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BRICs: from Norm-takers to Norm-makers in Climate Governance

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Abstract: *The issue of climate change has become an increasingly prominent global issue. Climate change is no longer a simple natural science problem caused by excessive emissions of greenhouse gases, but a political problem related to national interests. In order to maximize their respective interests, developed countries and developing countries, namely the North and South camps, have launched a complex and fierce political game over the issue of climate change. This article discusses that the role of the Europe Union has been weakened in the field of global climate governance, while the emerging economies represented by BRICS countries has gradually improved, from norm-makers to norm-makers.*

Keywords: *Climate Change Policy; Norm Transformation; the Europe Union; BRICS; the North and South*

1. Introduction

The issue of climate change has gradually become one of the issues of common concern for all countries in the world. Today, the issue of climate change is no longer a purely natural science issue, but a major issue involving the economic development of various countries and the right to speak internationally. In order to maximise their respective interests, developed countries and developing countries, namely the North and South camps, have launched a complex and fierce political game over the issue of climate change. Over the past 30 years, Western developed countries have made many efforts in climate governance, and its role has been recognised by countries around the world. In recent years, emerging economies have also begun to actively participate in climate governance and play an increasingly important role. After the financial crisis, with the BRICS as representatives of the Southern countries, their influence in the international community has increased day by day. The strengthening of the economic power of these Southern countries has brought a certain impact on the global climate governance pattern dominated by Western countries. This article discusses the gradual transformation of emerging countries from traditional climate change policy bearers to active policymakers from multiple perspectives.

2. Background Brief for on Global Climate Governance

Since entering the industrialised society, the massive growth of the global population and the use of fossil fuels, the content of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere is gradually rising, causing global climate warming [1]. Since the 1960s, large-scale environmentalist movements have emerged in developed Western countries. Driven by those movements, the issue of climate change has attracted public attention and has become one of the important issues of international environmental protection. As a result, the United Nations held the first World Climate Conference in 1979, marking that climate change as an important environmental issue has received extensive attention from the international community. Taking into account the seriousness of the potential global climate change problem, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) established the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in September 1985 to formally incorporate climate change issues into international political agenda. Compared with other environmental issues, climate change issues are obviously different. The problem of climate change is often caused by the emission of greenhouse gases from many countries, and the impact is very wide, spreading to other countries around the world. This feature determines that the climate problem cannot be solved by a single national government but needs to be solved by various actors in the international community.

In order to find a reasonable climate governance system, the United Nations officially launched the

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international climate negotiation process in 1991. In 1992, at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, the participating parties finally signed the "United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change" （UNFCCC）. UNFCCC has laid the institutional foundation for global climate governance. Subsequently, at the Kyoto Climate Change Conference in 1997, many countries passed the "Kyoto Protocol," which stipulated specific and legally effective greenhouse gas emission reduction tasks, which was the first time in human history to limit greenhouse gas emissions in the form of regulations. At the 2007 Bali Climate Conference, the participating parties jointly established the "Bali Road Map", which made an important contribution to the improvement of the global climate governance system. It clarified the emission reduction action plan for developing countries for the first time [2]. At the 2015 Paris Climate Change Conference, the participants reached a universal and legally binding climate agreement, the "Paris Agreement", which is a landmark international legal text on climate governance.

In the current global climate governance field, there are two camps, developed and developing countries, and climate governance issues have also become one of the north-south problems. The developed countries in climate governance are led by the European Union and the Umbrella Group (a loose alliance composed of non-EU developed countries). The developing countries are led by several actors such as the Group of 77, the BRICS, and the Alliance of Small Island States. In the camp of developed countries, although the EU and the Umbrella Group have differences on issues such as emission reduction targets and emission reduction deadlines, they have the same position on requiring developing countries to undertake emission reduction tasks. Specifically, regarding emission reduction responsibilities, there has always been a dispute between developing and developed countries. Most developed countries believe that global warming is the result of the development of all countries in the world. Therefore, developed countries tend to emphasize the actual emissions of developing countries and advocate that global warming should be controlled with the least cost as much as possible in the world [3]. Correspondingly, the mainstream view of developing countries is that developed countries bear historical responsibility for global warming. Therefore, developed countries should undertake more corresponding emission reduction obligations. And they advocate those developing countries should enjoy the right to development and need more emission space and financial support. All in all, developed countries and developing countries have shown obvious differences in their understanding of climate issues.

3. The Role of Developed Countries in Global Climate Governance

The previous chapter gives a brief introduction to the background knowledge of global climate issues. This chapter mainly discusses the important role of the EU in global climate governance and its diminishing leadership. Developed countries represented by EU countries have played a vital role in the field of climate change for a long time. EU can lead the formulation of international climate change governance standards to a large extent. However, after the financial crisis, especially at the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference in 2009, the EU proposal was questioned by emerging countries. Since then, the EU has gradually lost its leadership in global climate governance.

