

Research on Government Ecological Responsibility in the Process of Urbanization

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Abstract

Urbanization can shorten the gap of dual economic structure in China's urban and rural areas effectively, but the problems as wasting of land resource, causing environmental pollution and the absence of government's ecological responsibility and so forth are arisen in the process of urbanization. To solve the contradiction between urbanization and the problems mentioned above, a sustainable developing mode must be formed to realize the economic, ecological and social benefits. Moreover, we must adhere to the coordinated development of society and strengthen the government's responsibilities on ecological ethics. This should start from three aspects include government, society and individual citizens, establishing a correct ecological ethics idea, implementing ecological ethical responsibilities of the government and actualizing literacy among citizens a sense of low-carbon, green ecological ethics.

Keywords: Urbanization, ecological ethics, government responsibility

The 18th CPC National Congress lays out an overall arrangement to carry forward the socialism with Chinese characteristics. It is mainly composed of promoting all-round economic, political, social and ecological progress, realizing the socialist modernization and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and completing the process of building a moderately well-off society in all aspects. The construction of an ecological civilization has reached such an important status. Urbanization has effectively promoted the development of regional economy and society. Wei Hong, who is Vice Secretary of provincial party committee and Vice-governor, pointed out at the working meeting of the provincial urbanization of 2015, that urbanization is tightly bound to the investment and consumption, and tied with development and people's livelihood. Not only does it generate strong market needs, but also effectively promotes industrial restructure and upgrade. When it comes to our province, by the year of 2020, 7 million people shall be encouraged to migrate to cities in the vicinity, and the permanent residential rate shall reach some 54%. Besides, help 8 million rural people who have moved to cities attain their urban residency and the registered population urbanization ratio shall reach 38% or so. Moreover, restore the old and dilapidated houses and shanty towns in which about 3.5 million dwell at this moment, and improve the living conditions of urban residents on all sides. However, the drift between the increasing land expansion at towns, the extensive growth mode of economy and the urgency of protecting the ecological environment is forever increasing.

This severe ecological condition needs especially from the government the policy guidance and planning. Improving our citizens' consciousness of ecological protection and fortifying the government's responsibility of ecological ethics are the fundamental paths to lift this problem. As Engels stated more than one hundred years ago, "We must bear in mind, There is no similarity between ruling foreign people, who stand outside the nature and in the nature,--instead, we, together our flesh, blood and brains belongs and exists in the nature; the reason why we could govern the whole nature is that we are more powerful than any other creature and can understand and correctly apply the laws of nature."

1. Conception Definition

1.1 Ecological Ethics

In Chinese traditional culture, Philosophy on ecological ethics such as the syncretism of the nature and man, harmony and accommodation, were exalted very often, while condemning those scenes of ecological break like the reckless waste of gain or to drain the pond to get all fish. However, our nation's exploration for ecological ethics is still at the beginning stage, and researchers weigh too much on the introduction of western ideas on ecological ethics. Contemporary Marxism believes that ethical problems are beyond the economy concern; they are also social and political issues, and more like a problem of institutional progressing and reforming. "The most radical goal for green is no less than using a nonviolence revolution to overturn our whole polluted, predatory and materialized industrial society and replacing it with a new economy and social order where human beings could live with the earth in a harmonious way." [3] Common ethics takes morality as its research objects and tries to incorporate Taoism into people themselves so they can affect others with virtue. Our nation's ecological ethicist Liu Xiang Rong believes, "Ecological ethics covers people's different attitudes and conducts towards the nature. We can't only take people's interests into consideration, but we should evaluate whether it's favorable to people's long-term interests, which is the value standard of ecological ethics. We can define it here that ecological ethics researches mainly on the ethics spirit of which people shows in the process of environmental protection.

