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Exploration of International Climate Governance Mechanisms from the Perspective of Social Dialogue

Sizhu Zhang[1,a,*]

[1]*Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Harbin Institute of Technology, West Dazhi Street, Harbin, China*
a. 1728806205@qq.com
**corresponding author*

Abstract: The global climate issue has become increasingly severe, and relying solely on a single entity for governance is insufficient to achieve ideal outcomes. Various international organizations are on the rise, and diversification and decentralization have become inevitable results in the evolution of international climate governance mechanisms. Social dialogue, as a mechanism involving multiple stakeholders, information sharing, and collaborative decision-making, can effectively address the collective action dilemma in climate governance. Therefore, this paper explores and analyzes the evolution of international climate mechanisms and the impact of diversified governance models through the lens of social dialogue. From this perspective, multiple stakeholders enhance democratic participation in international climate governance, which, to some extent, increases governance motivation. However, it also inevitably leads to a fragmented and decentralized global climate governance mechanism, characterized by a lack of international leadership and low governance efficiency. To address this issue and advance the climate governance process, it is necessary to acknowledge that a diversified governance mechanism has become a established fact, and subsequently, to establish a collaborative mechanism among multiple stakeholders, facilitating multi-faceted and multi-level dialogues to promote active and orderly participation from all parties, rather than pursuing a singular centralized leadership governance mechanism.

Keywords: International Governance, Climate Governance Mechanisms, Social Dialogue, Multiple Stakeholders, International Organizations.

1. Introduction

The world has entered an era of social dialogue, where the strategy of social dialogue, as a mechanism for negotiation, information sharing, consultation, joint decision-making, and collaborative problem-solving among multiple stakeholders, has gradually evolved into a means of jointly addressing global development challenges. As national, regional, and global affairs develop, the meaning of social dialogue continues to enrich and adjust. Although this concept originally emerged to address labor relations, its subjects are no longer limited to governments, employers, and worker representatives; they have become increasingly diversified. It can be said that its role has long since surpassed the realm of labor relations and is increasingly being applied to solve social and developmental issues. Social dialogue promotes democratic participation and the establishment of consensus among multiple stakeholders, a characteristic that has garnered increasing attention and application in

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research. Global climate change has consistently been one of the focal issues for the international community and is one of the most severe challenges humanity has ever faced. The negative impacts of climate change transcend borders and are not confined to any single country or region. Therefore, effectively addressing the increasingly complex issues of global climate governance has long surpassed the capabilities of individual sovereign nations, leading to the emergence of a series of global climate governance mechanisms and various international organizations. Since the 21st century, with the increasing frequency of extreme climate events and their significant socio-economic impacts, an increasing number of sovereign countries and international institutions have placed emphasis on climate change and related security issues, actively engaging in the process of international climate governance. Diversified climate governance models have become the mainstream in contemporary international politics. Climate issues are not only social problems but also developmental challenges. Thus, examining how to view the increasingly diversified and multi-level international climate governance model through the lens of social dialogue, analyzing the impacts of today's diversified stakeholders on international climate governance from this perspective, and exploring how to utilize social dialogue to improve current international climate governance mechanisms and advance the international climate governance agenda has become a viable topic for research.

2. Literature Review and Concept Definition

With the rapid development of globalization, international governance has increasingly garnered attention. International governance encompasses both formal and informal mechanisms, and almost no country can exist in an independent space without being involved in and constrained by international governance [1]. International governance requires institutional mechanisms to promote the implementation of international rules and the adherence to governance principles, with international organizations becoming vital safeguards for formal cooperation among nations and the establishment of international norms [2]. As globalization deepens, the traditionally "state-centric governance mechanisms" led by developed countries are facing challenges from emerging entities and powers, leading to visible issues regarding governance capacity [3]. Although nation-states continue to play a core role in international governance, the governance actors in the international community are no longer dominated by them; rather, a trend towards diversification and multi-level participation has emerged, with regional international organizations, multinational corporations, global civil society, and even individuals actively participating in international governance practices.

Social dialogue has long been an important tool used by the International Labour Organization to promote broad participation and the formulation of social and economic policies. As a comprehensive governance mechanism, social dialogue facilitates inclusivity and scientifically informed decision-making by enabling three or more stakeholders to engage in mutual communication and negotiation, collectively seeking solutions to problems [4]. Additionally, during the consultation and negotiation processes, the government must provide feedback to social partners regarding subsequent actions and plans, creating opportunities to enhance transparency and accountability among the involved parties [5]. Therefore, social dialogue is particularly suited to addressing collective action problems. This paper primarily employs the perspective of social dialogue, encouraging multi-party participation, information sharing, democratic consultation, and joint decision-making to resolve the dilemmas of collective action, analyzing the increasingly apparent trends of decentralization and stakeholder diversification in international climate governance mechanisms.