Western developed countries have long been leaders and policymakers in the field of global climate governance. For example, the United States was a major participant in climate governance in the 1970s and 1980s and actively promoted the signing of the Montreal Protocol. After the end of the Cold War, with the changes in the global power structure, the United States' attitude towards climate change issues began to turn negative, and its leadership in the field of global climate governance was gradually weakened [4]. Especially after the Bush administration refused to sign the "Kyoto Protocol" in 2001, the United States was gradually marginalized in the field of climate governance. After the United States withdrew from the Kyoto Protocol, the European Union took the initiative to assume the responsibility of the climate agreement and actively negotiated with Russia, Japan and other countries, effectively promoting the signing and entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol [5].

Internally, the European Union also actively undertakes the task of reducing emissions. In order to promote the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, in June 2000, the European Commission formally promulgated the First European Climate Change Programme (ECCP I). In March 2003, the environment ministers of the EU member states approved the "Kyoto Protocol." Since this time, the EU's climate policy has focused more on the realization of emission reduction commitments. In October 2005, the European Union officially launched the Second European Climate Change Programme (ECCP II), opening a new milestone in the EU's climate change policy.

ISSN 2706-6827 Vol. 4, Issue 2: 10-16, DOI: 10.25236/IJFS.2022.040203

By participating in climate governance and solving environmental problems, the EU's international influence has been greatly enhanced, and it has become the main leader in climate governance at that time. However, after the 2008 financial crisis, the rise of emerging countries challenged the EU's leadership in global climate governance. At the Copenhagen Conference, various parties had different opinions on the emission reduction targets and financial assistance targets stipulated in the Kyoto Protocol. At the meeting, the EU proposed a single-track negotiation route and high emission reduction targets in order to reach a comprehensive legally binding agreement, and compulsorily list the emission reduction schedule for developing countries, but it was protested by developing countries [6]. The EU's actions led to a stalemate in the negotiation process of the conference, so the EU's status at the conference plummeted and was gradually marginalized. The "Copenhagen Agreement" reached at the end was jointly promoted by the United States and the four BASIC Countries and cannot reflect the EU's policy propositions on global climate governance. After the Copenhagen Conference, the leadership of the European Union was frustrated, and Durao Barroso, then President of the European Commission, could not conceal his disappointment, arguing that the Copenhagen Agreement did not achieve the EU's expected goal of climate governance [7].

4. The Role of 'Southern' Countries in Global Climate Governance

After the 2008 financial crisis, the international status of emerging countries has continued to improve, and their status and role in global climate governance have also become more important. This chapter mainly discusses the role of the 'southern' countries represented by the BRICS countries, namely Brazil, Russia, China, India and South Africa in the current global climate governance. It is found that these countries have gradually changed from passive recipients of policies to active policy makers.

4.1 Brazil

The issue of climate governance in Brazil has always been linked to the contradiction between the ecological environment and economic development. In the 1970s and 1980s, Brazil's economic development was at its peak, and it resisted the environmental protection policies proposed by the international community, believing that environmental protection would hinder Brazil's economic development [8]. In the 1980s, the Brazilians began to develop and cut down the tropical rainforest, which was strongly condemned by the international community. Due to external pressure, in the 1990s, Brazil began to face climate change and environmental issues as a political issue and began to actively participate in international climate negotiations. Brazil established the Climate Change Commission in 1999 to strengthen the political coordination of the Brazilian government on climate change issues. Beginning in 2000, Brazil has gradually established a climate change forum, where the government, business, non-governmental organizations, and academia discuss climate issues. During the Copenhagen Conference, the Lula government at that time attached great importance to the issue of climate change and always emphasized that emission reduction commitments should be based on the historical responsibilities of countries. In 2007, Brazil, China and South Africa jointly announced the implementation of voluntary emission reductions and took the lead in proposing emission reduction targets before the Copenhagen Climate Conference, becoming the first developing country to propose voluntary emission reduction target [9]. In 2009, the Brazilian government promulgated the National Climate Change Law, which clearly set out Brazil's emission reduction targets by 2020.

