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# Green Assessment: Critical Review of IR's Neo-liberal Theory on the Environment\*

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## Abstract

The theory of international regime has dominated study on international environmental politics in International Relations (IR). It has made a huge impact on the study of environmental governance. This article argues how the issue of the environment has been incorporated into neo-liberal theory in IR, and highlights the benefits and drawbacks for research into environmental regime and governance. In order to bridge the gap in current environmental governance study, ideas from writings on nature, imported from Green Political Theory (GPT) are suggested for exploring ethical and different modes of governance and interactions, including social improvement.

**Keywords:** Neo-liberalism, Environmental Governance, International Environmental Regime, International Relations, Green Political Theory

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## 1. Introduction

In the last few decades, the international dimension of environmental issues has been analysed in two theories, Green Political Theory (GPT) and International Relations (IR) theory. It can be said that both theories have focused on the environmental problem (i.e. identifying and defining those issues, and, in the case of IR theory, suggesting solutions to them); however, there are several different approaches which are important when identifying a starting point for a discussion on the integrative aspects between the two theories.

With regards to the former, GPT, the theoretical debate on the politics of environment has been developed intensively since the publication of *The Limits to Growth* in 1972.<sup>1)</sup> The key ideas in the theorisation of environmental politics in GPT are concerned principally with tension in the relations between the human and the non-human: in short, subjects such as ecologism, environmental justice, the non-human world and future generations, science and technology, and green democracy.<sup>2)</sup> Most of these approaches, which posit links between human beings and their environment, were inspired by *The Limits to Growth*.

All of these ideas are derived from a concern with the issue of human's activity from the Greens' point of view. For instance, regarding democracy, the difference between liberal democracy and green democracy is relatively clear; the former maximises the interest of individuals, while the latter explores, and attempt to identify, what is good in a universal sense in order to 'naturalise' individuals (i.e. increase the individual's awareness that he/she is part of nature).<sup>3)</sup> Similarly, Conservatism stresses the love of the country while liberalism privileges human individuals.<sup>4)</sup> Thus, it could be said that GPT is the theory of "greening" political theory, challenging existing assumptions in Political Theory by introducing a more environmental point of view.

The second approach, stemming from IR theory, emerged in the late 1970s when the theoretical attention of many IR scholars moved to international/global issues, including that of environmental degradation. A concomitant shift was a move away from a focus on

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1) Donella Meadows, Dennis Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William Behrens, *The Limits to Growth* (London: Pan Books, 1972).

2) John Barry and Andrew Dobson, "Green Political Theory: A Report," in Gerald F. Gaus and Chandran Kukathas eds., *Handbook of Political Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 2004), 180-191.

3) Michael Saward, "Green Democracy?," in Andrew Dobson and Paul Lucardie eds., *The Politics of Nature: Explorations in Green Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 1993), 68.

4) Roger Scruton, "Conservatism," in Andrew Dobson and Robyn Eckersley eds., *Political Theory and Ecological Challenge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 7-19.

the conflict-based relations of states (e.g. the balance of power between the East and West from realists' view) to a study of cooperation-based interaction between states motivated by détente and economic interdependence. Moreover, from the 1980s to the beginning of 1990s, the theory of international regimes developed, with more attention paid to the environment. During this period IR scholars, in discussing solutions to environmental problems, framed the debate within the context of neo-liberal institutionalisation. Moreover, during and after the discussion on international regimes, they began exploring environmental issues within the theory of global governance; this examination was necessary as IR global governance theory did not initially adequately address the problems associated with the cooperation on environmental issues.

The two theories, GPT and theory on IR on the environment,<sup>5)</sup> emerge from different origins and have consequently developed differently. Yet, the two are not totally independent, and it is worthwhile to explore the relationship between them. Patterson summarises the discussions of GPT and its background.<sup>6)</sup> He rejects the approach of scholars who use theories of IR to examine environmental issues because of their substitutability to the neo-liberal institutionalist dominant approach in IR. He therefore introduces only GPT and global ecology to denote green politics. In other words, his argument is critical of the claim that the theories of the Environmentalists are similar to those of IR. Indeed, he is correct in saying that it is certainly necessary to distinguish between Environmentalists and Greens in a sense.<sup>7)</sup>

However, this distinction between the two viewpoints does not mean that it is reasonable to reject those arguments of Environmentalists which are related to theories of IR. It is also difficult to say that there can be progress without any argument in the literature in IR; thus, for example, the green position can be explored within the context of neo-liberalism in IR. The theory of IR originally started from an investigation of the interactions (conflict and cooperation) between states as an expansion of human relationships.<sup>8)</sup> To put it another way, until recently, IR theory has not focused on the environment as its attention on the non-human realm has been minimal.

Nevertheless, we need to consider the 'IR-side' theory on the environment in order to

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5) There are other approaches such as Marxism and Postmodernism, however, this article mainly covers Neo-liberalism since this theoretical approach has had a great impact to the other studies and assumptions of environmental study in IR.

6) Matthew Patterson, "Green Politics," in Scott Burchill, Andrew Linklater, Richard Devetak, Jack Donnelly, Matthew Patterson, Christian Reus-Smit, and Jacqui True, *Theories of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 235-257.

7) Andrew Dobson, *Green Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

8) Eric Laffèriere and Peter J. Stoett, *International Relations Theory and Ecological Thought: Towards a Synthesis* (London: Routledge, 1999).

scrutinise the relationship between GPT and theories of IR. It is important to understand why the argument of neo-liberal institutionalists, particularly on the subject of regime theory, has held dominion over the environmental issues in liberalism, over the realists' explanation of IR theory. Moreover, it is necessary to know how the theory of environmental governance has changed the scope of analysis. Furthermore, an examination which identifies the differences between GPT and IR could contribute to development of the theorisation in IR on the environment. Such an examination could also lead to a dialogue between the two theories, with IR theory incorporating some approaches or perspectives from GPT.

