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Author: Prof. Jie Long
Shenzhen University, China, longjie@szu.edu.cn

Ms. Yimiao Zhao
Shenzhen University, China, zhaoyimiao@szu.edu.cn

SPACE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION GOVERNANCE: A DECENTRALIZED MODEL

Abstract

The international community has been regulating and restricting international subjects' behavior through the Outer Space Treaty regime to ensure comprehensive space governance since the 1960s. However, the space environment is being threatened as states, and commercial entities continue to expand, increasing commercial activities in outer space. Balancing commercial interests with humankind's common interests is becoming increasingly urgent, and the existing space governance model featured by ambiguous and lagging space law should be improved. In this context, as scholars and experts suggest, institutional innovation and a decentralized governance model can potentially solve the dilemma of space environmental protection governance. Such as, under the Artemis Accords, the countries led by the U.S. intend to establish a semi-independent idealized space governance ring system. Based on this, this paper aims to propose a variety of feasible and efficient space environmental governance methods and also argues that a polycentric space governance system shall be applied to its environmental aspects to resolve issues caused by space debris and other factors of space activities. In addition, various entities, including state governments, international organizations, and non-state actors, can take measures to strengthen the bottom-up approach to achieve space environmental protection. Consequently, diverse participants can jointly break the confusing governance deadlock mainly caused by the uncertainty of the existing space law regime. Finally, this paper emphasizes that outer space is the common property and valuable asset of all humankind. According to the Outer Space Treaty, humankind shall be protected from environmental damage caused by space activities through various means. Under a decentralized space governance model, the space environment can be developed and exploited in a sustainable manner. Thus, the interests of humans could be fully considered and protected in the space commercialization era.