

China's Role in Global Environmental Governance

The Emergence and the Potential of Partnerships for Sustainable Development

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1. Introduction

Partnerships for Sustainable Development (PFSDs) were introduced at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) as ‘voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiatives aimed at implementing sustainable development’ (UN 2008). China does not seem to constitute a favorable environment for PFSDs. Political, cultural and institutional restrictions inhibit the emergence of PPP arrangements. Yet, China agreed to these PFSDs. Moreover, the UN system actively promotes such arrangements in China. In the set of 340 PFSDs registered with the UN Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD), some 55 claim to have activities in China. How come so many PFSDs implement in China when it constitutes a relatively unfavorable environment? In this paper it is argued that China is a second-mover in the partnerships process, it follows rather than defines the partnerships regime, yet it successfully capitalizes on the regime by attracting investment and gaining know-how in sustainable development. These patterns of emergence and effectiveness are confirmed in an analysis of data from the Global Sustainability Partnerships Database (GSPD). In the conclusion it is argued that the partnerships process in China is disjointed from domestic environmental governance; PFSDs are *in* China but not *by* China. Although recent scholarship suggests that China is assuming more of a driver role in global governance, this particular study does not confirm a ‘sinofication’ of global governance.

2. What is global about global governance?

Global governance has emerged as an important subject within International Relations (IR). However, the concept is surrounded by fuzziness. On the one hand, some scholars view global governance as a more encompassing form of government or steering. One clear merit of this organizational view of global governance is that it does not assume an anarchical state model, it seeks to find the underlying principles and structures of IR. There is also a normative dimension to this perspective; how could we better organize IR? On the other hand, global governance is seen as encapsulating every societal relation (for example, Rosenau 1995: 13), ‘global’ is understood as the most inclusive dimension (Shaw 2000: 71). This inclusive understanding may be so wide that it loses substantial meaning. However, it also allows for understanding of global governance as a mindset rather than a global organizational structure. The merit of this perspective is its wide analytical applicability and its inclusiveness. Whereas some traditional and realist notions of IR concentrate on only the ‘important’ states, the inclusive understanding takes into account the importance of smaller states, emerging states, but also a myriad of social entities; NGOs, trade unions, indigenous peoples et cetera. These entities anticipate upon the global effects of their own actions and those effects resulting from actions by others. One could call this dimension of the global governance *anticipatory global governance*, all actors – not only the strong states – adjust to gain a favorable position in the whole of global governance.

This paper takes a mid-range between the two opposite perspectives of global governance. On the one hand, PFSDs are regarded as an regime that reflects the interests of IOs and governments; while acknowledging that they are also the manifestation of structural processes, such as the emergence of transnational actors. Also this study looks at the particular case of China, how it strategically positions itself and how it (potentially) capitalizes on the PFSDs.

3. Analytical Framework

To operationalize the mid-range perspective of global governance into an analytical framework the concept of organizational field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983) is helpful, because it addresses both organizational aspects and institutional change, and it does not

assume the continuity of institutions. Rather institutions are subject to change through constant repositioning by multiple institutional players. This is especially applicable to global governance since it acknowledges the increasing number of relevant players other than states. Traditional IR has been occupied with the behavior of states, even when there has always been transnational and subnational players. The assumed Westphalian order of nation-states has always competed with different global political arrangements. The 19th century ‘the golden age of nation-states’ was actually dominated by European imperial states. Also, the direct political role of corporations in governance can be dated back to, for instance, the 17th century when the Dutch East Indies Company ran proto-colonial territories. However, states cannot be done away with, even when transnational movements are emerging. Not only has the state model become increasingly commonplace, the world is carved up in state territories and territorial claims by states. It has also been argued that the East Asian interstate system in particular predates the Westphalian system (Arrighi 2007: 314). The historical memory of statehood in East Asia results in a strong state identity, even today. Moreover, the neo-liberal premise that government capacity is weakening, or, that the government should retreat, does not necessarily hold for emerging states. High economic growth, high profits of state-owned enterprises, broader tax bases, and communication technologies, all contribute to increased capacities. That capacity allows for state-led capitalism and economic reforms.

In this study I take partnerships as an organizational field. Multistakeholder partnerships are inherently transnational, consisting of multiple actors and sectors; NGOs, business, government and research. Therefore this study includes non-state actors by default. Yet, I depart from states as dominant actors in the organizational field of PFSDs. This point of departure serves both analytical-methodological and substantial purposes. The degree of transnationalism varies from state to state and is dependent on governments’ openness to non-state actors. Non-state actor activity can therefore be considered as attributes to states. To this account, globalization is far from a deterritorialized process. However, it could be argued that the identification of territorial entities as states is inaccurate, Sassen (2001) for instance locates transnationalism in global cities. However, since there is a wide agreement that the world is moving *from* a predominantly interstate system, taking states as a comparative entities is viable.