Therefore, in this article, I will highlight to what extent regime theory, as propounded by both neo-liberal institutionalists and neo-realists, is helpful in understanding and solving the environmental issue. I will also argue how the study of environmental governance could or could not contribute to "greening" the theory on environment in IR. In other words, this could be a green assessment or 'ecosizing' of IR theory. In order to discuss the points raised in this and the preceding paragraph the following three steps will be taken. First of all, the definition of, and the debate on, global governance in the literature of IR will be explained. An examination of the definition of international regime theory will be included as the theory is an important part of the discussion on environmental governance. Secondly, three aspects of regime theory will be explored in a discussion on the theory's utility: its versatility, its problem-solving capacity, and its interconnection to international/global governance. I will also explain the drawbacks of regime theory, via these aspects, through a comparison with some of the ideas of GPT. Thirdly, and finally, after these three matters have been considered, I will make a further comment on the relationship between GPT and IR theory in terms of ways of changing society and people's behaviour.

## 2. Studying Environmental Governance

### 2-1. Overview of the Features of Environmental Governance

The issue of the environment was the driving force behind the debate on global governance when the concept was first theorised.<sup>9)</sup> This can be attributed to the fact that

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9) Another example is security study. Regarding the expansion of idea of security, environmental issue was used as the new common threat, i.e. environmental security. There are, of course, critics on this type of security because this idea discusses only on conflict not security or because it is just the theory-oriented study. Thomas F. Homer-Dixon, "On the Threshold: Environmental Changed as Causes of Acute Conflict," *International Security* 16/2 (Fall 1991): 76-116; Marc Levy, "Is the Environment a National Security Issue?," *International Security* 20 (1995): 35-62; Jon Barnett, "Destabiliz-

environmental issues. This can be attributed to the fact that environmental issues transcend national boundaries. They can be transnational and local, but if the latter, still of global interest in two senses; firstly, local matters can still have impacts beyond their geographical location and, secondly, the same or similar issues may occur in many places around the world. The introduction of environmental issues into IR theory necessitated the expansion of the scale of research in the field to include the multiple roles of actors and institutions in their engagements with the environment.

Concern with environmental problems has been sustained in various international environment-related conferences and meetings. These began with the United Nations Conference on Human and Environment (UNCHE) in 1972, and have since included the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. The establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in 1972, which has become one of the components of international institutional arrangements, and the EC (currently EU)'s involvement in European environmental issues (from the late 1970s onwards, especially after the signing of the 1979 Geneva Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP)) contributed to the present understanding of the significance of the environment as a subject for discussions at international level.

Environmental governance study seeks (and discusses) the attainment of common goals or solutions to certain collective problems which cannot be overcome by contemporary sovereign states. It enquires how environmental governance can be achieved in a fragmented system of states and private agencies. Global governance theory emerged out of the debate on global change at the beginning of the 1990s.<sup>10)</sup> There are several definitions of global governance theory as it relates to the environment. According to James N. Rosenau, one of the leading theorists on global governance and other theories on global political change, "governance without government" expands the political sphere.<sup>11)</sup> The Commission on Global Governance defines global governance as "the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs" and includes "formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as in-

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ing the Environment-Conflict Thesis," *Review of International Studies* 26 (2000): 271-288.

10) Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Sinclair, "The Emergence of Global Governance Theory," in Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Sinclair eds., *Approaches to Global Governance Theory* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 3-22.

11) James N. Rosenau, "Governance, Order, and Change in World Politics," in James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel eds., *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3-8.

formal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest".<sup>12)</sup> The World Resources Institute defines governance as the formulation of decision-making and its process, and is thus concerned with the function of power and distribution of responsibility.<sup>13)</sup>

In considering the environmental dimension of global governance, John Vogler identifies four ways in which international cooperation can occur: international law, international organisation, international regime, and scientific cooperation.<sup>14)</sup> International law in this context refers to the growing body of international environmental law.<sup>15)</sup> The objects of analysis are framework conventions, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Convention on Biological Diversity (known informally as the Biodiversity Convention), the Rio Declaration, and other institutional advancements.<sup>16)</sup> These international environmental provisions are categorised by international law researchers as "soft" or "hard" law.

### International Regime Theory and the Neo-liberal Institutionalists

One of the most dominant components of global governance of environmental issues is international regime theory. Regime theory, which emerged in the 1970s, is an attempt to explain the behaviour conditioned by rules in an otherwise anarchical system.<sup>17)</sup> Early theorists focused on economics as they sought to explain the interdependence between states.<sup>18)</sup> It can be argued that the first positive instance of international regime building (i.e. cooperation among states) around an environmental issue was the CLRTAP of 1979.<sup>19)</sup>

Regime theory has a wide range of definitions which, according to some IR theorists, is

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12) The Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood: The Report of the Commission on Global Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 2.

13) United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Environment Programme, The World Bank, and World Resources Institute, *World Resources 2002-2004: Decisions for the Earth: Balance, Voice, and Power* (Washington, D.C.: World Resources Institute, 2003), 6.

14) John Vogler, "In Defence of International Environmental Cooperation," in John Barry and Robin Eckersley eds., *The State and the Global Ecological Crisis* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 229-253.

