

River management and the importance of relational values

Abstract:

River Chief System is a river management system in China in which government politicians are in charge of solving all river/water-related issues, e.g., water resources protection, water coastline management, water pollution prevention, and water environment governance. I argue that this river management policy is unlikely to work in the long term, because it lacks the participation of anyone who has a real relationship with the rivers, e.g., the people that live near them. I argue that the River Chief System ought to make use of relational values that are based on personal interactions, life experience, historical/cultural identification and even self-identification between the rivers and the local citizens.

Proposal:

10 years ago, China created a river management system called River Chief System or River Leader System. This system developed from a local experiment in Wuxi, Jiangsu and was employed nationwide, and is now signed into law. What is River Chief System? Simply speaking, the Party and government leaders serve as river chiefs. They implement local main responsibilities in accordance with laws and regulations, coordinate and integrate all forces, and effectively promote water resources protection, water coastline management, water pollution prevention, and water environment governance. The river chief's management of the river counts as one part of his overall performance review. Scholars like Jiang bing, Wang shuming, Cai mengmeng and Zhan yuanyuan all raised their concerns and doubts about this particular river management from the perspective of public policy and legal policy.

I, as an environmental ethicist, consider that the River Chief System fails to make use of relational values. What I mean by relational values? I want to follow but develop the definition of relational values by Chan et al.,. They define that *'Relational values have been defined as 'preferences, principles, and virtues associated with relationships, both interpersonal and as articulated by policies and social norms'*(Chan, 2016). Moreover, I argue that if humans and nature have any of the following relationships, then humans should care about nature more than they care about a mere instrument. For example, 1) humans being part of nature like a member in an institution which is a part and whole relationship. Being a part can contribute to the whole and also the whole can benefit the part. 2) human and nature may have a kind of friendship like a special partnership, humans can't live without nature running well and nature may need humans to help it flourish. 3) nature can also be considered

as “mother nature”, i.e., there are possibilities to discover that nature as a “mother nature” has a mother-child relation with human.

I argue that the relational values are some certain relational values I will discuss based on personal interactions, life experience, historical culture identification and even self-identifications with the rivers or lakes. People that have these relationships and connections with nature will voluntarily be motivated to preserve the rivers/lakes and to care about them. If you care about nature in this way, then you will be stably and consistently motivated to protect it and take responsibility for it. But the River Chief may lack these relations and connections with the river so that they don't have the certain relationship so that relational values I discussed above. Therefore, I believe that the long-term and effective development of this policy will attract a lot of questions and opposition.