4. A Classification of Actors in Global Governance

The analytical framework will include states and IOs. In this section, I attempt at classifying these actors in global governance.

Even when one would accept the claim that states are the most important players in global governance; it must be acknowledged that the substantial meaning of state varies greatly. This diversity has been widely acknowledged. Recent interest in the role of global governance in areas of ‘limited statehood’ reflects this acknowledgement (Risse and Lehmkuhl 2006), also there has been differentiation between ‘islands of governance’ (Keohane 2002: 209). However, these classifications are not comprehensive; it is not clear how many islands of governance exist or whether there is also something like ‘excessive statehood’¹. The concept of ‘first-mover’, and by implication ‘second-mover’ is useful for an initial classification of states in global governance. The idea of first-mover was first suggested in institutionalist theories (e.g. Krasner 1991; Mattli and Buthe 2003). Originally applied to international standard-setting, the first-mover assumption is that institutional innovators gain an advantage

¹ The notion of ‘excessive statehood’ came to my mind, denoting a political context wherein the central or local government commands the capacity to challenge the autonomy of non-state actors and limit their activities.

by controlling for future rules and by impeding the entry of potential competitors. For instance, the UN clearly reflects the post 2nd WW dominance of the allied states, with veto-positions attributed to the allied victors. Subsequently, the roles global governance actors tend to tend to reflect political power at a certain point in time. First-movers try to replicate domestic characteristics in global governance to increase rents on coherent policies. Similarly, Keohane (2002: 200) suggests synergistic effects for those best adapted to conditions of interdependence.

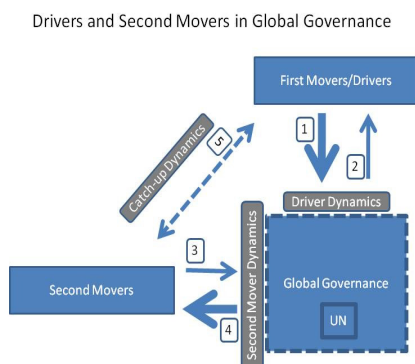
Although first-movers can usually be identified as the drivers of global governance, the two roles should be distinguished. The first-mover role implies action at a certain moment, a moment of formulation of global norms and design of institutions. Usually these first-movers continue to exert influence over the consolidation of such norms and institutions, however, this role is different in the sense that a driver acts within a certain institutional context. Because of this institutional path-dependency, drivers do not bluntly formulate norms of global governance, they are informed by existing norms and structures of global governance. Nevertheless, the economic, political and/or military power of these drivers, grant them greater capacity to shape the course of global governance; they exert and impose their interpretations on other players in global governance. Since first-movers and drivers are often the same, drivers are often quite conservative about reforms in global governance, since the *status quo* reflects the their initial interests. Therefore, while the gap between global governance norms and institutions on the one hand and first-movers on the other hand is relatively narrow, first-movers are not always winners of global governance and multilateralism. The attitude of first-movers is often ambivalent (Shaw 2000: 256), often opposing international agenda setting and frustrating IOs.

Second-movers are as much a part of the institutional field of global governance as first-movers and drivers. Their political power is limited as they have little leverage over the definition of norms in global governance. Yet, they cannot easily isolate themselves because they are dependent on more dominant players (first-movers and drivers) in global governance. But second-movers are not mere subjects to global governance. They will cope with structures of global governance, by seeking side payments (Keohane 2002: 254), or by catching up with the first-movers. An example would be the position of the G77, although it does not have the leverage to define the terms of positive integration (Scharpf 1996; Scharpf 1999: 45, 50-71) and collaboration in sustainable development, it seeks side payments by securing funds for development. Also, second-movers will often try to strengthen multilateral institutionalization; multilateralism could compensate their relative weak unilateral position. However, such structural change is hardly a side payment, and even in an alliance like the G77, these ambitions often cannot be realized.

First-movers, drivers and second-movers should be seen as analytical categories. Theoretically, these categories do not only denote state actors, nor has an ideal-typical first-mover really existed. Moreover, these categories are not static, for instance, it has been argued that countries like China and India are emerging as new players (Humphrey and Messner 2006), in other words: they reposition themselves as drivers rather than second-movers. However, there is little empirical evidence for this change of roles in global governance.

