

The Concepts and Practice of China's Participation in Global Climate Governance in the Post-Paris Era

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Abstract The Paris Agreement is by far the most universal and binding climate agreement. Since its signing and entering into force, the Paris Agreement has attracted great attention from the international community. Global climate governance in the Post-Paris era is faced with the dilemmas of lack of leadership, fragmentation of institutions and deficit of greenhouse gas emissions reduction. With the continuous increase of China's comprehensive national strength and international influence, China's ability and willingness to participate in global climate governance are also increasing. This paper will first analyze the practical dilemmas faced by global climate governance in the Post-Paris, then explain China's global climate governance concepts in this context, and finally analyze China's climate governance practice under the guidance of these concepts.

Keywords: global climate governance, the Post-Paris era, governance dilemma, China.

Introduction

Since the 1990s, the international community has been faced with many global challenges. As one of the most frequently mentioned topics, climate change has appeared often in various international conferences. Global climate governance has become an essential part of global governance. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement laid a global climate treaty and the institutional framework, but the particularity of the issue of climate change and the realistic pursuit of national interests constitute the complexity of global climate governance. Global climate governance involves the interest game and coordination and cooperation among various international actors. In December 2015, the 21st Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP21) was held in Paris, France, and the Paris Agreement was reached. This is the first global climate agreement that is both universal and legally binding, laying a legal and institutional foundation for global

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climate governance in the Post-Paris era. Since then, the international community has held the Marrakech, Bonn, Katowice, and Madrid climate change conferences focusing on implementing the Paris Agreement (Li, 2016). However, due to the differences in temperature control targets, greenhouse gas emissions reduction schedule, carbon trading mechanism, financial assistance and technical support from developed countries, it is challenging to achieve substantive breakthroughs in the process of global climate governance in the Post-Paris era.

As an important participant and builder of the global climate governance system, China's concepts and practice in global climate governance, as well as the construction of the international system, will be not only a practical issue related to its own national interests but also a theoretical issue related to global governance and international relations.

1. The Dilemmas of Global Climate Governance in the Post-Paris Era

1.1 The Lack of leadership

For an international agreement, whether it can exert the expected binding force and achieve the normal implementation behavior of the parties often depends on the strength of leadership it covers. The swing attitude of the United States on global climate governance (mainly the negative attitude of the Trump administration on global climate governance) and the decline of the EU's leadership have exacerbated the lack of leadership in global climate governance.

1.1.1 The swing attitude of the United States on global climate governance

The United States is a major energy producer and consumer and the world's second-largest carbon emitter. How its domestic climate policies will evolve and how effective they will be will significantly impact global climate governance (Liu, 2019). In January 2017, Republican Donald Trump was sworn in as the 45th president of the United States. Trump adheres to the "America First" governing philosophy, doubts the scientific basis of climate change and the necessity of global climate governance, and believes that the United States will affect its own economic development if it makes too many commitments to greenhouse gas emissions reduction. In June 2017, Trump announced his withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and formally started the withdrawal process in November 2019, which undermining leadership of the global climate governance regime in the Post-Paris era (Friedman, 2019). Moreover, due to the special status and powerful influence of the United States in the international community, its withdrawal will undoubtedly have a magnifying effect in the international community, which will cause a more serious impact.

In January 2021, Democrat Joe Biden became president of the United States. At the beginning of his presidency, Biden signed a document announcing his return to the Paris Agreement and issued an executive order or memorandum on protecting the climate

environment, rebuilding scientific institutions, and addressing the climate crisis (Wang, Yu, & Zhang, 2021). These measures show that the Biden administration intends to make the United States play a more active role in global climate governance, but it is too early to assert that the United States will succeed in reshaping its global climate governance leadership. The reasons are evident: the first is the Trump administration's climate policy legacy. The de-climate policies of Trump's presidency have damaged the coherence of US domestic climate governance and the credibility of international climate leadership, and these impacts are hard to eliminate in a short time. Second, there is the polarization of domestic politics. In recent years, the opposition between different interest groups in the United States has become more and more severe, and political polarization has become an unavoidable problem in American society (Niu, 2021). Political polarization has led to ideological and value splits and inefficiency and uncertainty in public policy outcomes, limiting the actual outcomes of the Biden administration's climate policies. Finally, the great power competition between China and the United States and the impact of COVID-19 will also limit the influence of the United States in global climate governance to a certain extent. As Charles A. Kupchan (2021) puts it, "U.S. President Joe Biden has ambitious goals at home and abroad ... However, Biden obviously can't achieve all of his goals ... Given the country's economic and political disarray, the new administration must focus on American development at home, which will inevitably come at the expense of American interests abroad."