15) For instance, Philippe Sands, *Principles of International Environmental Law* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); Peter H. Sand, *Transnational Environmental Law: Lessons in Global Change* (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 1999).

16) Peter H. Sand, "International Law after Rio," *European Journal of International Law* 4/3 (1993): 377-389.

17) Richard Little, "International Regimes," in John Baylis and Steve Smith eds., *The Globalization of World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 369-386.

18) Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (New York: Longman, 1989).

19) Don Munton, Marvin Soroos, Elena Nikitina, and Marc A. Levy, "Acid Rain in Europe and North America," in Oran R. Young ed., *The Effectiveness of International Environmental Regimes: Causal Connections and Behavioral Mechanisms* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 155-247.

one of its weaknesses.<sup>20)</sup> First, from the domain of International Political Economy, the most typical and classical definition of an international regime is articulated by Stephen D. Krasner, who defines it as a set of “principles, norms, rules and decision-making procedures around which actor expectations converge in a given issue area”.<sup>21)</sup> According to this definition, there are two approaches to regime theory: one informed by rationalism the other a social idea (currently known as social constructivism). The former explains that states search for international institutions, the norms and rules of which they are happy to comply with in order to explore ways in which they can cooperate with other states with common or complementary interests in the system of the nation-state.<sup>22)</sup> Members in international society basically prioritise rules, and their commitment is regulated by formal agreements even if they do not always have legal binding force (i.e. there is no legal motivation not to deceive other states).<sup>23)</sup> In this regard, (neo-)realists claim that regime building is always determined by the power the member states have (i.e. regimes reflect existing distributions of power), whereas neo-liberal institutionalists argue that states should aim at maximising their own interests, making absolute gains.<sup>24)</sup>

The dominant school of regime theory on the environment is derived from neo-liberal institutionalism. Oran R. Young, one of the neo-liberal institutionalists, puts the several concepts of regime involving social institutions together to construct an international regime theory. Young attempts to answer the question of how regimes are formulated by identifying three types of regime: imposed, spontaneous and negotiated.<sup>25)</sup> An imposed regime is based on an agreement in which the superior state or elite imposes its ideas on other members by putting pressure on them through enforcement or a sort of cognitive (“Gramscian”) hegemony. This is the regime model propounded by (neo-)realists. For them, regimes cannot be built without power relations between states; in short, power will not always be equally distributed within regimes.<sup>26)</sup>

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20) Needless to say, there are many definitions of international regime. A broader one, for instance, international regime can be understood as “persistent and connected set of rules and practices that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations”. Robert O. Keohane, Peter M. Haas and Marc A. Levy, “The Effectiveness of International Environmental Institutions,” in Peter M. Haas, Robert O. Keohane and Marc A. Levy eds., *Institutions for the Earth: Sources of Effective International Environmental Protection* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993), 4-5.

21) Stephen D. Krasner, “Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables,” in Stephen D. Krasner ed., *International Regimes* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1-21.

22) Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 63.

23) Arthur A. Stein, “Coordination and Collaboration: Regimes in an Anarchic World,” in Stephen D. Krasner ed., *op.cit.*, 115-140.

24) Joseph Grieco, “Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism,” *International Organization* 42/3 (1988): 485-507.

25) Oran R. Young, *International Cooperation: Building Regimes for Natural Resources and the Environment* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989).

26) Susan Strange, “Cave! Hic Dragones: A Critique of Regime Analysis,” in Stephen D. Krasner ed. *op.cit.*, 337-354.



The second type identified by Young, spontaneous agreement, occurs when actions are done without conscious effort or according to patterns of action which have become institutionalised. Using the study of Robert Axelrod and Friedrich Hayek on the evolution of cooperation,<sup>27)</sup> Young insists that such a regime enables a member of the group's behaviour without any tangible mechanism for implementation. On the other hand, using the battle of the sexes to illustrate their point, realists claim the prospect of a pay-off can lead to an equilibrium solution (or regime). Such a solution is dependent upon the unequal power relations among the actors. The third type, a negotiated regime, is positioned in the middle between imposed and spontaneous regimes. Here, with conscious actions, self-reliant actors agree on mutually acceptable regulations and procedures of decision-making through the process of negotiation; it does not always mean that there is an equal power distribution. According to Young, a regime is defined as a set of rules developed to achieve norms which are constantly redefined (and renegotiated) in the process.<sup>28)</sup>

### Expansion of Analysis on Environmental Governance

Rosenau emphasises the changing direction of governing to express the view that the 'political sphere' is moving towards both micro-level and macro-level.<sup>29)</sup> Both the state-centric and multi-centric perspectives are incorporated into Rosenau's definition of global governance. This perspective includes the alliance of actors such as scientists and/or experts (to form epistemic communities), NGOs, transnational corporations (TNCs)/multi-national corporations (MNCs) and local authorities which could have an important influence on the process of global change. In particular, the impact of epistemic communities on the process of policy-making has been incorporated into the context of international regime building, although there are some critics who point out that this impact on the decision-making process depends on various conditions.<sup>30)</sup> Regime theory from the reflective point of view has, since the 1990s, had a different approach.<sup>31)</sup> The reflective approach (taken by social constructivists) discusses regime theory in terms of "principles and

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27) Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984); Friedrich A. Hayek, *Law, Legislation, and Liberty, Volume 3: The Political Order of a Free People* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979).

28) Oran R. Young, "International Regimes: Toward a New Theory of Institutions," *World Politics* 39/1 (1986): 107.

29) James N. Rosenau, "Toward an Ontology for Global Governance," in Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Sinclair eds., *Approaches to Global Governance Theory* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), 287-301.