4.2 Russia

The impact of climate change on Russia has always been pros and cons. From a geopolitical point of view, Russia is adjacent to the Arctic, and global warming increases the temperature of the Arctic region, which will make the development and utilization of natural resources in the Arctic more convenient [10]. The economic value of the Arctic region will strengthen Russia's power. Therefore, Russia has resisted climate policy in the past. However, on the other hand, Russia has always hoped to participate in international affairs with the help of global climate governance, and gain recognition from other countries, especially the European Union [11]. Until 2009, the Russian Ministry of Environmental Protection issued the "Climate Protocol", which marked a change in the Russian government's attitude towards climate issues. In December of the same year, Medvedev formally signed the Climate Doctrine of the Russian Federation, putting forward the objectives, content and specific practices of Russia's climate policy, which became a milestone in the Russian climate governance system. After taking into account the security issues in the frozen lands, in September 2019, Russia formally joined the Paris Agreement [12].

ISSN 2706-6827 Vol. 4, Issue 2: 10-16, DOI: 10.25236/IJFS.2022.040203

4.3 China

For a long time, China has been the world's largest developing country and the country with the most greenhouse gas emissions. In the past, like all developing countries, considering its own economic development issues, China has always treated international climate change policies negatively. At the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009, China was still a strong opponent. With the rapid development of China's economy, China is facing increasingly severe pressures and challenges on the international political arena and climate governance issues. Especially in recent years, the problems of sandstorms and extreme weather in northern China have been increasing, which has attracted the attention of the people [13]. In the policy system, China has signed important international documents such as the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement, and has formulated several action plans. Beginning in 2008, the Chinese government has continuously issued annual reports on climate change, clarifying the process and basic path of China's response to climate change [14]. At the Paris Climate Change Conference in 2015, China has become an active promoter, conducting consultations with India, Brazil, the European Union, France and other countries and regions, laying the foundation for the Paris Climate Conference to reach consensus [15].

4.4 India

India's domestic energy and ecological issues have a great impact on its climate change policy. In coping with international climate change cooperation, India has always made development its top priority, believing that 'poverty is the greatest harm to climate change' [16]. In order to deal with climate change, in 2007, India established a committee of experts to conduct scientific research on climate change and put forward scientific countermeasures for India to deal with climate change. In 2008, the Indian government issued an official document, proposing eight key plans to address climate change, providing an institutional guarantee for India's participation in global climate governance [17]. At the international level, India participates in international climate cooperation through the "CDM (Clean Development Mechanism, one of the compliance mechanisms in the Kyoto Protocol)". India announced in October 2015 that from 2015 to 2030, India will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 33%-35% and set up a fund to address climate change, indicating that it is gradually actively participating in the process of global climate governance [18].

4.5 South Africa

With the deepening of the impact of climate issues on national security, the South African government began to attach importance to climate issues and began to formulate and issue a series of policy documents to clarify policies and strategies on climate change. In 2004, the South African government formulated a national climate change strategy to monitor air pollution. In 2009, South Africa held a climate change policy summit to discuss how to deal with climate change related issues. The 2011 Climate Change Conference was held in Durban. As the host country, South Africa officially announced the white paper "South Africa's Policy on Climate Change" in order to show the world its efforts in climate governance. This is the first time that the South African government has issued a comprehensive national action plan on climate change, drawing a clear road map for South Africa's participation in global climate governance [19]. The issue of climate change affects food security and has therefore become an inevitable issue in the development of Africa. Many international organizations have pointed out that the temperature rise in southern Africa in 2019 is twice the global average, and the rainy season precipitation is severely low, which has caused severe damage to southern African agriculture [20]. As the representative of African countries, South Africa is increasingly actively participating in global climate governance.

5. Discussion

This chapter first discusses the essence of the global climate governance game and believes that national interests are the key to various games and contradictions. Then argue that the EU's power in global climate governance has been challenged for two main reasons. On the one hand, the reason comes from the impact of the financial crisis, making the EU's economic situation unable to withstand the economic pressure brought about by emission reductions; On the other hand, it comes from the rising status of emerging countries in climate governance, which has caused the organization of the climate governance power structure.

ISSN 2706-6827 Vol. 4, Issue 2: 10-16, DOI: 10.25236/IJFS.2022.040203

5.1 The Essence of the Game in Global Climate Governance

The core essence of the political game among countries in the field of international climate change is national interests. National interest is the most basic element that drives national interaction in international relations. The impact of climate change has different manifestations in different countries. For example, for countries such as the United States, China, and India, climate change policy directly affects the space for economic development, that is, national economic interests [21]. Small island countries are more concerned about survival interests in international climate policies. The country's core interests take precedence over the issue of climate change [22]. Therefore, countries' consideration of national interests is far greater than their interest in building consensus on climate governance. For some countries, there are conflicts and contradictions between fulfilling their emission reduction obligations and their existing domestic economic development models [23]. Especially for emerging countries that favor export-oriented economies, reducing emissions means that their countries have lost their comparative advantages in cheap labor and cheap energy in international trade, which is a disadvantage for the development of labor-intensive and resource-intensive industries [24]. Considering self-interest, many issues related to climate governance have been politicized to varying degrees. A typical case is that the United States implemented the 'Clean Energy and Security Act' in June 2009. The bill stipulates that the United States has the right to impose "carbon tariffs" on products imported from countries that have not implemented emission reduction quotas. In the form of laws, the United States has artificially constructed the link between climate issues and international trade, created trade barriers, and aimed to restrict the export trade of emerging countries [25]. The United States uses such measures to weaken the competitive advantages of developing countries in the global market.

