

Research on the mechanism of social media-driven ecological governance under the three dimensions of environmental justice —— Multi-dimensional analysis of Qinghai Muli coal mine incident

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Abstract. In global environmental governance, problems such as information monopoly and marginalization of vulnerable groups have become increasingly prominent. These problems have limited the public's awareness of environmental issues and their effective participation in environmental decision-making, further exacerbating environmental inequality. Social media has the characteristics of immediacy, interactivity and wide coverage, and has great potential in breaking information monopolies, promoting public participation and enhancing the empowerment of vulnerable groups. However, its mechanism of action within the framework of environmental justice remains to be studied. This paper takes the incident of the Muli Coal Mine in Qinghai Province as an example to explore how social media can promote distributive justice, procedural justice and recognition justice in ecological governance under the PEST perspective, providing new theoretical and practical insights for environmental governance research.

Keywords: Environmental Justice; Social Media; Ecological Governance.

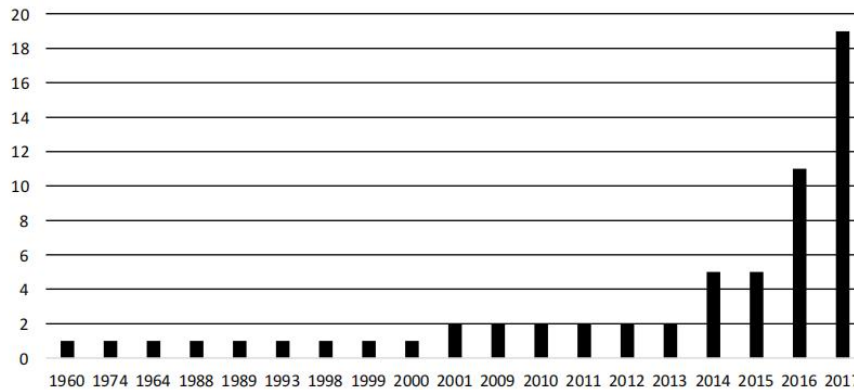
1. Introduction

The Muli Coal Mine illegal mining and ecological restoration incident in Qinghai Province (2020 - 2023) is a major event in China's ecological environment field, occurring in the ecologically sensitive Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and having a wide impact and profound influence. The Muli mining area, located at the junction of Tianjun County in Haixi Prefecture and Gangcha County in Haibei Prefecture, Qinghai Province, is part of the coal-rich Qilian Mountains belt. However, illegal mining has significantly damaged this fragile high-altitude ecosystem. Notably, the local Tibetan pastoral residents, who have long lived on this land and relied on herding for their livelihood, have been particularly affected by the incident. They maintain a harmonious coexistence with nature. However, illegal mining at the Muli Coal Mine has severely damaged their living environment. Illegal mining has led to systematic destruction of the alpine meadows and placed local herdsmen in a marginalized position during the environmental improvement process. Their voices are ignored, their interests are infringed upon, and their lives have become extremely difficult.

This incident has exposed three lacks of justice in environmental governance. First, from the perspective of distributive justice, the distribution of benefits completely ignores the ecological compensation of Tibetan herders. Illegal mining activities have reaped huge profits, but these profits have not benefited the local herders. They have not received deserved ecological compensation and have been deeply disturbed by environmental destruction. Second, from the perspective of acknowledging justice, the traditional ecological knowledge of local herdsmen, who are very familiar with the land and possess much ecological knowledge, has been abandoned. However, this knowledge has not received sufficient attention and utilization in environmental governance. Finally, from the perspective of procedural justice, the lack of public participation channels in the supervision process makes it difficult for local herders and other members of the public to participate in environmental governance decision-making and supervision, resulting in prolonged illegal mining activities. It reminds us that greater emphasis should be placed on environmental protection and ecological governance to ensure environmental justice when

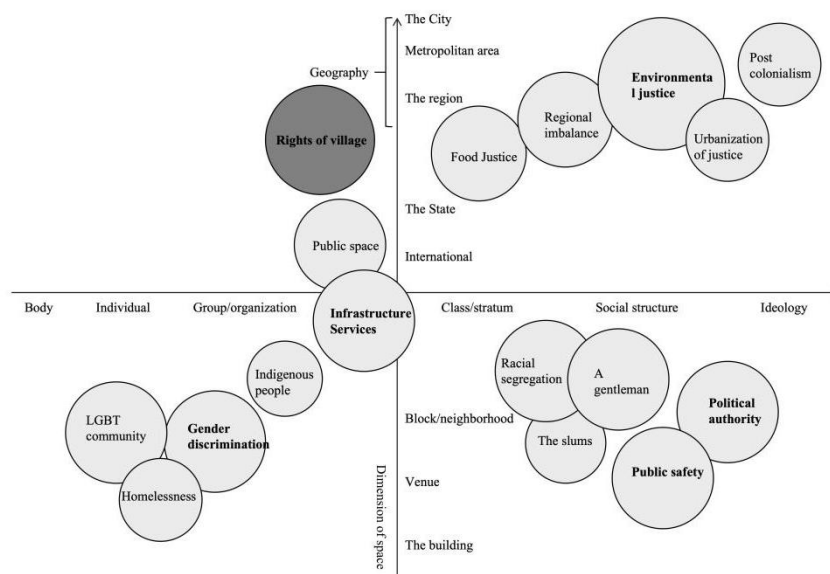
developing the economy. Only in this way can we achieve harmonious coexistence between humans and nature and continuously advance China's ecological civilization construction.[1]