1.1.2. The EU's leadership in global climate governance has gradually declined

The EU has long played a leading role in the global climate governance process. After the United States withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, the EU took active and forceful measures to facilitate climate negotiations and successfully persuaded Russia to sign the agreement in 2005, which resolved the impasse in global climate governance, and thus the EU's leadership reached its peak. However, at the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in 2009, the EU was isolated due to its radical stance. The United States and the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) seized the opportunity and finally dominated the conclusion of the Copenhagen Accord. The leadership of the EU in global climate governance began to show a trend of decline. In 2015, China, the United States and the EU all played an essential role in the Paris Agreement negotiations. The EU's influence has recovered to some extent, but it is no longer as influential as before. In addition, the Brexit process since 2016 has intensified the centrifugal tendency among EU members, reduced the EU's influence in the international community, and further weakened the EU's leadership in the global climate governance process in the Post-Paris era (Kang, 2019).

1.2 The fragmentation of institutions

Fragmentation refers to the trend and state that multiple governance centers appear in parallel in global climate governance. It emphasizes the "patchwork" characteristics

of the overall institutional environment and argues that there is no single international governance mechanism in a fragmented international community. The global climate governance system is complex and covering multiple specific policy areas. These policy areas are not controlled by the traditional single international system but are pieced together by many international systems with different characteristics and scopes, leading to the fragmentation of the global climate governance system (Nina & Åsa, 2018).

The global climate governance system is mainly reflected in two aspects: the fragmentation of climate governance mechanisms with UNFCCC as the core and the diversification of climate governance mechanisms outside the UNFCCC framework. Fragmentation takes different forms in different global issues. It weakens the overall nature of the system. It makes it difficult for various actors in global climate governance to conduct unified and coordinated actions, thus affecting the follow-up implementation of the Paris Agreement and reducing the efficiency of all parties in implementing the agreement.

1.3 The deficit of greenhouse gas emissions reduction

The deficit of greenhouse gas emissions reduction is the difference between the greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets stipulated in a series of agreements under the framework of UNFCCC and the actual greenhouse gas emissions reduction of each party. There are three main reasons for it:

1. the rate of climate change continues to update previous studies, leading to the increasing greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets required by global climate governance;
2. the targets stipulated in the agreement itself are too high, or the allocation of specific greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets is unreasonable;
3. the parties' willingness and ability to implement the contract fail to meet the previous expectations.

Data released by the World Meteorological Organization (2021) shows that every consecutive decade since the 1980s has been warmer than the previous one since 1850, and 2011-2020 the warmest decade on record, with 2016, 2019 and 2020 the top three, 1.2 (± 0.1)°C above pre-industrial levels.¹⁰ This is a diversion from the goal set out in the Paris Agreement. Taking into account the potential discount in the performance of the parties and the need to adequately respond to the reality of global climate change, the agreement sets higher requirements for national greenhouse gas emissions tasks. As the rate of climate change continues to climb, the global climate governance targets have been raised accordingly, and the provisions of the agreement need to be modified accordingly.

In addition, the willingness and ability to implement the convention vary from country to country. In terms of the ability to implement the convention, developed countries have a solid ability to implement the convention. In contrast, developing countries have limited their ability to implement the convention due to the impacts of economic development, social concepts, capital and technology, etc. In terms of the

willingness to implement the convention, except for some European countries and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), the willingness of all countries is not strong, but most of them still indicate that they will make greenhouse gas emissions actions within the framework of the convention. The strong ability of developed countries to implement the convention makes their willingness to implement the treaty become the main variable. The strength of their willingness will affect themselves and have an impact on the ability to develop countries to implement the convention.

2. The concepts of China's participation in global climate governance in the Post-Paris era

2.1 The fundamental concepts

2.1.1. The concept of sustainable development

Sustainable development generally refers to a mode of development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the needs of future generations while protecting the environment (Niu, 2012). The basic principles of sustainable development include:

1. The principle of equity, that is, the horizontal equity among contemporaries, the vertical equity among generations and the equity in the distribution and utilization of resources among different groups;
2. The principle of sustainability, that is, the pursuit of economic and social development needs to match the carrying capacity of resources and environment;
3. The principle of commonality.

