

Problems and Reflections Arising from Inequality in Natural Resources

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Abstract: This article explores the problems brought about by the inequality of natural resources, including environmental pollution, conflicts between countries, unbalanced national development, political polarization and de-globalization. The article first points out that the unequal distribution of natural resources leads to environmental problems. Secondly, the inequality of resources is one of the main cause of conflicts between countries. In addition, the inequality of resources will also lead to the unbalanced development of countries, which in turn triggers political polarization and de-globalization, affecting the normal operation of global trade. The article also emphasizes the importance of international cooperation and the negative impact of political polarization on international cooperation. Finally, the article calls on countries to support each other, strengthen international trade, achieve the global circulation of resources, and pay attention to sustainable development and green development.

Keywords: Inequality in Natural Resources; Sustainable Development; Global Governance

1. Definition of natural resources

“Natural resources can be defined as the resources that exist (on the planet) independent of human actions,” such as food, fertilizers, metals, water, and geothermal energy. However, the distribution of natural resource is uneven, such as the concentration of precious mineral resources in the hands of a few countries. For example, the Middle East is rich in mineral resources, and Southeast Asian countries are rich in fruits and vegetables. These innate natural resources have brought them convenience and economy. Meanwhile, the inequality of natural resources leads to many problems, such as environmental pollution problems, uneven national development, and international conflicts.

Inequality in natural resources leads to environmental pollution and affects the biological chain

First, natural resource inequality destroyed our sustainable life with increasing environmental pollution and damaged biological chain. Due to the land shortage in Japan, Kansai International Airport in Osaka is a piece of land created by the sea. The Japanese used various garbage to make caissons, which became the foundation for land reclamation. “Caissons made of garbage are an important cause of pollution to the marine environment, such as caused the reduction of tidal flats on Japan’s coast.” The decline live space of marine animals will destroy the marine biological chain. In addition, land reclamation will release some industrial pollution, which has certain side effects on maintaining the stability of the marine environment and ecology. Thus, the loss of coastal tidal flats and industrial pollution by reclamation led to a decrease in biodiversity. United Nations pointed that “the continued loss of biodiversity and the continued degradation of ecosystems have profound consequences for human well-being and survival.” Thus, the scarcity of land resources has forced Japan to build airports on land reclamation, which in turn has intensified the damage to the ecological environment and threaten human survival.

2. Natural Resource Inequality Leads to Conflict

Secondly, Inequality in natural resources leads to national conflict. “Between one-quarter and one-half of interstate wars since 1973 have been linked to oil. Conflicts triggered by the prospect of oil-market domination, such as the United States’ war with Iraq over Kuwait in 1991.” Obviously, the unbalanced oil distribution caused many seriously conflicts between countries to fight for having this precious limited energy. Similarly, land as a limited resource has also triggered many wars. In the Sino-Japanese War, China was defeated and was forced to sign the Treaty of Shimonoseki with Japan. “Among the main provisions of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, it

included the cession of Taiwan Island and its affiliated islands, the Penghu Islands, and the Liaodong Peninsula to Japan.” Japan thus acquired land and capital, alleviating its own land shortages and agricultural depression. This shows that the main reason for Japan’s invasion of China is the extreme shortage of its own land. Thus China, with its vast land and rich resources, has become the primary target of aggression from Japan.

3. Inequality in natural resources leads to imbalances in national development, political polarization and de-globalization

On the other hand, Inequality in natural resources leads to unbalanced national development and leads to political polarization and de-globalization. Addisu pointed out in his research paper that “the development is consistent positive direct effects found for physical capital measures”, which means that natural resources affect development, so imbalances in natural resources can lead to differences in development between countries. Of course, uneven development will also lead to uneven economic development and ultimately lead to political polarization and de-globalization. Some argue that today’s globalization cuts the imbalances caused by resources, but it is to compete for these precious resources that, of course, there are historical ethnic conflicts that divide the world into two political groups: Russia and the United States. Those two countries controlled two important global oil transportation routes because of their initial military capabilities, while the rest stood apart for various reasons. Such political polarization seriously affects the normal functioning of global trade, and the two groups are constantly pressuring each other through trade restrictions, but there are no winners in the trade war, which is a heavy blow to global trade markets.

4. Political polarization affects international cooperation

Therefore, political polarization undermines global cooperation. “Steiner went on to call for a renewed sense of global solidarity to face shared and interconnected challenges”. However, he acknowledged that the international community was currently “stagnant in making these changes.” It indicates that de-globalization is neither feasible nor realistic, and that all countries in the world must unite to resist social problems rather than move toward political polarization. At the same time, “Research shows that no region in the world is even close to being self-sufficient, with each region importing at least 25% of at least one major type of goods and services from other regions.” For example, North Korea, one of the world’s most centrally planned economies, has long suffered from a poor economy, due to its insular policies. Its second seven-year plan clearly failed. “It was officially claimed that the economy had grown at an annual rate of 8.8% during the plan, somewhat below the planned rate of 9.6%. During the plan, the target annual output of 10 million tons of grains (cereals and pulses) was attained. However, by official admission, the targets of only five other commodities were fulfilled. Judging from the growth rates announced for some twelve industrial products, it is highly unlikely that the total industrial output increased at an average rate of 12.2% as claimed.” In addition, in the figure 1, North Korea’s GDP has been experiencing negative growth in recent years. All these show that the closed economy under North Korea’s closed-door policy is not optimistic, so international trade is particularly important.

North Korean real GDP Growth												
(percentage change over previous year)												
'90	'95	'00	'05	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17	'18
-4.3	-4.4	0.4	3.8	-0.5	0.8	1.3	1.1	1.0	-1.1	3.9	-3.5	-4.1
(9.8 ²⁾)	(9.6 ²⁾)	(8.9 ²⁾)	(4.3)	(6.8)	(3.7)	(2.4)	(3.2)	(3.2)	(2.8)	(2.9)	(3.2)	(2.7)

Note: 1) Figures in parentheses represent South Korea’s GDP growth rates.

2) Figures based on 2010 prices

Figure1. North Korean real GDP Growth

5. Conclusions

All in all, we can have a reasonable conclusion that inequality of natural resources may lead to serious problems, including environmental pollution, unbalanced national development and national conflicts. To cope with these challenges, countries should enhance cooperation, promote international trade and achieve the global circulation of resources. At the same time, the world should be committed to saving resources, focusing on sustainable development and protecting our common Earth. Remember that there is only one earth and all countries in the world are one.

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