The concept of governance in response to international climate issues has mainly been formed within the framework of the United Nations, primarily through institutional cooperation and arrangements that integrate individuals into collective actions within the international community. This is achieved by controlling or reducing greenhouse gas emissions to maintain a general balance

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between global economic development and greenhouse gas emissions, thereby ensuring a relative harmony between human development and environmental capacity. Although since 2007, numerous multilateral international organizations, such as the G8 and G20, have prioritized climate change as a significant agenda item, leading some scholars to suggest the emergence of a "mechanism complex" in the field of climate change [6], the international climate governance mechanism under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change remains unmatched and irreplaceable in terms of legitimacy, universality, and authority [7]. The international climate change governance mechanism is in a state of constant transformation; its formation and development constitute a dynamic multilateral process, with new rules and organizations emerging or about to emerge, and an increasing number of countries and international organizations participating. Since the financial crisis of 2008, the climate governance model traditionally led by sovereign states has gradually waned, while non-state actors have significantly enhanced their participation methods and levels, making diversified governance models the mainstream [8].

3. International Climate Governance Actors and Mechanisms

3.1. Main Actors in International Climate Governance

The Global Governance Commission mentioned in its report, "Our Global Neighborhood," that "global governance encompasses both formal institutions and mechanisms with enforcement power as well as a variety of widely accepted informal arrangements" [9]. Therefore, the actors in global climate governance are not limited to national governments and intergovernmental organizations; they can also include non-governmental organizations, enterprises, and multinational corporations. These actors play their respective roles in the global climate governance mechanism while also influencing and impacting one another. Specifically, they can be categorized into four main types: sovereign states, intergovernmental international organizations, multinational enterprises, and global civil society organizations represented by non-governmental international organizations. Sovereign states are not only the main participants in climate negotiations, influencing the negotiation process and final outcomes, but they are also the ultimate executors of international climate agreements, coordinating and implementing various international climate initiatives. Developed countries bear certain obligations regarding greenhouse gas emissions reduction, funding provision, and technology transfer; they possess significant instrumental power but often adopt a relatively passive and conservative stance due to their national interests. Moreover, intergovernmental international organizations hold some powers delegated by sovereign states and are also important actors in international climate governance. In the realm of climate issues, the United Nations, through the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council as its highest decision-making bodies, along with the United Nations Environment Programme as its core institution, carries out specific work. This is further supported by various specialized agencies and related organizations under the UN, forming a cross-sectoral and multi-level governance system.

Multinational enterprises are also significant stakeholders in international climate negotiations. They are not only major sources of greenhouse gas emissions but also victims of climate issues. Under pressure from global climate challenges, an increasing number of national governments have begun to adhere to the "polluter pays" principle, setting prices for carbon emissions while also providing subsidies for energy conservation, emissions reduction, and the development of new energy technologies. Currently, gradually raising carbon pricing and tightening energy efficiency standards has become an indispensable approach in global climate governance [10]. Finally, global civil society organizations represented by international non-governmental organizations are playing an increasingly important role in international climate governance. Since the UN initiated global climate negotiations, international NGOs have consistently appeared in various governance systems as

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experts, active participants, and diplomatic agents [11]. At the 2009 Copenhagen Conference, 1,400 NGOs and IGOs obtained observer status, with NGOs accounting for about 90% of this number [12]. Furthermore, in the 2015 Paris Agreement, NGOs were classified as non-Party stakeholders. The participation of international NGOs in international climate governance not only enhances the legitimacy of policy outcomes but also increases the democratic nature and transparency of governance. Additionally, leveraging their resource allocation and expertise, these organizations help establish a global-regional-national climate governance network, creating more opportunities for information exchange.

In summary, the participants in international climate governance mechanisms are becoming increasingly diverse, decentralized, and less centralized. In the face of severe climate challenges, the number of international climate institutions has increased, and various climate change initiatives have proliferated, with different governance actors, including civil society, actively participating and gradually altering the governance model and leadership structure of global climate governance.