Sustainable development is a development concept that all countries should follow in the world. The issues discussed by it are those related to all humankind, and the goals to be achieved are the common goals of humanity. The concept of sustainable development combines environmental issues with development issues and becomes a concept unity covering economic sustainability, ecological sustainability, and social sustainability.

In the field of global climate governance, climate change is not a simple ecological and environmental issue, and global climate governance is also different from other ecological and environmental issues in the international community. In the process of participating in global climate governance, China needs to give full consideration to its actual stage of economic and social development. It should advocate not only green development and gradually fulfill its greenhouse gas emissions reduction commitment but also ensure social and economic stability and progress and avoid going to extremes. In the discussion of global climate governance, there is an "ecological supremacy" view, which requires countries to limit or even give up their economic development rights to achieve climate governance goals. This obviously ignores the content of economic and social sustainability, distorts the nature of global climate governance, and runs counter to China's idea of global climate governance.

2.1.2. The concept of a community with a shared future for mankind

A community of shared future for humankind is a concept of value. As President Xi Jinping (2017) pointed out, “A community of shared future for mankind means that the future and destiny of every nation and country are closely linked. We should stand together through thick and thin, share weal and woe, and work hard to build the planet where we were born and grew up into a harmonious family.” Building a community with a shared future for mankind is not only China’s pursuit of value, but also a practical need for countries to jointly address various global challenges facing mankind.

As a typical global problem, climate change has gradually penetrated into many fields of the international community. On the one hand, due to the complexity of the climate problem and its impact, it is not easy to solve it through individual countries, but can only rely on international cooperation. On the other hand, countries differ considerably in terms of the economic base, scientific and technological level, social ideology, and greenhouse gas emissions. Different countries have different demands and propositions on the issue of climate change, which makes the cooperation between them often full of interest game and political compromise, so it is difficult to reach a truly effective international agreement. In this context, the concept of global governance, common interests and sustainable development advocated by the concept of a community with a shared future for humanity are of great guiding significance for China to participate in and play a leading role in global climate governance in the Post-Paris era.

The concept of a community with a shared future for mankind affirms the necessity of global climate governance, believes that climate and environmental issues should be considered while developing the economy and that green, low-carbon and sustainable development should be pursued. It means that, on the basis of a series of international climate agreements, countries should earnestly honor their emission reduction commitments, cooperate to address climate change and work together to achieve positive results in global climate governance in the Post-Paris era.

2.2. The normative concepts

In December 2015, at the opening ceremony of the Paris Climate Change Conference, President Xi Jinping delivered a speech entitled *Work Together to Build a Win-Win, Equitable and Balanced Governance Mechanism on Climate Change*. He proposed that the global climate governance mechanism should pursue the governance concepts and institutional features of win-win cooperation, fairness, and justice, which is also the conceptual connotation of China’s participation in global climate governance.

2.2.1. Win-win cooperation

Win-win cooperation means that in the process of building a global climate governance mechanism, countries should transcend the traditional mindset of utilitarianism and zero-sum game, actively undertake the responsibility of greenhouse gas emissions reduction,

actively share the concept of greenhouse gas emissions reduction, and achieve mutual benefit and win-win results. In the process of participating in global climate governance, China has always adhered to the concept of win-win cooperation, actively participated in global climate negotiations, worked hard to uphold the multilateral governance system under the framework of the UNFCCC, and earnestly fulfilled its commitments under the Paris Agreement. President Xi Jinping (2015) has pointed out that “on the issue of climate change, China calls for all parties to work together to meet challenges, discuss ways to cope with climate change and safeguard the common interests of mankind.”

The concept of win-win cooperation consists of two aspects. Cooperation focuses on the relationship between different actors participating in global climate governance, while win-win cooperation is the logical result of this situation being stabilized. Cooperation is relative to confrontation. The basis of cooperation is that all parties have common interests on the issue and clearly understand such interests. Besides, the long-term game on the same issue makes all parties acquiesce that the benefits of cooperation are more significant than confrontation or their own actions. Since the 1990s, global climate governance has undergone nearly 30 years of development. Facts have proved that cooperation rather than other ways should be the best strategy for China to participate in global climate governance.