30) Lawrence E. Susskind, *Environmental Diplomacy: Negotiating More Effective Global Agreements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 62 and 74; Oran R. Young, *International Governance: Protecting the Environment in a Stateless Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 94-97.

31) Peter M. Haas, *Saving the Mediterranean: the Politics of International Environmental Cooperation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

shared understanding of desirable and acceptable forms of social behavior".<sup>32)</sup> The increased awareness of global change (an example of a new social behaviour) can be counted as a beneficial characteristic of the various political changes at the global level. In addition, political elites and businesses (such as TNCs and MNCs) could play significant roles in the global economy and/or the global political arena. It can be said that the activity of the G-7/8 and the Global Compact are examples of global governance.

The global civil society represented by NGOs is also attracting increasing attention.<sup>33)</sup> Such a vision is not new, having been part of 18<sup>th</sup>-century liberalism. Although theoretical interest in the role of non-state actors declined during the 1980s (when IR theorists became more interested in the "neo-neo debate (intra-paradigm debate)"<sup>34)</sup>), it was reignited with the emergence of a pluralist perspective among some neo-liberalists. In the UN context, although NGOs were accredited to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in the 1940s, they did not play a significant role until the 1990s when they were acknowledged in Agenda 21 at UNCED in 1992 and the action plan at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in 1994. The membership of transnational environmental NGOs such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth, and a number of other environmental NGOs has increased after the change of their status at global-scaled conferences. Social constructivists make claims for the importance of learning through iteration whereas both the (neo-)realist and neo-liberalist approaches are premised on the assumption that political actors are rational.

To sum up, emerging attention on the global environmental issue in the neo-liberal IR debate has contributed to progress in the formation and effectiveness of international regime theory, while study on international environmental issues in IR originally expanded the scope of analysis (e.g. by including the of exploring human beings relationship with nature). The merits of the environment and the motivation to resolve current and potential global environmental issues have promoted the study of global governance. These facts, combined with the ideas of social constructivists, have been partially incorporated into the development of regime theory.

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32) Friedrich Kratochwil and John Ruggie, "International Organization: A State of the Art of the State," *International Organization* 40/4 (1986): 764.

33) Ronnie D. Lipschutz and Judith Mayer, *Global Civil Society and Global Environmental Governance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

34) Steven L. Lamy, "Contemporary Mainstream Approaches: Neo-realism and Neo-liberalism," in John Baylis and Steve Smith eds., *op.cit.*, 205-224.

## 2-2. Double-Edged Aspects of Regime Study on the Environment

In this section, I will discuss two dimensions of international regime study on the environment. One is the three aspects of regime theory related to its utility. These are its versatility, its problem-solving capacity, and its interconnections with international/global governance. The international and global environmental changes (and academic discussions) can be related to these benefits of the neo-liberal interpretation of regime theory (which assumes the continued existence of current institutions and international relations). At the same time, the theory has also been criticised by advocates of GPT because of several shortcomings. These critics argue that regime theory is ambiguous, suffers from a theoretical perspective inherited from IR theory, and that there are heterogeneous understandings of the relationship between the theory and the environment.

### Regime Versatility

The first strength of international regime theory lies in its versatility. Not only can it serve as a guide to solve a variety of problems, but it is also able to absorb ideas, assumptions, and logics from other fields. Thus, regime theory has incorporated the foundations of micro-economics during the 1970s and 1980s, concepts from sociological debates during the 1990s, and many ideas from international law.<sup>35)</sup> For instance, the regime approach draws on years of traditional consensus of the last of these.<sup>36)</sup> Implementation, legitimacy, and justification, all often used to discuss the effectiveness of regimes, are all concepts drawn from international law study. In the previous section, a regime was defined as an international institution. As such, a regime operates according to formal and informal rules of conduct stipulated in international legal norms such as treaties.<sup>37)</sup> It can be said that an international regime is a sort of “soft law,” compared with international law, which can be regarded as “hard law”.

International regimes are also often explained as framework conventions. They normally establish “a set of general principles, norms, and goals for cooperation on the issue (including a regular Conference of the Parties, or COP, to make policy and implementation decisions) rather than impose major binding obligations on the parties”.<sup>38)</sup> A framework convention does not always require the designing of detailed regulations such as aims,

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35) David A. Baldwin ed., *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

36) Richard Little, *loc.cit.*

37) Stephen D. Krasner, *loc.cit.*

38) Pamela S. Chasek, David L. Downie and Janet Welsh Brown, *Global Environmental Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2006), 20.

binding items, schedules, and other commitments on which member states agree at the first conference. However, participating states do usually negotiate a set of protocols. It is expected that participants will share information, learn, in detail, about the issue, and devise some possible strategies.<sup>39)</sup>

It was the Geneva Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (CLRTAP) of 1979, specifically its negotiation process, that served as the original model for framework conventions.<sup>40)</sup> The CLRTAP was initially criticised because it seemed to achieve nothing; for instance, it did not include any legally binding commitments on states to reduce air pollutants.<sup>41)</sup> However, a wide range of states (all Eastern and Western European nations, Russia, and the United States) were signatories. Such wide involvement was necessary for a discussion on the reduction of specific, transboundary, air pollutants (i.e. in alerting states to the fact that it was an international issue which needed to be discussed in the international arena). The LRTAP regime was a site conducive to the materialisation of the actions on the issue; thus, for example, the European Monitoring and Evaluation Programme/Cooperative Programme for Monitoring and Evaluation of the Long-Range Transmission of Air Pollutants in Europe (EMEP) was established,<sup>42)</sup> setting out in legally binding protocols for the reduction of particular air pollutants. It is because an international regime (the LRTAP), which shared norms and changed states' behaviour, emerged from a non-binding agreement that the original convention has become the formula, as it were, for many subsequent conventions, which have based their treaties and protocols on it.<sup>43)</sup>

### Capacity for Problem-solving

Regime theory provides a blueprint for the way to address international environmental issues as well as interrelationships with other disciplines.<sup>44)</sup> Since the 1970s, regime theory has been strengthened by the incorporation of problem-solving theory, and now serves as an effective framework for addressing certain issues because it includes a recognition that there are certain problems which need to be solved. Some critical studies of the

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39) *Ibid.*, 99.

