

Commentary

The role of China within Arctic climate governance

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The impact and consequences of climate change in the Arctic are becoming more and more catastrophic, posing a great threat to human survival and development. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued a stark warning about the dangers of climate change in the Arctic in its latest sixth climate assessment report. The issue of Arctic climate change has become a common concern of both Arctic and non-Arctic countries. How to implement Arctic climate governance to solve climate change has become an important Arctic governance issue related to the future of mankind.

Climate governance involves all aspects of politics, economy, science and technology, diplomacy, and social development of various countries, and requires the cooperation of all countries. However, the current international situation has undergone major changes, and Arctic climate governance cooperation is facing an unprecedentedly severe and complex international environment.

Since its establishment in 1996, the Arctic Council has played an important role in promoting international cooperation in the Arctic. However, affected by the Russia-Ukraine war, the other seven Arctic countries have suspended various cooperation with Russia in the Arctic, and the Arctic Council has come to a standstill. In the future, whether the Arctic Council can resume normal work still faces great uncertainty. At the same time, Finland officially joined NATO on April 4, 2023, and Sweden is also in the process of joining NATO. A situation in which NATO's seven Arctic countries confront Russia is taking shape. The geopolitical situation in the Arctic is unprecedentedly tense, and the international trust of Russia and the other seven Arctic countries has dropped to a historical low after the Cold War. This is very detrimental to the cooperation in dealing with climate change in the Arctic because climate governance cooperation requires mutual trust among countries. Without basic trust, there can be no effective international cooperation.

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As political games and confrontations in the Arctic region become more intense, and Arctic cooperation becomes increasingly fragmented, Arctic climate governance requires the participation of non-Arctic countries more than ever. Since becoming an observer country of the Arctic Council, China has been actively participating in Arctic affairs over the years, and climate change is one of China's key concerns. Although the current Arctic climate governance is in a disadvantageous situation, it is also an opportunity for China. On the one hand, the Arctic climate issue is not only an environmental issue but also poses a huge threat to the sustainable development of the Arctic region. Participation in Arctic climate governance is an inherent requirement for China's sustainable development in the Arctic region. On the other hand, although China claims to be an important stakeholder in the Arctic region, this identity has not yet been fully recognized externally. For China, if China can contribute to Arctic climate governance in the current difficult period of Arctic climate governance, it will not only reflect China's responsibility as a responsible Arctic stakeholder but also help expand China's influence in Arctic affairs, thereby helping China to gain wider recognition of identity in the Arctic region.

Therefore, China should seize the current opportunity, place the Arctic climate governance in a more prominent position in its Arctic strategy, and seek to lead the Arctic climate governance. First, China needs to act as a good coordinator of Arctic climate governance. China should actively coordinate the conflicts between Russia and the seven Arctic countries in Arctic cooperation, and encourage all parties to put aside political disputes and work together on Arctic climate governance. Second, China must be a practitioner of climate governance and take practical actions to contribute to Arctic climate governance, rather than just staying at the level of slogans. In addition, China should actively act as a pioneer in Arctic climate governance. China should take the initiative to explore the Arctic climate governance model, increase investment in scientific research on the Arctic climate, improve the training of climate governance personnel, etc., and strive to be at the forefront of climate governance. Finally, China should vigorously advocate multilateralism, actively promote the Arctic climate governance cooperation network through bilateral and multilateral negotiations, promote the joint construction of a fair, reasonable, cooperative, and win-win Arctic climate governance system, and enhance the cooperation and effectiveness of the Arctic climate governance.