

Topic and Research Question

This research paper examines the **effectiveness of International Environmental Institutions (IEIs) with regard to environmental governance in China and South Korea**. IEIs have turned into relevant institutions that enjoy increasing global recognition. The origin of the research question dates back to the fact that by now a variety of IEIs has been established, however environmental degradation has become more severe during the last decades. Therefore, there is a necessity to pose the question in how far they are effective and additionally, where deficiencies can be identified.

The paper analyses the impact on two countries, China and South Korea, that form the empirical study of the research paper. Apart from the individual identification of the degree of effectiveness, differences and similarities between the governance of these states is assessed.

In general, contemporary research proves that both countries have strongly focused on economic development and rather neglected environmental degradation in their territory. Furthermore, it suggests that much more power must be attributed to IEIs to realize effective work with positive long-term effects.

This research aims to identify the level of effectiveness of different conventions on national governance in China and South Korea and in continuation it seeks to present areas of improvement.

State of the Art

Abundant literature in terms of approaches to assess institutions' effectiveness is available, nonetheless, concerning Chinese and South Korean environmental governance it seems more challenging to find scholars that have dealt with the exact topic. Thus, English and German literature on the specific research question, especially regarding the selected agreements, is rather limited and therefore presents a research gap. Authors such as Haas, Keohane and Levy (1993), Young (1989, 1999) or Mitchell (2010) have dedicated their research to institutional effectiveness whereas Evans (2012) made an important contribution in the field of environmental governance. With regard to the case studies, compared to China, South Korean literature is rather limited when it comes to specific facts. A comparison of these countries' governance affected by IEIs has not been conducted.

Methodology and Approach

The methodological framework is centered around the term effectiveness, for which different criteria were elaborated from existing literature and afterwards applied to five chosen agreements. Firstly, this procedure was utilized for China and secondly for South Korea to be able to judge whether the respective countries' governance is effective or not.

These two states were selected since on the one hand they present a similar culture and have experienced many shared historical incidents. Both have also developed within a short period in economic terms. On the other hand, at present they demonstrate different styles of governance and differing political systems.

Due to the vastness of environmental agreements, a number of five was selected and assessed with respect to the chosen criteria. Concerning the conventions, two were taken to represent the **conservation of biodiversity** (Convention on Illegal Trade in Endangered Species - CITES and Convention on Biological Diversity - CBD), two that deal with **climate change** (Montreal Protocol and Kyoto Protocol) and the final one, which encompasses **various areas of protection** (Agenda 21).

In summary, the following criteria to judge effectiveness were elaborated:

- **Contractual environment**
- **Political and administrative capacity**
- **Concern and awareness**
- **Epistemic community**
- **Compliance**
- **Change of behavior**

After having established a construct for evaluating whether the different conventions have been effective, firstly, impact on Chinese governance was assessed. Each of the conventions was assessed based on the criteria. In continuation the same process was adopted for South Korean governance. At the end, the differing results were discussed and differences between the two countries were identified.

Main Facts

The effectiveness differs strongly between the different conventions. In terms of China, first of all **CITES and**

CBD were assessed. The main facts in this matter are that Chinese governance faces a great threat of **diversity loss** as well as continuation in illegal trade, especially because of the weak enforcement of laws and the usage of a number of species for Traditional Chinese Medicine. Although harsh punishments have been introduced, illegal poaching is still prevalent. Moreover the general assumption of Chinese people, that the natural environment is a good to be used and exploited, presents an ideological challenge. Concerning **climate change** China has demonstrated a rather negative attitude with regard to legally binding restrictions on greenhouse-gas emissions and has not provided a contractual environmental nor an expert community for research. Its response to the **Montreal Protocol** though was a more active one and also its compliance record is considered acceptable. As **Agenda 21** offers a remarkable number of areas in need of environmental protection, thus, the effectiveness strongly differs. By introducing legal mechanisms and a responsible administrative body, China was particularly eager to prepare a National Agenda 21. Additionally, the political environment out of which the Agenda arose plays a significant role. It was originally elaborated during the **UN-Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED)** where Non-governmental Organizations were invited to participate. Therefore, at that time environmental governance evolved and further eased the path for NGOs in China.

South Korea on the other hand, established legal regulations in the field of **biodiversity protection**, however great lacks of expert knowledge and research could be identified. In addition, the South Korean government has implemented punishments and fees in case of illegal trade, nevertheless, the financial incentives of poaching are still too convincing. With respect to the **Montreal Protocol** South Korea has shown more commitment and was successful in freezing a number of ozone depleting substances. The **Kyoto Protocol** could only raise awareness on climate change, although a real change in behavior was not achieved. South Korea has struggled gravely with the fact that for enterprises it is cheaper to pay fees for polluting activities than engaging in environmental protection. In Korea the government and non-state actors established an acceptable contractual basis for implementing **Agenda 21** and furthermore Regional and Local Agenda 21. South Korea has experienced vital environmentalism and the formation of a high number of NGOs. Obviously the **UNCED** contributed to

the inclusion of non-state actors, however there is great potential for improvement in this field.

Results

International Environmental Institutions clearly do have an effect on both countries. Although in some areas, the impact is limited, in others essential effectiveness can be observed. Nonetheless, IEIs need to be given more power to increase their effectiveness hence the threat of urgent environmental problems is not diminishing. In this respect the soft-law character of the majority of these agreements is considered an obstacle. For both countries it is valid to list the visualization of environmental problems on the domestic political agenda as successful. In terms of inclusive governance South Korea has taken the lead over China since its democratic transition has ascribed more freedom to non-governmental actors. Thus, on the one hand South Korea has experienced more environmental maturation than China, however in China IEIs have been more effective in the field of promoting epistemic communities. As living standards have been rising in both states it is considered a deficiency of IEIs that so far neither China nor South Korea could be moved to engage stronger in climate protection as well as implementing legally binding emission standards. When it comes to binding targets, both countries have highlighted their image of poor developing countries incapable of contributing more. Thus, international organizations have exerted insufficient pressure concerning the fulfilment obligations. The evidence suggests a need for continuation and intensification of the activities of IEIs and their effectiveness on national governance modes.

References

All references can be found in the full version of the MA thesis available at <http://othes.univie.ac.at/>

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