Fig. 1 Two or more references



This study proposes to combine the dimensions of environmental justice (distributive justice, procedural justice and determination justice) with PEST analysis (political, economic, social and technological), and creatively constructs a "three-dimensional -PEST" comprehensive analysis framework (Figure 2). Distributive justice focuses on the fair distribution of resources and burdens, procedural justice focuses on the fairness and transparency of decision-making, and recognition justice focuses on respecting cultural and social identities. These three dimensions offer a comprehensive perspective for understanding environmental issues. The PEST system reveals the operational mechanism of social media in ecological governance, offering new methodological tools for environmental governance research. [2], Summarize the research of relevant scholars in recent years from the perspectives of politics (the pressure from the central environmental protection inspection), economy (attracting social capital), society (public participation in environmental protection), and technology (algorithmic traffic distribution mechanism), and analyze how social media can promote ecological governance to provide a theoretical basis.[3]

Fig. 2 Three-dimensional PEST integration analysis framework



ways to achieve distributive, procedural, and recognition dimensions of environmental justice. Some studies show that social media promotes public participation in environmental governance through information dissemination and advocacy, improves decision-making transparency and fairness, and provides diverse information channels and interaction platforms. This enhances public understanding and experience of environmental issues, contributing to the implementation of environmental justice

From a specific perspective, social media's information dissemination mechanism can easily lead to the rapid spread of false information. First, social media's low entry threshold and anonymity make it difficult to trace information sources, creating conditions for false information spread. Second, social media's algorithmic recommendation system, which recommends information based on user preferences and habits, can cause the "information cocoon" phenomenon. This makes the information received by users monotonous, reducing their ability to distinguish information authenticity. Under such circumstances, unverified news can easily spread rapidly within user groups, causing unnecessary panic and misunderstandings. Moreover, social media has problems such as usage thresholds and digital disparities. In environmental governance, full public participation is key to achieving environmental justice. However, due to differences in technical equipment, network access, and digital literacy, some groups, such as the elderly and remote area residents, may not effectively use social media to obtain and disseminate environmental information. This restricts their participation opportunities. This also makes it difficult for the decision-making process of environmental governance to reflect the interests and demands of these people. Therefore, it is necessary to deeply explore how to improve the application of social media in environmental governance to achieve the goal of environmental justice more effectively

3. Conclusions

Analyzing from the perspective of PEST is helpful for a comprehensive understanding of the impact of social media on environmental governance, especially in the Muli Coal Mine ecological restoration incident. Politically, after social media exposure, relevant departments quickly formed an investigation team to look into illegal mining and lack of supervision, with many officials being severely held accountable. The rapid responses show social media's strong influence in promoting political accountability and policy implementation. It allows the public to directly pressure government departments, enabling more proactive environmental supervision. Socially, in the Muli Coal Mine case, social media discussions and calls led more organizations and people to join ecological restoration efforts, creating a positive atmosphere of societal participation in environmental governance. This shows that social media provides a platform for the public to voice their demands for supervision. It generates strong public opinion pressure, complementing traditional methods and prompting the government, enterprises, and social organizations to actively participate in environmental governance. Economically, social media guides enterprises and social organizations to focus on ecological restoration and invest more resources, increasing funds and technical support for related projects. In 2021, the State Council issued opinions encouraging social capital to participate in ecological protection and restoration, establishing a "whoever restores benefits" market mechanism. This releases policy dividends and taps restoration potential. Thus, social media not only draws public attention to environmental issues but also directs economic resources towards environmental governance, facilitating ecological restoration.

Social media's influence in cross-border environmental governance is growing. It serves as a key venue for obtaining information, exchanging ideas, and expressing opinions, breaking time and space constraints and optimizing information dissemination speed and scope. For example, the Amazon rainforest, known as the "lungs of the Earth," is crucial for global climate regulation but is in crisis due to human activities like illegal logging and agricultural expansion. Environmentalists, scientists, and people worldwide use social media to share photos, videos, and reports, sparking global concern and discussion. This public pressure has pushed the Brazilian government to

prioritize Amazon protection and implement measures like increasing penalties for illegal logging and promoting sustainable forestry policies. Social media acts as a bridge, uniting individual efforts into a powerful public opinion force, advancing cross-border environmental governance.

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