40) *Ibid.*, 101-106; Lorraine Elliott, *The Global Politics of the Environment* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 70-73.

41) John McCormick, *Acid Earth: The Global Threat of Acid Pollution* (London: Earthscan, International Institute for Environment and Development, 1989), 77.

42) It was established under the auspices of UNECE, and in association with WMO and UNEP, for the monitoring and gathering of information regarding acid rain; the findings are then discussed in negotiations.

43) There are growing numbers of regimes at global level after the LRTAP. Richard Little, *loc.cit.*; Owen Greene, "Environmental Regimes: Effectiveness and Implementation Review," in John Vogler and Mark F. Imber eds., *The Environment and International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996/2005), 196-214.

44) Gareth Porter and Janet Welsh Brown, *Global Environmental Politics* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

framework convention approach raised above are derived from this perspective. Institutional bargaining and other negotiation-related approaches are also examples developed in this context.

The analysis of regime effectiveness has been especially discussed in the context of its theoretical development.<sup>45)</sup> It can be said that there was motivation for the neo-liberal institutionalists to explore the potential practical applications of international regime theory. In fact, contrary to what the neo-realists would assume, relatively minor states in the international arena began to bring their problems onto the world stage while the explanatory capacity of studies of the balance of power have declined since the end of the 1970s.<sup>46)</sup> From this perspective, international regimes from the 1970s, such as the CLRTAP (1979), and the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer (1985), are regarded as examples of effective regimes. By contrast, most international treaty before the 1970s, such as the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling in 1946, the Antarctic Treaty in 1959, the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), and the Convention on the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL), were not legally binding agreements and were hence regarded as largely ineffective.<sup>47)</sup> Many theorists of neo-liberal institutionalism (Greens call them “Environmentalists”) are inclined towards problem-solving because they believe that regime theory is the most reliable academic solution for addressing environmental issues at the international level.

However, these ideas discussed in regime study regard the existing institutions and international relations as given assumptions; their origins are not interrogated by them.<sup>48)</sup> It also lacks multiple spheres and aspects of action connecting to other factors. Nonetheless, the study of international regime theory is still dominant in IR discourse of interna-

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45) According to Young, there are six criteria of regime effectiveness: process effectiveness, behavioural effectiveness, effectiveness as problem solving, evaluative effectiveness, constitutive effectiveness, effectiveness as goal attainment. Process effectiveness can be explained by the extent of ratification, redemption and implementation of agreements; behavioural effectiveness is judged by whether the regime alters the behaviour of states or not; effectiveness as problem solving focuses on the capacity of regimes to solve problems; evaluative effectiveness considers the extent to which regimes achieve (effective) results; constitutive effectiveness highlights the degree of productivity of social practices; effectiveness as goal attainment focuses on the extent a regime can attain its aims. These criteria are useful for the discussion of the evaluation of international regimes and their development. However, this debate on effectiveness is still developing and controversial. Oran R. Young, *International Governance: Protecting the Environment in a Stateless Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

46) Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *loc.cit.*

47) Exceptionally, CITES had a system of trade sanctions and other related regulations; however it did not work properly because of the means of evasion.

48) Robert W. Cox, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 10/2 (1981): 128-130.

tional/global environmental issues, with numerous studies on transnational actors by constructivists and scholars of international political economy.

### Interconnection with International/Global Governance

Regarding the relationship to international/global governance, it can be argued that international regime is one of the most important modes of governance architecture. Regimes have had an impact on the behaviour of member states through raising concerns on an issue, creating a cooperative environment among related actors, and building the capacity to deal with the issue.<sup>49)</sup> Moreover, the argument on the development of regime theory tends to focus on its monitoring of implementation as well as the inter-linkage of regimes. In addition, some scholars argue that international regime theory has made progress through the incorporation of implementation (and monitoring) of shared agreements and practical international cooperation,<sup>50)</sup> although there remain several controversies in the discussion of regime development. If these latter can be incorporated into regime theory, it would be possible for the theory to be governance rather than a part of governance. Governance is a higher-order term. Nevertheless, it is clear that regime theory is important to a discussion on global governance theory.

Critics have identified three major problems with international regime theory: the ambiguity of regime theory, the theoretical perspective inherited from IR theory, and the heterogeneous understandings of the relationship between the theory and the environment. Firstly, it is often claimed that both the idea and components of international regime theory cannot avoid being obscure. This problem is derived from regime itself: its classic definition and its components. With regards to the former, it is difficult to understand its essentiality (what exactly it is) because its theoretical concept still remains contested and used in many different and inconsistent ways in practical analysis.<sup>51)</sup> With regards to the latter, it is difficult to distinguish its components. According to Owen Greene, because of this equivocality and controversy, recent scholars tend to use more 'social institution' terms to analyse the cases.<sup>52)</sup>

Secondly, the analytical bias of the state-centric inclination of regime theory could lead

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49) Peter M. Haas, Robert O. Keohane and Marc A. Levy eds., *Institution for the Earth: Sources of Effectiveness International Environmental Protection* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993).