However, cooperation does not necessarily lead to win-win results, and international cooperation under hegemony may damage partners' interests. The reasons why win-win is the logical outcome of cooperation of global climate governance in the Post-Paris era include multilateralism mode of cooperation, the particularity of the issue, the long-term repeated game. First of all, global climate governance cooperation is not a hegemonic mode of cooperation but a typical multilateral mode of cooperation, which involves enough actors to make vulnerable countries join together to compete with powerful countries. Secondly, due to the particularity of the topics, it is often more critical than traditional international political and economic cooperation to emphasize value concepts such as fairness and justice. Finally, in the long-term game, countries recognize the importance of cooperation and thus prefer stable long-term cooperation on this issue.

2.2.2. Fairness and justice

Fairness and justice have a special meaning in global climate governance. Its core lies in upholding the principle of Common But Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) between developed and developing countries. To put it simply, this means that developed and developing countries, due to their different historical responsibilities, stages of development and coping capacities, should also assume different obligations in tackling climate change and cannot simply assign the responsibility of each other for greenhouse gas emissions reduction. In the process of global climate governance in the Post-Paris era, China has always adhered to the principle of CBDR, taken the initiative to shoulder its due responsibilities, and made efforts to fulfill its greenhouse gas emissions reduction

commitments. President Xi Jinping has stated on many important occasions that it is China's consistent position to adhere to the principle of CBDR and encourage more countries to participate in international cooperation on tackling climate change.

Win-win cooperation, fairness and justice are not only the value goals that should be reflected in the global climate governance mechanism but also the basic approaches to improve the global climate governance mechanism. They are complementary to each other. Win-win cooperation is the value goal of the global climate governance mechanism. It calls for all parties to seek common interests and a basis for cooperation through active exchanges and cooperation and accommodate demands and concerns with each other. Fairness and justice is a basic requirement for win-win cooperation. It calls for all parties to share common responsibilities and distinguish specific obligations equally and effectively through substantive participation to advance global climate governance jointly (Bo, 2019).

3. The practice of China's participation in global climate governance in the Post-Paris era

3.1. Actively fulfilling greenhouse gas emissions reduction commitment and incorporating tackling climate change into the national long-term development plans

At the Paris Climate Change Conference held in December 2015, China promised to peak carbon dioxide emissions around 2030 and strive to achieve it as soon as possible. By 2030, carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP will be reduced by 60% to 65% compared with 2005. In March 2016, China issued the 13th Five-Year Plan for Economic and Social Development, which listed green transformation of production methods and lifestyles, low-carbon levels, and effective control of total carbon emissions as part of its economic and social development goals. It proposed to actively respond to global climate change, control carbon emissions, implement emissions reduction commitment, and contribute to the solution of global climate change. According to data released by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People's Republic of China (2021), by the end of 2019, China's carbon emissions intensity was 18.2% lower than 2015 and 48.1% lower than 2005, and non-fossil energy accounted for 15.3% of energy consumption, fulfilling the 2020 target China promised to the international community ahead of schedule. In September 2020, President Xi Jinping announced at the 75th United Nations General Assembly that China will increase its nationally determined contributions (NDCs), adopt more effective policies and measures, and strive to reach the peak of carbon dioxide emissions by 2030 strive to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060. It was further announced at the Climate Ambition Summit three months later that by 2030, China's carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP will drop by more than 65% from 2005, and that non-fossil energy will account for about 25% of primary energy consumption. The storage volume will increase by 6 billion cubic meters over 2005, and the total installed capacity of wind power and solar power will reach 1.2 billion kilowatts or more. In March 2021, China issued its fourteenth five-year plan

for national economic and social development, which included the extensive formation of green production and lifestyles, a steady decline in carbon emissions after peaking, and a fundamental long-term improvement in the ecological environment goals for 2035. At the same time, it was announced that it would reduce energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP by 13.5% and 18%, respectively, and increase the forest coverage rate to 24.1% in the next five years.

Actively fulfilling the greenhouse gas emissions reduction commitment in the Paris Agreement and incorporating tackling climate change into the national long-term development plan is a model of China's participation in global climate governance practices in the Post-Paris era. A series of measures taken by China in optimizing the industrial structure and energy structure, controlling greenhouse gas emissions, increasing carbon sinks, and more, have made essential contributions to combating climate change, demonstrating its own responsibility as a major country, and serving as a model for other countries.