3.2. Current Status and Challenges of Diverse Actors in International Climate Governance

The anarchical nature of the international community and the trend towards increasing diversification of actors in international climate governance have led to a lack of international leadership in the climate governance mechanisms, resulting in fragmentation in global climate governance. Due to insufficient representation, lack of action, and inefficiency in traditional governance mechanisms, a separation of mechanisms has begun to emerge in the field of climate governance. Furthermore, the basic unit of global climate governance being sovereign states poses constraints on the progress of global climate governance, complicating the mechanisms involved [13]. The European Union, which once played a leadership role in global climate governance and was one of the first entities to propose climate goals, has seen its overall influence and strength decline, making it insufficiently equipped to independently lead climate governance based on its current capabilities. Additionally, Brexit has also affected the EU's power and international influence, limiting its future leadership in global climate governance. As a superpower in today's international community, the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement has harmed the progress of international climate cooperation and diminished its credibility in international climate governance. China has been actively promoting the international climate governance process in recent years and possesses ambition; however, due to its relatively limited experience in international climate governance, its leadership capabilities are not prominent. As major actors in international climate governance, sovereign states have their own interests to consider, and discrepancies exist in the willingness and capacity for governance between developed and developing countries, resulting in a collective action dilemma that leads to inefficiencies in the operation of climate governance mechanisms.

4. The Impact of Diverse Actors on Global Climate Governance from the Perspective of Social Dialogue

From the perspective of social dialogue, the participation of diverse actors in climate governance is an important embodiment of enhancing democratic engagement, which can, to some extent, foster proactive involvement in climate governance and reduce the "free rider" phenomenon. However, at the same time, due to the anarchical nature of the international community, the diversity of actors also leads to increasing difficulties in coordinating international climate governance mechanisms, with fragmentation and decentralization becoming more pronounced. Differences in interests, ideologies, and rights among various parties hinder the formation of a cohesive leadership structure in international climate governance, leading to a lack of leadership and establishing decentralization as an established fact. Furthermore, the governance systems and funding of diverse actors are often

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difficult to coordinate, resulting in frequent duplication of activities in the field of international climate governance, high operational costs, and low resource utilization efficiency. This inefficiency makes it challenging to achieve governance goals with existing resources. Therefore, since the diversification, multi-level structure, and decentralization in the field of climate governance have become unavoidable, the more critical issue lies in establishing a collaborative mechanism among diverse actors, facilitating multi-party dialogue, and effectively promoting the active and orderly participation of all parties in international collaborative climate governance mechanisms. Strengthening cooperation and coordination should take precedence over pursuing a singular leadership and followership system. Drawing on governance mechanisms of social dialogue means involving different actors in international climate governance, establishing and improving dialogue and consultation mechanisms, exploring various forms of government collaboration and policy innovation, and fostering cooperative consultation mechanisms among actors at different levels to enhance the efficiency of international climate governance.

5. Conclusion

Compared to other global issues, climate change has its unique characteristics: it is not bound by geography, time, or space. Under the dual pressure of globalization and environmental issues, single entities struggle to address the increasingly severe challenges posed by climate change, making diversification, multi-levelization, and decentralization inevitable trends in the development of international climate governance mechanisms. As a comprehensive governance mechanism, social dialogue enables information sharing, mutual consultation, and collective problem-solving among multiple stakeholders, addressing the collective action dilemma to some extent. This is of great significance for the increasingly diverse international climate governance mechanism. Therefore, this paper introduces the perspective of social dialogue to explore international climate governance mechanisms, emphasizing the evolution of international climate governance issues and mechanisms, and analyzing the diverse stakeholders in international climate governance, as well as the challenges and dilemmas faced by international climate governance mechanisms under the participation of diverse stakeholders. It reveals the importance of social dialogue in international climate governance and provides a new perspective on how to achieve effective cooperation in decentralized and multi-stakeholder international climate governance. From the perspective of social dialogue, although the participation of diverse stakeholders has enhanced the democratization and participation of international climate governance to some extent, it has also led to fragmentation and decentralization of governance mechanisms, resulting in a lack of leadership and efficiency in international climate governance, which to some extent weakens the collective action ability of the global response to climate change. Social dialogue, on the other hand, can provide a platform for all parties to actively participate, coordinate positions, and jointly seek solutions to climate change issues. Therefore, this paper believes that international climate governance mechanisms have already shown trends of diversification and decentralization, and this trend is difficult to change in a short time. It is necessary to develop it more effectively through the thinking and framework of social dialogue. The future of international climate governance depends more on cooperation and coordination among diverse stakeholders. Only by not pursuing a single governance system, but instead strengthening social dialogue and allowing diverse and multi-level stakeholders to participate together to establish an inclusive collaborative governance mechanism, can we effectively address the global challenge of climate change.

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