50) Marc A. Levy, "European Acid Rain: The Power of Tote-Board Diplomacy," in Peter M. Haas, Robert O. Keohane, and Marc A. Levy eds., *ibid.*, 75-132; Don Munton, Marvin Soroos, Elena Nikitina, and Marc A. Levy, "Acid Rain in Europe and North America," in Oran R. Young ed., *op.cit.*, 1999, 155-247.

51) Helen Milner, "International Regimes and World Politics," *International Social Science Journal* 435/4 (1993): 491-7.

52) Owen Greene, *op.cit.*, 198.

to the underestimation of other, non-state, actors, and discourage the exploring of other theoretical approaches using those other actors. This bias is a consequence of the fact that regime theory inherits the main, traditional, preposition in IR theory (i.e. that IR is about international relations between states). International regime theory is “mainly used and developed within the neo-liberal institutionalist and neo-realist perspectives in international relations” and tends to be “a partial understanding of social responses to international problems”.<sup>53)</sup> Admittedly, the role of the state is important for solving environmental degradation. Therefore, scholars of IR have tended to prioritise it as a corollary of the main premise in traditional IR theory. However, this should not mean that only states always have to be involved in all agreements and activities.

All non-state actors are usually bundled together in a group as part of regime theory. Notwithstanding this assimilation of transnational non-state actors, such as TNCs, NGOs and scientists, into the discussion, their role is generally “secondary”.<sup>54)</sup> However, various non-state actors (e.g. the aforementioned NGOs, TNCs,<sup>55)</sup> and scientists) have been dealt with in the literature on global governance since the 1990s. The discussion tends to be incorporated into the design of regime theory, but there is little discussion on the complexity of the interactions that these actors have with others. The dialogue between the international and local is still divided even in the discussion of regime-based theory of environmental governance.<sup>56)</sup> An international treaty might be formed in this regard. However, it is uncertain whether international society and/or the fundamental problems related to environmental issues (such as the antagonism between the North and the South) can be improved solely by a treaty. Furthermore, there is little discussion on this point as scholars argue on how to make unwilling countries get involved in certain regimes. In my view, however, they cannot continue to avoid this matter, which could have such a significant affect on the resolution of environmental issues. It takes time to form protocols, and some member states may withdraw from the agreement and/or choose not to join the agreement *ab initio*. Nonetheless, it is indeed possible to build an international

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53) *Ibid.*, 197.

54) Peter M. Haas, *loc. cit.*; Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Relations* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); John Gerard Ruggie, “The Theory and Practice of Learning Networks: Corporate Social Responsibility and the Global Compact,” *Journal of Corporate Citizenship* 5 (Spring 2002): 27-36.

55) TNCs were already in existence by the 1970s with economic globalisation. In the study of global governance, TNCs are regarded as one of the important actors. The number of TNCs has increased nine-fold since 1970. Jennifer Clapp, “Transnational Corporations and Global Environmental Governance,” in Peter Dauvergne ed., *Handbook of Global Environmental Politics* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2005), 284-297.

56) Oran R. Young, “Why is There No Unified Theory of Environmental Governance?,” in Peter Dauvergne ed., *ibid.*, 170-184; Lorraine Elliott, *op.cit.*, 113-136.



treaty.

The state-centric approach has also led to the ignoring of other factors. For instance, networks could support the formation and advancement of international regimes. However, networking does not always lead to regime building or development and does not always include states. Rather, the study of networks has focused on some of their basic functions, such as the capacity for speedy resource sharing, a feature which regime theory does not expect and therefore account for.

The third of the major negative aspects of international regime theory is derived from heterogeneous understandings of the relationship between the theory and the environment. It might come from a different context of standpoint within IR. For example, norms, which are one of the components of regimes, tend to be studied for their stabilisation (norm diffusion) in the American IR literature,<sup>57)</sup> and are rarely studied from an ethical perspective. For instance, Oran Young pays attention to the equity and fairness in regime building.<sup>58)</sup> However, it is a discussion concerned with institutions internally, and does not include external factors (e.g. society) and/or that which informs it (e.g. ethics); for Young, equity refers to the legitimacy which can be allocated to the actors individually in the formation and development of a regime. Discussions of several normative or ethical concepts, such as norms, fairness, and equity, are affected by these different contexts. It might be said that we need to go back to the origins of the two theories, neo-liberal IR and GPT, to make progress in these discussions. However, GPT, the critical-sighted hybrid theory proposed by Greens and possesses properties differing from neo-liberal IR, might be the more helpful. GPT, which originated in the United Kingdom, regards ethics as one of the main components in discussions of environmental issues.

### 2-3. Considering 'Internationalisation' of the Environment from the Greens' View

The environmental problem has been highlighted (or brought into focus) at an international level as a result of the consideration, in GPT, of the impact of environmental degradation. This focus contrasts with the "background" status of the 'internationalisation' of environmental politics in IR (e.g. in IR's concerns with such issues as transboundary air pollution in Europe). It is rarely stated in IR, but is nonetheless important, that the recog-

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57) Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," in Peter J. Katzenstein, Robert O. Keohane, and Stephen D. Krasner eds., *Exploration and Contestation in the Study of World Politics* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000), 247-277; Amitav Acharya, "How Ideas Spread: Whose Norms Matter? Norm Localization and Institutional Change in Asian Regionalism," *International Organization* 58/2 (Spring 2004): 239-275.

