.4. Stick to community of human destiny and construct a new order of global environmental governance

Environmental pollution and climate changes caused by economic globalization have become a worldwide problem. Anti-globalization movements have brought severe damages to worldwide environmental governance order. Populism believes consequences of ecological damages, environmental pollution and climate changes are indirect, uncertain and across time and space, and that differences in ideas, cultural diversity and multi-level participants make it hard to formulate a global common code of action. Populism is in the shadow of global democratic politics, and its morality lies in the claim to represent people's interests.

Populism protects small group's immediate interests by finding enemies and excluding others. As a matter of fact, however, global environmental governance is an important content in global governance, and one of the cooperative areas with the most consensus among countries around the world. No country can stand alone. Thus, we have to build a real "community of shared destiny" to replace populism's "false community",^[34] realizing the long-term and overall interests of mankind.

To this end, firstly, we should construct community of shared destiny and continue to push forward One Belt One Road initiative. We should uphold the principle of protection priority and ecological priority, and promote the coordination of economic development and environmental protection of countries along the line. We should build a "community of shared destiny in neighboring countries" and clarify the progressive relationship between "Asian community of shared destiny" and "community of shared destiny of mankind".^[35] Moreover, we should practice the principles of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits, jointly plan the construction of global ecological civilization, and participate in global environmental governance,^[36] to devise the optimal scheme conducive to sustainable development of the world. Based on that, we should establish an international cooperation mechanism to deal with climate changes, promote cooperation in clean energy development, disaster reduction and prevention, and strive to achieve global climate energy governance, realizing a balance between co-construction and leading. Third, we should constantly innovate global environmental governance. In the globalized context, we should satisfy the public's demands for a beautiful ecologic environment, and understand that innovating global governance theory is the basis of constructing a new order of global environmental governance. Today's development is no longer a zero-sum game, and we are living in an era where countries share equal consultation, peaceful coexistence, and mutual benefits.^[37] We should implement a national strategy to actively respond to climate changes, promote to establish a fair, reasonable, and win-win global environmental governance, and uphold the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. China's contribution to global cooperation on climate changes is universally recognized, and it has become an important participant, contributor and leader in constructing global ecological civilization.^[38]

5. CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, eliminate the impact of populism on the ecological environment governance in the first place is to clarify the populist connotation and characteristics, in clear populism is how to influence under the premise of environmental governance, put forward must to Xi Jinping ecological civilization thought as the instruction, improve the modern environmental management system, strengthening the environmental rule of law and build a community of human destiny. Eliminating the impact of populism on environmental governance is an important part

of the modernization of national ecological and environmental governance system and governance capacity, as well as an important aspect of global good governance.

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