1.2 Government Responsibility

Citizens usually refer to the modern government as responsible government. This system of responsible government mainly consists of the present responsibility, legal responsibility and moral responsibility. Moral responsibility commits the government an innate mission in the process of fulfilling responsibilities. As Professor Zhang Chengfu put it, "Responsible management or responsible government is a basic idea for modern democratic politics, and it is also an institution arrangement to control the government's public administration, which emphasizes that the government must answer to the basic needs of society and citizens and act vigorously. Besides, government must fulfill its social obligations vigorously; take moral, political and legal responsibilities; accept the governing in and out of itself to assure the accomplishment of responsibilities. China national development and Reform Commission deputy director Liu Jiang stated at the roundtable meetings of energy ministers in London as: The Chinese government has formulated the focus of energy development strategy, including the priority to energy conservation, adjust energy structure and energy diversification, strengthen environmental protection, strengthen technological progress and innovation and is working to build a low-carbon society. He pointed out that the solution to the problem of climate change should emphasize international cooperation, and improve energy efficiency; development of renewable energy and the development of nuclear power is China's priority areas of international cooperation. In simple terms, the government responsibility is that the government in the management of public goods must bear the administrative, legal and moral obligations, but also to fulfill the responsibility of the sun in the operation

1.3 Government's Role on Ecological Ethics during Urbanization

The solution to energy crisis, air pollution, global warming and environmental accidents has become the fundamental request of more and more people. Besides, along with the process of urbanization, scenes like wasting lands, deteriorating environmental condition and lacking government management emerge and also become those new citizens' urgent requests. These scenes have become the significant factors to restrict new urban dwellers to urban residents. Thus in the process of urbanization, government should take advantage of economical, administrative, legal and educational means under the direction of ecological ethics, to vigorously cope with people's requests during the process of urbanization, realizing the condition of binding the fate of human beings and nature together. As a result, it satisfies the whole society for sustainable development.

2. Problems of Ecological Ethics in the Process of Urbanization in China

Urbanization means to gather the people in the rural areas to towns and cities or by certain ways congregate people of the nearby villages to form a new town. Urbanization process is not only to achieve the coordinated development of urban and rural areas as a whole and to balance the development of integrated economy, but also to help turn farmers to citizens with the accelerated process of urbanization in rural areas. While achieving economic growth, issues like the wasting of land resources, the deterioration of the ecological environment, the lacking of government's environmental protection also pop out simultaneously.

2.1 Waste of Land Resources

According to *the 2014 Sichuan Province land and resources bulletin*, the data of land use change shows that in 2014 the province had a reduction of cultivated land area of 15.4 thousand hectares. Reasons include building occupation, ecological restoration and other causes. In 2014 the province approved 1301 cases of construction land, which was an increase of 35.8%, adding up to 59.9 thousand hectares, an increase of 42%, among which the land dedicated to agricultural cause was 40.3 thousand hectares, and arable land 22.5 hectares. Specific data see Figure 1 and figure 2. As of 2014, the urbanization rate of Sichuan province reached 46.3%. (Data source: government work report of Sichuan Province in 2015) During the process of urbanization, Sichuan Province increased cultivated area a total of 21.1 thousand hectares in the year of 2014 by land remediation, structure adjustment of agriculture. Thus the net increase of arable land area was 0.57 million hectares. However, according to the survey, farmers were made to live in places 1-10 kilometers away from their arable land in the villages. This disjunction between life and farming divert far apart from the traditional agriculture, causing the majority of rural land in the state of abandonment. The total amount of arable land has increased, the actual arable farmland has declined instead.