58) Oran R. Young, "Fairness Matters: The Role of Equity in International Regime Formation," in Nicholas Low ed., *Global Ethics and Environment* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 247-263.



nition of international environmental issues, not only acid rain and other transboundary or transnational environmental issues, but also the Chipko issue, nuclear testing, and the Chernobyl nuclear accident, are related to such campaigns as the anti-Vietnam War movement in the USA and other peace-related issues and movements from around the world; all have lead to the new environmentalism.<sup>59)</sup> Caroline Thomas, for example, has noted that the formation of environmental politics has led to public attention on both issues and movements at the international and grassroots levels.<sup>60)</sup>

Theorising on the environment in the literatures of IR is divided mainly into two aspects by Environmentalists and Greens. First, it can be said that studying the environment within IR theory means to think about the relationship between humans, as actors, and the environment. Even so, and secondly, it is still difficult to avoid thinking about international relations, or to put it another way, interactions between states.

Reasons for this avoidance can be more clearly understood by looking at the IR discipline itself. Narrowly speaking, on the one hand, it can be partly attributed to the fact that neo-liberal institutionalists are dominant in discussions of international regime theory. Broadly speaking, on the other hand, a contributory reason is that it is difficult to question the main initial premise of IR from the Environmentalists' point of view. That premise is the traditional (and implicit) assumption that IR study is based on state relationships. For this reason, the state is the main actor in the building and developing of regime theory; other actors are only partly considered. One consequence of this state-centric preference is that many outstanding studies done by Environmentalists have been criticised and have not been argued within the context of Green Political Theory.

Does the foregoing mean that IR theory is inevitably limited for thinking about the environment? I would say, "No." GPT rather "invites a modest means of accommodating such challenges within the existing preconceptions of orthodox IR",<sup>61)</sup> because that it can be said that one of the preliminary challenges for IR is to consider the environment from the Greens' point of view. Is there any way for IR to be fascinated by the ideas of the Greens?

One tentative suggestion is to incorporate an ethical dimension into regime theory.<sup>62)</sup>

59) Tony Brenton, *The Greening of Machiavelli* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1994), 25.

60) Caroline Thomas, *The Environment in International Relations* (London: The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1992).

61) Julian Saurin, "International Relations, Social Ecology and the Globalisation of Environmental Change," in John Vogler and Mark F. Imber eds., *op.cit.*, 77.

62) Peter Laslett, "Environmental Ethics and the Obsolescence of Existing Political Institutions," in Brendan Gleeson and Nicholas Low eds., *Governing for the Environment: Global Problems, Ethics, and Democracy* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 165-179.

In this regard, however, it differs from the standpoint of previous studies in IR, as I explained above. It can be said that the inclination to environmental problem-solving has led IR academics concerned with environmental issues to focus on the institutional arrangements and their improvements. It could be concluded therefore that regime theory is not a basic re-theorisation of international relations; however, that is not to say that it could not be improved or theoretically developed by incorporating aspects of GPT. It is necessary to seriously consider the benefits of using both views: GPT and IR (on the environment).

A second suggestion is to explore different modes of governance and interaction which include social improvement. To do this, a connection between social movement theory and global governance theory is needed. Regime theory has not discussed social movements, which also engage in transnational issues, and which are crucially connected to the environmental issue and problem-solving. With respect to problem-solving, according to Brian Doherty, two approaches were formulated in social movement theory. One is new social movement theory, which focuses on structural changes. The other is political process theory, which analyses mobilisation and objections.<sup>63)</sup> It also focuses attention on institutionalisation because social movement organisations could increase in number and kind if they cooperate with national/local authorities and business enterprises such as Greenpeace, WWF and Friends of the Earth.<sup>64)</sup> However, the seriousness of these suggestive ideas and theories has been underestimated in regime theory. It can be said that an extreme enthusiasm for international regime could lead to a failure to value not only other actors' and/or communities' contributions, but also other modes of governance and other analytical approaches.

In a discussion of the ethical/cultural dimension of governance related to local society in a holistic manner, it is necessary to consider both globalisation and localisation.<sup>65)</sup> Since the emergence of the 'internationalisation' of every method of communication, it cannot be said that each place or ethnic or local group possesses its own unique culture. Some people (including some scholars) have attempted to avoid accepting this phenomenon because there is a certain competition between global norms or identities and indigenous one(s).<sup>66)</sup> However, it is important to look at this phenomenon from the local per-

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63) Brian Doherty, *Ideas and Actions in the Green Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 7-26.

64) *Ibid.*, 121-153.

65) Gabriela Kütting and Sandra Rose, "The Environment as a Global Issue," in Michele M. Betsill, Kathryn Hochstetler and Dimitris Stevis eds., *International Environmental Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2006), 113-141.

66) Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, *loc.cit.*

spective.<sup>67)</sup>

Shared norms can be understood through discourse analysis. For example, by applying discourse analysis it is possible to see how, particularly after the publication of Brundtland's report, *Our Common Future*, the recognitions of environmental degradation have enhanced environmental discourse by, if not introducing, at least establishing the concept of sustainable development. It is a persuasive argument; however, as has been frequently argued, it is also necessary to highlight other, sometimes dichotomous, factors such as the tension between North and South,<sup>68)</sup> transnationalisation of the actor and entity,<sup>69)</sup> and conflicts of different identities and justice. In the environmental context, it could be said that the most social and structural cause of environmental degradation was derived from the excessive consumption of natural resources and the diffusion of a consumption culture. However, it is possible for new universal norms to be established; thus, it can be argued that the claims made in *The Limits to Growth* are such examples.