5.2 The Rise of Emerging Countries in Climate Governance and the Decline of EU

The EU has been affected by the global economic crisis and the European debt crisis since 2008. According to the EU's official report on the future economic development trend of the EU in 2018, the economy is still growing slowly and lacking momentum, and economic growth is extremely uncertain. Data show that the GDP growth of the European Eurozone economy in 2019 decreased by 0.2% compared with 2018. It is predicted that by 2020, the GDP growth rate will drop from 2.1% in 2018 to 1.7% [26]. It is worth noting that the European Union has set itself very ambitious climate governance goals and promised to provide climate assistance funds to developing countries. For example, on October 29, 2015, the European Union announced at the Paris Climate Conference to provide a total of 350 million euros in aid funds to underdeveloped countries around the world in the next five years to address the challenges posed by climate change [27].

After the Katowice Climate Conference held in December 2018, the European Union issued a 2050 long-term strategy, which aims to create a climate-neutral EU. According to estimates, if a climate-neutral Europe is to be established, only innovation in clean energy technology, the EU must invest at least 10 billion euros. The European Commission stated that in order to maintain the European Union's leading advantages in clean energy technology, the EU needs to develop more sustainable products and technologies, which also means that more money needs to be invested in technological development [28]. In order to achieve the ambitious climate governance goals, set, the EU will need more funds. However, the haze caused by the financial crisis on the entire EU member states, has not yet dissipated.

Brazil, India, China, South Africa and other developments played the role of followers in the early stages of global climate governance. These countries had low participation in global climate governance in the early stage, and their positions on climate governance were relatively cautious and conservative. After the 2008 financial crisis, emerging economies represented by the BRICS countries began to rise and play a role in international politics and global governance. At the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference, the European Union and developing countries diverged on some climate issues. In the climate negotiations, the European Union proposed a single-track negotiation model to put pressure on China and India on emission reduction targets, which caused dissatisfaction among developing countries [29]. Developing countries represented by Brazil, China, India and South Africa adhere to the dual-track negotiation model. Therefore, the "Denmark Draft" proposed by the developed countries was strongly resisted by the BASIC Countries. With the continuous growth of the economic strength of the BRICS countries, their international status has been improved, and they have continuously deepened their cooperation in the field of climate change. At previous BRICS climate summits, the BRICS countries have incorporated their understanding and ideas on climate change issues into the declaration. For example, in the 2011 Sanya Declaration, these countries recognized that climate change is one of the current global challenges and emphasized that they actively fulfil the responsibilities. In the 2012 New

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Delhi Declaration, the BRICS pledged to contribute to global climate governance and respond to climate change through sustainable development. The 2016 Goa Declaration stated that the BRICS countries support the use of natural gas as a clean fuel and reduce greenhouse gas emissions in accordance with the Paris Agreement. It can be seen that the developing countries represented by the BRICS countries are gradually reaching a series of basic consensus in the field of global climate governance and are constantly striving for the right to speak in global climate policy formulation.

6. Conclusion

The issue of climate change has become an increasingly prominent global issue. Climate change is no longer a simple natural science problem caused by excessive emissions of greenhouse gases, but a political problem related to national interests. In this global context, this article mainly discusses the changes in the field of climate governance and finds that emerging countries have gradually changed from policy resisters in the past to policymakers today, while the voice of developed countries represented by the EU has been weakened. The European Union has played a very important role in the field of global climate governance. During the "Kyoto Protocol" period, it has mastered the right to speak in global climate governance and has led the development of global climate governance policies for a certain period of time. However, after the 2008 financial crisis, the status of emerging economies represented by the BRICS countries in the international community has gradually improved, which has caused a certain impact on the EU's climate governance power. The developing countries represented by the BRICS are large emitters of greenhouse gases and have similar interests in climate issues. Therefore, they continue to deepen cooperation and exchanges on climate issues. For example, through the establishment of multilateral exchange mechanisms such as the IBSA Dialogue Forum and the BASIC Countries Climate Summit, they continue to be active in the field of global climate governance and fight for the rights and interests of developing countries. In the long-term climate governance practices, these developing countries have gradually changed from followers in the field of climate governance to active participants.

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