Cross-Sectoral Coordination Mechanism in China’s Environmental Governance: Leading Small Groups

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Introduction

- The dilemmas in China’s environmental governance
  - Horizontal aspect: Different government bodies that share many environmental responsibilities tend to compete rather than cooperation;
  - Vertical aspect: Local governments’ selective implementation of central government’s environmental policies are often observed;

- How does the Chinese government deal with problems of noncompliance at the local level and organizational fragmentation in environmental governance?
  - How to do the coordination among different departments, different regions, and various levels of governments in China’s environmental governance?
  - Cross-sectoral coordination mechanism in China: Leading Small Groups (LSG)
Leading Small Groups

- The “Leading Small Group” (领导小组, LSGs) is a super-ministerial mechanism created to largely coordinate the complex decision-making process in some policy fields where there are many ministries involved. According to the latest official definition, LSGs were regarded as “Deliberative and Cooperative Organs” (议事协调机构, DCO) and have the power to coordinate across sectors in a particular situation;

Research Method

- This article mainly uses data from government documents, official media reports, China Environment Yearbooks, memoirs and collected works of officials (e.g. Qu Geping), government websites, and etc.

Central Groups for Deepening Reform Comprehensively (CPC News, 2014)
The development of LSGs on China's environmental governance

Awaking (1972)
Start-up (1973-1984)
Development stage (1984-1998)
Waning and reviving (1998-2015)


- LGPGR (Wang Li as Director)
- EPLC (Vice Premier Yu Qiuli as Director)
- EPA (Bureau Internal Ministry)
- NEPA (Bureau Internal Ministry)
- EPC (Vice Premier Li Peng/ State Councilor Song Jian as Director)
- CSGREEC (under the CGDRC, President Xi Jinping as Director)
- CEIT (former Minister of MEP Zhai Qing as Director)
- MEP (Departments under the State Council, Ministerial-Level)
- SEPA (Departments Directly under the State Council, Deputy Ministerial-Level)
- NEPA (Departments Directly under the State Council, Deputy Ministerial-Level)

- Above the timeline is the reform process of LSGs on environmental governance at central level;
- Under the timeline is the reform process of central environmental protection agencies
The full view of LSGs on China's environmental governance

- Types of LSGs on environmental governance

  - LSGs under CCCC focus on essential environmental reforms involved not only the government but also the party;

  - LSGs under the State is generally not only in charge of domestic environmental governance issues but also the international cooperation;

  - LSGs under the State Council mainly deal with some specific national environmental issue limited in the scope of the State Council.
The full view of LSGs on China's environmental governance

Some of China’s Leading Groups at the National Level in 2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LSGs under the CCCC</th>
<th>Establishment Time</th>
<th>Chairman</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Central Special Groups for the Reform of Economic and Ecological Civilization</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Xu Shaoshi (Director of NDRC), Liu He (Vice Director of NDRC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Environmental Inspection Team</td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>Zhou Jian (former Minister of MEP)</td>
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<tr>
<th>LSGs under the State</th>
<th>Establishment Time</th>
<th>Chairman</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China Council for International Co-operation on Environment and Development</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Zhang Gaoli (Vice Minister)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Ozone Layer Protection Leading Group</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Zhai Qing (Vice Minister of MEP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Program Leading Group</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Zhou Shengxian (Minister of MEP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Leading Group to Address Climate Change</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Li Keqiang (Premier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Committee of China’s Biodiversity Conservation</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Zhang Gaoli (Vice Premier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Energy Commission</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Li Keqiang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Environment and Health Leading Group</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Wu Xiaqing (Vice Minister of MEP) Chen Xiaohong (Vice Minister of Health)</td>
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<th>LSGs under the State Council</th>
<th>Establishment Time</th>
<th>Chairman</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Afforestation Environmental Protection Commission</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Wang Yang (Vice Premier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the State Council Leading Group for Energy Conservation and Emission Reduction</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Li Keqiang</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some of China’s Leading Groups at the National Level in 2015

National Leading Group to Address Climate Change and Energy Conservation and Emission Reduction (NLGACCECER) held a teleconference.

Premier Wen Jiabao as the Director of NLGACCECER attended UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.
The full view of LSGs on China's environmental governance

- LSGs on environmental governance at local level

  - **Isomorphism**: Local LSGs are corresponding with the LSGs at the central level. When some national or regional LSGs on environmental governance are established at the central level, the central government would usually suggest or require the local governments from different levels to establish corresponding LSGs.

  - **Regionalism**: Local LSGs are established according to the demands of the regions to solve local special environmental protection problems. The base of this type of LSGs is the current Environmental Protection Law, with the dual leadership of higher environmental protection departments and local governments, was centered on the leadership of local governments.
Some of China’s Leading Groups at the local Level

Guangdong Leading Group for Energy Conservation and Emission Reduction held a meeting.