Another discussion point is that of the ethical dimension of global governance. Oran Young's argument of fairness and equity in the process of international institutionalisation can be raised as its example.<sup>70)</sup> Young aims to explore these ideas through the examination of the rationality of actors, the role of fairness in regime formation, and the decreasing of transaction costs. However, Young's argument remains based on international institutions. In reality, the ethical dimension of environmental governance does not come only from institutions, but also from people, society, and the environment itself. For instance, the notions of protecting the environment from human-related activity and the importance of nature can be found in several influential nature writings, such as works by Annie Dillard and Rachel Carson.<sup>71)</sup> Dillard has not specifically mentioned the importance of the conservation of nature; however, her thoughtful writing has influenced both environmentalists and the general public. Carson, using scientific knowledge, warns about the horrendous and long-lasting consequences of the careless use of insecticide, noting the potential for dangerous chemicals to be transferred from a particular place or animals to human beings.

The attitudes of the likes of Dillard and Carson can be summarised as a love of nature

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67) Amitav Acharya, *loc.cit.*

68) Pratap Chatterjee and Matthias Finger, *The Earth Brokers: Power, Politics and World Development* (London: Routledge, 1994).

69) Margaret Keck, and Kathryn Sikkink. *loc.cit.*

70) Oran R. Young, *loc.cit.*

71) Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974); Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

and naturally occurring things (such as future generations); both of which are much discussed in GPT. Although the question of which non-human creatures should be protected is problematic, it is still interesting to ask what is it that drives human beings to address environmental degradation? There are many ethical and practical explanations for the importance that human beings place on (re)solving environmental issues: justice, a sense of danger, mercy, repentance, compassion for future generations, morality, love, recognition, and sense of awe.

Although it is difficult to prioritise these explanations, it is important to attempt to understand or assess them. The following questions might be keys to the acquisition of such an understanding: To what extent do human beings consider the relationship between humans and nature? Does that ethic consider the different types of other ethics in each area? What values do we have? Can our justice be properly justificative? In addressing these questions, it would be possible to identify the interrelationships between the environmental politics in IR and GPT, thus facilitating further dialogue between the theorists of each approach.

### 3. Concluding Remarks

To sum up, in this article, IR's neo-liberal institutionalists' theory on environment was mainly highlighted through the assessment of environmental regime and governance.

Regime theory is useful in its versatility, its problem-solving capacity, and its connection with international/global governance in explaining the prominent features of global issues, especially those of the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, neo-liberal institutionalists came to realise the necessity of providing theoretical explanations for these issues. In particular, the study of regime advancement and its effectiveness was successful in identifying the blueprint for problem-solving and in strengthening the theory through incorporating micro-economic foundation, sociological debates and traditional ideas of international law.

On the other hand, international regime theory can be criticised in three ways: its ambiguity, its state-centric perspective, and its heterogeneous understandings of the relationship between the theory and the environment. Regime theory is still dominant in IR theorising about the environment, partly because a number of striking events (e.g. the UNCED and several successful regimes such as those dealing with ozone layer and acid rain in Europe) encouraged IR scholars to think about the environment. Moreover, regime theory has been incorporated into the idea of international institutions and is currently

discussed as one branch of international institutionalism.

Scholars of international regime insist that multiple regimes can form international/global governance. Hence, in this regard, the state remains important because it is the main actor in international regime theory. In the global governance context, therefore, international regime is defined as a governing system which addresses the limited capacity for problem-solving in institutions.

There are, of course, many discussions on international organisations and scientific co-operation. However, the focus has often been on the process of institutionalisation; the challenge posed by the environmental governance debate in IR forced regime theorists to address the problems postulated by the theory and, by so doing, enhanced the “process”. Discussions on environmental governance in IR have been led by the neo-liberal institutionalists, and have concentrated on issues such as institutionalisation and the effectiveness of regimes, even though other approaches exist.

However, it is clear that institutions at various levels could act together and improve society by addressing environmental issues through the formation of global environmental governance. Indeed, as Young argues, its creation tends to come with difficulties even within the discussion of institution building. It is because that the issues needed to be solved transcend from states to global sphere, but the activity of actors to address them is international cooperation which cannot deal with the issues efficiently and globally. As the consequence of this, the global governance has started to argue from more holistic perspective through the link from local to global.

The original definition of governance includes both the act of governing and its process. Governance comprises both formal and informal architecture. The former refers to the implementation of legislation and rules which are legally binding. The latter refers to the mechanisms of non-state actors pursuing common goals on the basis of agreement and spontaneity.<sup>72)</sup> Thus, environmental governance essentially needs to include the multiple interactions of actors, institutions, and networks.

Such governance could emerge if the perspective of the Greens and some Environmentalists was incorporated into the theory and practice of international regime theory. However, is it possible to conceive of a revisionism of international regime theory? Or do the Greens have to avoid it only because of its different theoretical position? It is difficult to conclude that theories propounded by neo-liberals contribute to the “greening” of IR theo-

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72) James N. Rosenau and Ernst-Otto Czempiel eds., *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 4-5.

ry on the environment. In their ethical aspects, for instance, there are wide differences between GPT and IR. Nonetheless, it is possible to explore the bridge between the two approaches. For example, it would be possible to apply several ideas from GPT to IR's global governance theory on the environment. In this regard, it is also necessary to pay attention to the significance of diverse cultures and ethical backgrounds, and ensure that the voices of minorities or states/people with no or limited power are heard in the global arena. It is important that multiple perspectives contribute to the discussion on global governance. This issue still divides those engaged in the discussion on environmental governance.