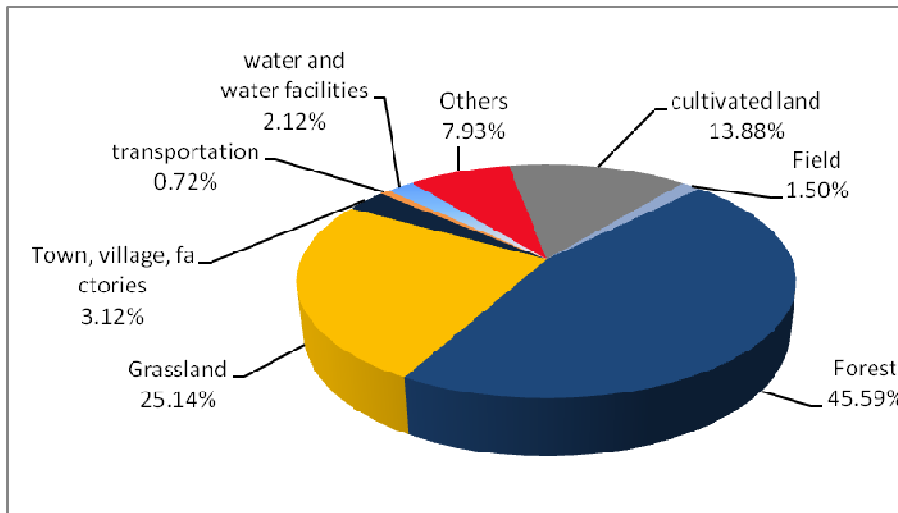


Figure 1. Pie chart land use in 2014 of SiChuan

Data source: *SiChuan Province Land Resources Bulletin*



Figure 2. Supply change of state-owned construction land from 2010 to 2014

Data source: “2014 Sichuan province land and resources bulletin”

2.2 Severity of Environmental Pollution

In the process of urbanization, Sichuan Provincial Government has played emphasis on people’s living standards and adopted a series of measures to ensure that urbanization construction can proceed smoothly. For one thing, within the social security system, the pension systems of urban residents and rural residents have merged. The coverage of basic pension system, basic medical security for urban residents and rural residents, and new rural cooperative medical system has extended to more residents, which shows social fairness and justice. For another, however, the expansion of economic construction is valued but the protection of environment and resources are neglected. Two aspects are involved. Firstly, as some industrial zones relocate in rural-urban fringe zones and rural areas, various of noxious gases, dangerous effluents and industrial wastes are released and poured, which not only has bad effects on the productive and economic activities of these areas but also the health of the local residents. Secondly, with the emergence of

citizenization in rural areas, these new citizens have gradually changed their lifestyles. In this way, more and more domestic sewage and waste are produced without treatment. And its environment is under greater pressure.

3. Reason Analysis of Ecological Ethics in the Process of Urbanization

With the acceleration of urbanization, ecological ethics emerge as a more and more vital factor in terms of people's life and government efficiency.

3.1 The Absence of Government's Ecological Responsibility

With the acceleration of urbanization and the rapid growth of GDP in Sichuan rural areas, residents' living standards and disposable incomes have raised gradually. However, this kind of development model is based on the supply of ecological environment and extensive economic mode. The absence of government's ecological responsibility includes:

Firstly, the absence of administrative responsibility

Government emphasizes more on GDP but neglecting environmental protection. In 1993, government put forward a principle of "allocation of giving priority to efficiency with due consideration to fairness" in a document relating to the establishment of socialist market economic system, and since then efficiency has become an important evaluation standard of government achievement. Though, in the Fifth Plenary Session of the Sixteenth CPC Central Committee, fairness is emphasized, the idea of efficiency is deep-seated, which can be showed as follows:

From one aspect, in order to obtain government achievements, many officials only focus on the development of economy without considering the environment. For another, since the funding of our country, to achieve the goal of "surpassing Great Britain and catching up with the UN", industry develops rapidly with excessive exploitation of various resources and economy develops fast with the destruction of environment. Although during recent years the attentions of protecting environment raise up, when it comes to the dilemma, environment is always defeated by economy.

Secondly, The absence of legal responsibility.