3.2. Participating in the multilateral process of global climate governance and strengthening exchanges and cooperation between countries

Since the Paris Agreement came into force, China has continued to play a responsible role in global climate governance, strengthened dialogue and exchanged with other countries on climate change, deepened international cooperation on climate governance, promoted consensus among all parties, and upheld the multilateral framework for global climate governance. On the one hand, China actively participated in the follow-up process within the framework of the UNFCCC and encouraged the international community to implement better the Paris Agreement, such as the Marrakech Climate Change Conference, Bonn Climate Change Conference, Katowice Climate Change Conference, Madrid Climate Change Conference and the postponed Glasgow Climate Change Conference in 2021. On the other hand, China has also participated in the climate governance process in other multilateral platforms outside the UNFCCC framework, such as the Petersberg Climate Dialogue, the Ministerial Meeting on Climate Action (MoCA), the Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol, the Climate Ambition Summit, and the Leaders' Climate Summit. In addition, China has incorporated climate governance issues into high-level exchanges and strengthen exchanges and cooperation with the United States, Germany, France, Russia, and other major countries, such as the China-France-Germany Leaders Climate Video Summit and the China-US Joint Statement on Climate Crisis.

3.3. Providing public goods for global climate governance—take The Belt and Road Initiative as an example

Global climate governance is non-competitive and non-exclusive and is one of the typical public goods in the international community. Even if a country does not

participate in climate governance, it can still enjoy the benefits brought by climate governance rather than being excluded from the benefits of climate governance by other countries, and the benefits of one country will not reduce the benefits of other countries. The leadership of the United States and the European Union in global climate governance in the Post-Paris era has been weakened, which objectively promotes the relative improvement of China's leadership in this field, thus putting forward higher requirements for China's ability to provide public goods for global climate governance. To sum up, China provides two main types of public goods in global climate governance. One is to share the concepts of China's participation in global climate governance, and the other is to provide platforms for building international consensus and promoting climate governance cooperation and gradually improving the practice of the global climate governance system.

The Belt and Road Initiative covers both aspects and is a typical representative of China providing public goods for global climate governance. First, the Belt and Road Initiative reflects the concepts of China's participation in global climate governance. Its principles of wide consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits align with China's concepts of win-win cooperation, fairness, and justice in global climate governance. The Green Belt and Road Initiative with ecological civilization as its core aims to promote green development and strengthen ecological protection in countries along the Belt and Road, which coincides with the concept of a community with a shared future for humankind and sustainable development (Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People's Republic of China, 2017). Secondly, the Belt and Road Initiative is also of great significance for countries along the Belt and Road to participate in the practice of global climate governance. There are many developing countries with relatively low levels of economic development and technological innovation capabilities. In the process of participating in global climate governance, these countries usually face troubles such as shortage of funds, backward technology, the Belt and Road Initiative to deepen China's cooperation with countries in global climate governance, providing an important platform to solve the problems. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China provides financial, technical, and personnel assistance to developing countries along the Belt and Road, thus helping them fulfill their greenhouse gas emissions reduction commitments.

Conclusion

This article analyzes the predicaments of global climate governance in the Post-Paris era and argues that the current global climate governance system is not perfect but is facing the challenges of lack of leadership, fragmentation of institutions, and deficit of greenhouse gas emissions reduction. Due to the swinging attitude of the United States in global climate governance and the relative decline of the EU's climate leadership, China's structural strength in the global climate governance system has increased. With the continuous enhancement of China's comprehensive national

power and international influence and the gradual popularization of domestic green development concepts, China's willingness and practical ability to participate in global climate governance has improved continuously. This paper argues that the concept of sustainable development and the concept of a community with a shared future for humankind are the fundamental concepts of China's participation in global climate governance in the Post-Paris era, and win-win cooperation & fairness and justice are the normative concepts of China's participation in global climate governance in the Post-Paris era. Under the guidance of these concepts, China has carried out a series of fruitful practices, such as actively fulfilling its greenhouse gas emissions reduction commitments, incorporating tackling climate change into national long-term development plans, participating in the multilateral process of global climate governance, strengthening exchanges and cooperation between countries, and providing public goods for global climate governance.

It is the common interest of all countries in the world to actively tackle climate change, promote the implementation of the Paris Agreement, and constantly improve the global climate governance system. Although the current reality of global climate governance and its operational mechanism is not perfect, global climate governance is in line with the historical trend and represents the international community's will. It is also a meaningful way to safeguard national interests and enhance one's international influence. In this context, China should use its special position in the Post-Paris era global climate governance system, build a global climate governance concept with Chinese characteristics, actively participate in global climate governance practice, and then promote global climate governance's continuous development.

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