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Global Climate Governance: Based on Liberal Environmentalism

Lijie Cui

QingDao University College of Politics and Public Administration International relations, Shandong Qingdao, 266100

Abstract: Students of Global Governance have long shown a special interest in climate governance. Global Climate Governance features prominently in global politics, but we lack full understanding about how to describe, characterize and analyze the normative context of climate governance. For China, the policies and legal system for climate governance is still not perfect and many shortcomings in the supporting mechanisms and guarantee mechanisms to fulfill its obligations. According to the theoretical contribution of the English School, the paper argues that the Liberal Environmentalism can be interpreted as the normative system for Global Climate Governance. This system provides a useful basis for scholars and practitioners to conceptualize the climate governance dynamics influencing Global Governance. It also provides an important theoretical reference for China's participation in Global Climate Governance.

Keywords: Global Climate Governance; Normative Context; Liberal Environmentalism

1. Introduction

Global Governance refers to the institutionalized interaction between various state actors and aims to achieve coordinated global development. Global Governance is a more complex international regulatory network than traditional international systems. Moreover, the concept of Global Governance differs from the widely held concept of power among analysts of the international system of sovereign states because it is not a zero-sum process. In the area of the environment in particular, governance can describe collective environmental action and the political structures and processes associated with international environmental regulation. Environmental management from a Global Governance perspective involves an international framework with a high degree of cooperation and interaction between States and a number of non-state actors. The decentralized management of Global Climate Governance has allowed more than just states as traditional participants in international relations to spread their authority among international and transnational institutions.

With the rise of English School, it has a lasting and potential transformative impact on international relations, and gradually forms the Liberal Environmentalism in the study of Global Governance. Among the themes of the Liberal Environmentalism agenda, climate change stands out because of its cross-cutting and multidimensional nature, linking the environment to other international agendas, such as development, trade and security, which gives the concept of the environment the inherent potential to change the social structure of international relations. In recent years, Liberal Environmentalism and norms have moved slowly but steadily from the margins to the center of the international agenda, gradually integrating into the normative structure of the national system. An increasingly complex set of international environmental institutions was gradually established, which expanded the influence of international environmental law and formed a unique practice of multilateral environmental diplomacy. International climate governance is urgent now, and climate change has reached a very serious situation. It requires extensive and in-depth collaboration and active participation to each countries.

2. Liberal Environmentalism: the normative system for Global Climate Governance

In recent years, English School has attracted attention again because of its divergence from classical theory and the diversity of theory and methodology in the discipline. The main argument in support of this theory has to do with the fact that, in addition to anarchy at the system level, there is an international community at the international level. Ideas, not material abilities, are the main factors that must be taken into account in understanding international politics. The theory of English School is deeply embodied in the field of Global Governance. English School scholars believe that the norm of Global Climate Governance has a decentralized institutional framework, involving multiple actors, governance tools and mechanisms, as well as multiple interactions among governments. The complexity of the norm is reflected in the normative commitment between multiple actors with different identities and interests. For instance, Global climate change governance involves the fragmentation of international law in different areas, resulting in overlapping regulations and potentially contradictory norms and interpretations. In spite of this fragmentation, there are normative convergence processes between state and non-state actors, which are determined in the presence of a normative complex of Liberal Environmentalism. These norms must be analyzed as processes that are reinterpreted and answered in practice by state and non-state actors.

To solve this problem, English School emphasizes the tradition of Liberal Environmentalism under the function of institution. They believe that although the subject and object of Global Governance are decentralized and diversified, liberalism provides the main norms and institutions that constitute the governance field. Buzan describes major norms as “persistent and recognized patterns of shared practices that are rooted in values shared by members of society across nations and that incorporate norms, rules, and principles”. This means that if climate governance actors are to achieve strong change in the international community, we should expect it to focus on coming up with acceptable major norms. For example, in the area of environmental regulation, it is possible to consider enabling legitimate climate governance actors to contribute to the climate issue by jointly defining governance and regulatory standards.

3. Liberal Environmentalism: the theory practice for Global Climate Governance

Under the guidance of Liberal Environmentalism, the normative construction of Global Climate Governance is based on the policy complex jointly formulated by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Specifically, there are three major agreements to guide global environmental efforts: First, Agenda 21, which includes a comprehensive plan of action for sustainable development; Secondly, the “Rio Declaration on Environment and Development”, which includes a set of principles defining the rights and obligations of States in this regard; Third, the Forest Principles. In addition, two legally binding instruments have been developed and made available to States for signature: the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Climate Convention.

On the other side, the Liberal Environmentalism has put forward many constructive principles and ideas in the process of global climate change governance. Normative among actors within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations helped transferring climate policies across countries and changed negotiation positions. Together with group pressure and leadership by key governments and non-national actors, norm, knowledge and altered the UNFCCC negotiation dynamics and facilitated the Paris Agreement. Governments, the UNFCCC secretariat and NGOs created opportunities for government representatives to explore policy options and learn from each other’s successes of designing and implementing norm policies. For instance:

3.1 The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities(CBDR)

The principle of common but differentiated responsibilities is based on two key ideas. First, protecting the global environment is the shared responsibility of all countries. Second, the more industrially developed countries bear the main responsibility in this area.

3.2 Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is defined as a multi-dimensional, goal-based process. Economic, social and environmental, each of which is necessary for sustainability. The concept of sustainable development promotes socio-economic transformation and focuses on the protection of the ability of natural systems to perform their essential functions in the context of global environmental change driven by human activities, with the aim of expanding the well-being of the entire human species.

4. Rethinking Liberal Environmentalism: understanding the roles of china in the Global Climate Governance

The report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly stated that China will “guide international cooperation on climate change and become an important participant, contributor and leader in global ecological progress “, and for the first time included climate governance and global ecological progress in the Party’s report. China’s role in Global Climate Governance has shifted from a passive follower to an active leader, which reflects China’s increased awareness of climate change and its changing status in the Global Climate Governance pattern. Proactive leadership means that China will be committed to achieving norms of climate governance within the scope of the international community. The normative consciousness constructed by Liberal Environmentalism is worth studying and thinking in China.

With Brexit, the US announcing its withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and the EU in the grip of multiple crises, the world is facing the risk of a new round of “anti-globalization” and anti-trade liberalization, casting a shadow over the global response to climate change. At the same time, inaction or little action has weakened the leadership of European and US countries in Global Climate Governance. In comparison, the Chinese government remains resolute in its efforts to tackle climate change. Its active and effective actions in implementing the Paris Agreement, undertaking independent energy conservation and emission reduction, and providing green investment to developing countries have won recognition from the international community. At present, China has preliminary ability to lead the global climate change. The future China will adhere to multilateralism, as “leader” of the Global Climate Governance, it is based on China’s own situation and the development trend of going along with the historical inevitable choice, is also a strategic response to the international community is looking forward to and to bear the responsibility of the global ecological security maintenance, will become the leading global ecological civilization construction, the effective methods to effectively promote the implementation process of the Paris agreement.

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