Accountability mechanism and supervision mechanism remain unsound. In 2015, the new revision of The Environmental Protection Law of the People's Republic of China implements officially. In article six, all entities and individuals shall have the obligation to protect the environment. People's governments at all levels shall be responsible for the environmental quality within their respective administrative regions. Enterprises, public institutions, and other businesses shall prevent and reduce environmental pollution and ecological disruption, and assume liabilities for damage caused by them. Citizens shall raise their awareness of environmental protection, adopt low-carbon and economical lifestyles, and conscientiously fulfill their obligation to protect environment. In article 53, citizens, legal persons, and other organizations shall, according to the law, have the rights to obtain environmental information and participate in and oversee environmental protection. The environmental protection administrative departments and other departments with environmental protection supervision and administration functions of people's governments at all levels shall, according to the law, disclose environmental information, and improve the procedures for public engagement, to facilitate the participation in and oversight of environmental protection by citizens, legal persons, and other organizations.

Comparing with the old, the new law includes how to take measures to improve environmental quality but without mentioning how to blame. Besides, according to the new law, citizens, legal persons, and other organizations have the rights to oversee environmental protection but the specific methods are not mentioned. What's more, due to the asymmetric information, the public lose their rights to oversee.

Thirdly, The absence of moral responsibility

The citizenization of farmers without lands is incomplete. In the process of urbanization, statements and actions to support and uphold social morality reveal the sense of responsibility and credibility of the service-oriented government. At the same time, the government pays much attention on the security of farmers who lose their lands and try hard to make sure the process of citizenization. However, problems exist. The expropriation of lands drives these farmers out of the homeland where they live for generations. Though the land compensation includes providing social security and newly built residence community, their higher demands for being respected are never satisfied. Before losing the lands, they own respects by growing sufficient crops. After losing the land, however, for lacking of professional competence they can capture nothing but idleness. And at the same time, they lose the respects from their family members. Thus, although government satisfies their material demand, it loads more burdens on the minds of these new citizens. Besides, in the process of land expropriation, the emergence of “change in policy” and “formalism” is contrary to the moral behavior of government. Without uniform land compensation policy, new citizens feel government is scrambling profits from them and the government credibility is lost.

3.2 A Lack of Ecological Protection Consciousness in Society

In the medieval period of UK, feudal lords would choose a fallow land as pasture and provide it for peasants without any charge, which is named as “common land” policy. Such policy is similar to our country’s policy toward enterprises in reform and opening period. As it is free to pasture, vast regions of the grassland are depleted by overgrazing. Since reform and opening period, government encourages enterprises to develop economy. And the famous theory “No matter if it is a white cat or a black cat, a cat that can catch rats is a good cat!” leads to excessive use of resources. We must learn a lesson from global warming, PM2.5, haze and so on. The process of urbanization is the process of enlarging plant scale of enterprises and industries to realize the urbanization of rural areas. After the process of urbanization, it must be enterprises to engage in industrial production in this new socialist countryside. Otherwise, it will cause a waste of land resources and a lost of reemployment chances of the expropriated farmers. In new social countryside, the relocation of too many industrial enterprises has destroyed its original ecological environment. Due to the indifference attitude of enterprises toward environment protection, the whole society will taste the bitterness of destroying ecological environment.

3.3 Citizens’ Lacking of Ecological Consciousness

Expropriated farmers should have become “new citizens” to promote the development of modern civilization. However, new problems emerge after the process of urbanization. Here come the main difficulties that disturb these “new citizens” most such as the sense of security and belonging decrease, the confusion of self-identification and a lack of labor skills. By the influence of traditional living habits, these “new citizens” living in different communities still unconsciously behave like farmers. Some plant vegetables and fruits on public green land in community. Some lack ecological consciousness and know little about protecting environment. They drop litters everywhere, which not only damages the public hygiene but also causes conflicts between residents. Though the building structure has shortened the physical distance between residents, the gap between their minds widens up. They indulge in the pains of losing land which discourage them from taking new works. Moreover, having get used to old living habits they can hardly adapt to the new life in community. Thus, these “new citizens” less focus on the outside affairs especially the environment, which leads to severe environmental problems.