Xiamen established a LSG for “the national environment protection model cities selection”.
The full view of LSGs on China's environmental governance

Organizational structure and operation modes of LSGs on environmental governance

“Presiding leader - Convening Agency - General Office” plays important role in practical policy implementation; the other departments.

- **Presiding leaders** is the main source of LSGs authority; Director and Deputy Directors.
- Responsibilities of **convening agency** and **general office** are almost the same. More precisely, general office is usually shared by an institution of convening agency in environmental governance;
- **Other components** usually play the assistive role and in passive position.

Structure of LSCs (Zhou Wang, 2010)
The full view of LSGs on China's environmental governance

- The most common operation mode of LSGs on environmental governance

  • Make plans for one environmental protection issue and hold meetings to make policy decisions;
  • Then release documents to member units and corresponding LSGs at the lower level;
  • Various functional departments on horizontal shall hold meetings to research and execute the allocated tasks;

  • *Case Study: The National Leading Group for Climate Change, Energy Conservation and Emissions Reduction*
LSGs in China’s environmental governance can exist for such long period, and gradually formulating a stable institutionalized structure and operational modes have proved that their existence is reasonable.

- **LSGs with Chinese characteristics:** “fragmented authoritarianism”

- Effects of LSGs on China’s environmental governance can be summarized into three mechanisms.
1. Mechanism of the transferring from informal agencies to formal agencies.

- Including the MEP, the origins of all environmental protection agencies are from LSGs;
- LSGs are the “incubators” for environmental protection policies and systems in China;
- Until now, whether restore the State Council Environmental Protection LSG besides the MEP or not is still a frequently mentioned issue.
Discussion: Roles of LSGs on environmental governance

2. The integration mechanism to tackle fragmented authoritarianism;

- The power structure of bureaucracy of China was fragmented and decision making was centralized that the agreement of consensus was necessary. As a coordinative mechanism among sectors, LSGs may be the best platform to solve the problem;

- The problems of fragmented authoritarianism in environmental governance are quite serious which make the establishment of lots of LSGs be necessary.

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<th>Functions</th>
<th>Agencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macro-control</td>
<td>National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pollution prevention and control</td>
<td>Ministry of Environmental Protection, Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, Ministry of Transportation, National Health and Family Planning Commission, State Oceanic Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological conservation</td>
<td>Ministry of Environmental Protection, Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, the State Forestry Administration, Ministry of Land Resources, the State Oceanic Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature resource management</td>
<td>Ministry of Environmental Protection, Ministry of Water Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Land Resources, State Forestry Administration, State Oceanic Administration, China National Tourism Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Education, State Oceanic Administration, National Meteorological Administration, National Audit Office, General Administration of Customs, State Administration of Taxation</td>
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*Chinese central government agencies related to environmental governance*
3. Supervision function to solve policy implementation problems among various levels of governments;

- The environmental policies in China were usually implemented from top to down by the vertical system. But the implementation of central policies in local often lacking of efficient supervision and control;

- By the top-down isomorphism LSGs, sources on environmental governance of the upper governments would not be embezzled by local governments as well, and then the central government could supervise the environmental protection more efficiently;

- Regionalism LSGs support platforms for the environmental protection cooperation of different governments. Despite lacking of law, LSGs can maintain the cooperation on environmental protection between different regions by promises or negotiations of the governments.
Criticisms on LSGs mechanism in China’s environmental governance

- Some criticisms focus on too many temporary agencies are set without order;
- Another criticism focus on the unique role of LSGs in China’s campaign-style governance;
- Finally, as a coordinative mechanism at high level, LSGs are not always as successfully as it seems to be.
Discussion: Other cross-sectoral coordinative mechanisms

- Other cross-sectoral coordinative mechanisms

  - Inter-Ministerial Joint Meeting (部际联席会议): it stayed at the information sharing level and was difficult to reach agreement on strategy and movements.

  - Super-Ministry Reform (大部制改革): The idea of SMR is giving formal administration agencies coordinative functions. Those institutional reform innovation exist in many provinces and cities but the practical effect remains to be seen.
Although being criticized, LSGs are still the most important cross-sectoral coordination mechanism on China’s environmental governance;

With long-term practice and experience accumulation, LSGs on environmental governance have formulated a relatively stable institutionalized structure and operational modes;

The functions of Chinese LSGs in environmental governance can be summarized in three mechanisms: “incubators” from temporary agencies to formal agencies, integration mechanism to tackle fragment authoritarianism, and supervision mechanism to solve problems of policy implementation;

The future priority issues of LSGs on environmental governance should be legalization and transparency.
Thanks