4. Advice on how to Construct Governmental Ecological Ethics Responsibility during Urbanization

4.1 Strengthening the Government's Ecological Responsibility and Increasing the Intensity of Ecological Protection.

The government, as the distributor and manager of public wealth, shall bear the primary responsibility of environmental pollution resulted from excessive pursuit of economic interests and poor supervision. The government departments have realized their own problems and set about taking up responsibilities to improve the situation, however, the solution to tackle the problem is not made overnight. The Party's eighteenth congress report indicated that "adhere to take the economic construction as the center, scientific development as the theme, comprehensively promote economic, political, cultural, social construction, and ecological civilization construction, to realize people-oriented, comprehensive, sustainable scientific development". Thus the government is in an urge to change the mode of economic growth from extensively exogenous to innovative endogenous. The following aspects are what we need to do:

Firstly, change the evaluation standard of government performance.

Industrial GDP is no longer the only index of assessment of government officials; conversely, the assessment of green GDP is the credible basis. The government report of Sichuan province in 2012 pointed out, in the face of increasingly prominent environmental problems, the government responsibilities had been reinforced and implemented. The transformation of high energy-consuming industry had been promoted, energy consumption per unit value added of industry was expected to decline by 6%, energy consumption per unit GDP fell by more than 3.5%, and the goal of controlling discharge of major pollutants annually was fundamentally completed. Actively carried out the solutions to tackle ash haze pollution, protect the source of drinking water, govern the hazardous waste and renovate overall rural environment. Take more vivid examples, 115 companies have been implemented a mandatory cleaner production audit, with 80 projects put into force about heavy metal pollution prevention; 8 central cities of environmental protection in China have released the PM2.5 monitoring data according to the new standard; the ranking of 25 provinces on air quality also has been carried out; The rates of urban sanitary sewage and hazard-free treatment of household garbage are respectively reached 85% and 92%. Besides, accelerate the construction of the upper Yangtze river ecological barrier, covering a width of 9.41 million mu, consolidating the returning farmland to forest about an area of 13.36 million mu, governing 120000 mu of desertification land and 528 square kilometers of rocky desertification land, the rate of forest coverage increased to 35.5%. We will continue to implement the western Sichuan Tibetan areas of ecological protection and construction projects, to start the construction of ecological civilization first demonstration area, promoting urbanization rationally and beneficially to build new urban communities rather than implementing the projects blindly.

Secondly, regulate the system and form the ecological system of accountability.

Bonus and forfeit has always been a vital means of incentive, so it is with the case of ecological protection. A system of giving a certain compensation to the enterprises that lay emphasis on green product production, raw material saving, high cost technological innovation should be formed; a higher rates should be exposed to the high-polluting and high energy-consuming enterprises effectively harness pollution. At the same time, the accountability system aimed at restricting the officials who lack practical actions on environment protection ought to be developed, which requires the supervision from the society and citizens. Only when the laws and regulation system are fully fledged, can the accountability system pointed at environmental protection law and ecological protection responsibility be comprehensively implemented. What's more, the actions that hit the "red line" of land and enclose in the name of land management should be severely stricken.

Thirdly, reinforce the government's moral responsibilities and attach equal importance on both setting an example and forming people-oriented model.

On one hand, the government officials are supposed to enhance their own quality, rather than chase profits with the common people. On the other hand, speed up the process of “urbanization” of farmers who lost their land, to ensure reasonable and legitimate needs of the “new citizens” and true realization of “urbanization”. In October 2015, 110 million Yuan was issued to operate on ecological protection by Finance Department of Sichuan, from which 43 million Yuan on national nature reserve, 25 million Yuan on compensation to experimental units of wetland ecological benefit, 27 million Yuan on wetland protection and recovery, and another 15million Yuan on rewarding wetland protection. Experimental units of wetland ecological benefit compensation was implemented for the first time in Sichuan province, the funds is mainly used to make compensation expenses for Ruorgai wetland national nature reserve and surrounding losses due to the protection of birds and other wildlife. The implementation of forestry national nature reserve and wetland conservation projects will promote our forestry ecological protection in our province to a higher level.

4.2 Strengthening the Social Cooperation and Consolidating the Ecological Protection of Social power.

As the creator of the social material wealth, the enterprises’ industrial process is the main factor that led to exacerbating the severe situation of environmental pollution. From the theory of economics, the purpose of the investors is to obtain investment returns and rewards, thus it is unavoidably to maximize the pursuit of economic profit and efficiency as the only goal of the enterprise management. However, since companies are involved in the use and distribution of social resources, they are inevitable to take responsible for protecting the ecological environment. Consequently, enterprises need fulfill new obligations on the sustainable development path.

First, the enterprises in creating profits also should consider the damage to the environment without chasing for “profit maximization” by ignoring environmental damage or contamination in exchange. Second, punish the enterprises which leave damages to consumers’ health by changing the technological process or producing substandard goods for the purpose of “environmental protection”, which is certainly a threat to the society. Third, the enterprises should bear responsibilities of compensation when their behaviors cause ecological damage, regardless of their faults being subjective or not, which shall arouse the enthusiasm of enterprises to prevent ecological damage from occurring. Being the main force of public administration, NGO is a significant part of government cooperation. Although the NGO in China is still in the exploring stage of the wholesome development process, whose way of cooperation with the government is still in need of further exploration, there remain numerous non-governmental organizations in the field of environmental protection, such as Friends of Nature, Green Homes Volunteers, the Chinese Environmental Protection Foundation and so forth. In the forum in 2013 between NGO and Department of Environmental Protection of Sichuan, NGO put forward many a suggestion on sharing information resources, introducing competition mechanism to the protection of natural reserve and the like, proposing crucial methods for the collaborative governance with the government.

4.3 Raising the Environmental Protection Awareness of “New Citizen”.

As society is our home, we are bound to take care of it. The cultivation of a good environmental protection consciousness of "new citizen" can help to solve the ecological problems.

First, enhance the government credibility.

The credibility of the government matters the levels the “new citizens” trust in it. There has been many cases of forced relocation and opaque demolition in the process of urbanization, resulting in the citizens’ lower faith in the government. More worse, land-lost farmers insist that the government is trying to rob profits with them through demolition, instead of protecting their interests. Therefore, only when the

fundamental requirements of the land-lost farmers are satisfied, can they fully participate in the process of environmental protection.

Second, raise the protection consciousness of the land-lost farmers.

The farmers move to concentrated community from their original homestead, which, has changed their living habitats rather than their habits and custom, so their awareness of environmental protection must be strengthened in order to shape their living habits. However, it can not be achieved overnight, but taking up from the trivial stuff at hand. On one hand, the government should provide access for the farmers to know about the importance of environmental protection by broadcasting relative knowledge on it. On the other hand, mutual supervision among the neighbors need to be acted out, curbing the occurrence of throwing litters until everyone acknowledge the necessity of classifying the rubbish. Meanwhile, critical education should be laid on the residents who privately reclaim the green land, which is not individually processed but the common wealth of the new community. Hence, the ecological protection awareness of the residents can be promoted from minor matter like the above aspects.

Conclusion

Urbanization has brought the urban-rural mutual prosperity, while the destruction of the ecological environment has brought a greater disaster to human beings. To seriously practice the requirements and directions of President Xi in the eighteenth report of the Party, we are urgent in strengthening the government responsibility, forming a government-leading, social-participating, and citizen-supervising ecological protection mode, improving the mode of extensive economic growth in the past, and then realizing the ecological protection of endogenous innovation development.

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