An important third role is that of the catalyst. While states are partly global actors, they partly fend off globality. IOs, however, are clearly global governance actors; they fully reflect globality and do not have divided loyalties in the sense of domestic vs. global, or, national vs. international loyalties. Therefore, IOs are relatively undividedly part of global governance. It has been fairly well established that IOs exert their own dynamic, for instance through their often extensive bureaucracies (Biermann and Siebenhüner 2007). This dynamic refutes the realist assumption that IOs are really appendices to powerful state entities. This dynamic is

directional, as IOs generally support and facilitate multilateral cooperation and often seek to stimulate further institutionalization in global governance. Rarely will the UN by its own accord withstand cooperation and integrative governance. To this account, the role of IOs is everything but the mere solidification of states' interests; rather their role is catalyst, they also promote global norms and institutions, disperse them and – sometimes – add legitimacy to them.



Having defined distinct roles, an analytical model unfolds (figure 1). The interaction between actors becomes apparent through several dynamics. The first group of dynamics are the driver/first-mover dynamics. (1) First-movers usually (successfully) attempt at matching domestic attributes to global governance by formulating global norms and devising international institutions that are compatible with their own institutions and norms. (2) At the same time global governance institutions and norms exert influence on the drivers, especially when such norms and institutions no longer match with the driver's

internal institutions and preferences. This influence is expected to be relatively weak, because the first-mover's/driver's greater capacity to close the gap between global and domestic norms and institutions. The second group of dynamics are second-mover dynamics. (3) On the one hand, second-movers try to reformulate norms, block negotiations and/or otherwise shape the organizational field of global governance. This dynamic, however, is not likely to be strong because second-movers typically lack the military, political and/or economic leverage to impose their preferences and interpretations on the structure and norms of global governance. (4) Second-movers are more likely subject to the influence of global governance, they seek convergence, and try to adapt to global norms. Usually the gap between global norms and institutions on the one hand, and domestic norms and institutions is bigger than with the drivers of global governance, since the structure of the organizational field of global governance reflects the stronger positions of the first-movers. (5) Finally, there are catch-up/lag dynamics. Actors in global governance can become more or less driver, or, second-mover. The extreme option of total isolation from global governance influences is left out of the analytical model. This unlikely but theoretical possibility would come at a high price under conditions of interdependence.

The analytical model presented here could be applied to various policy areas at several levels of governance, which would result in different first-movers, drivers, second-movers and catalysts identified. Some would suggest that the categories are in fact quite fixed, 'the Western world' generally being identified as the first-movers/drivers, while other countries and actors being identified as second-movers (for example, Shaw 2000: 225; Kahler 2004: 8). For instance, the US and its allies have more than often been identified as the front-runners of integration, multilateral collaboration and institutional integration on the bases of shared values in security cooperation. A problem with this classification is that it reflects a bias, namely the traditional concern with security issues in IR. Moreover, even in global security, the traditional transatlantic primacy might be giving away to a Eurasian dominated security order (Calleo 2007). This development may be more salient in other areas such as sustainable development. In fact, on some environmental matters like climate change there is no European-US alliance, instead Western players advocate quite different policy directions.

5. UN Summits, environmental governance and China

There is a strong relation between UN developments, the global framing of environmental issues and the ongoing institutionalization and policy formulation on the environment in China. In the early 70-ies, the environment was for the first time framed as a global problem, although limited, it was enough for the initial institutionalization of a global environmental governance². In the UN context, the People's Republic of China's (PRC) role was very limited; not being recognized by most states and the UN, it was the Republic of China (ROC/Taiwan) that represented China. The 1972 Stockholm UN Conference provided the PRC with one of the first international forums where it could exert itself as the legitimate representative of China. The PRC's high level attendance was not informed by the PRC's concern over the environment ('a typical capitalist problem') but by its desire to exert itself as a sovereign representative (Heggelund 2003: 2). Yet, the Stockholm was influential in China by raising awareness, and inspiring the first national conference on the environment in 1973, issuing a number of environmental regulations. Also, a State Council Environmental Leadership Group was established, a first step in the domestic institutionalization of environmental concerns that would eventually lead to a ministerial level agency for the environment.

In 1992 China's position at the UN Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) was remarkably analogous to its position in 1972. Although environmental concerns had become more important to China, external concerns featured more prominently. Since the 1989 Tiananmen disaster China had been seeking international recognition. However, China with the G77 also successfully raised the profile for development issues at UNCED. The result was a deadlock over the international institutionalization on some crucial sustainable development issues. For instance, most developing states vetoed the initiative text on forestry, which was mainly supported by the Western countries. On balance, developing countries failed at positive framing of international policies. The desired Green Fund for developing countries was not agreed upon, and GEF contributions were considered as official development aid (ODA), resulting in few additional funds. Over all, 'industrialized countries had a higher degree of success in attaining their objectives than developing countries' (Sjöstedt 2000: 158). An early pointer of the industrialized countries' driver position is the fact that the UNCED was inspired by the 1987 report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, an initiative from industrialized countries. To this account, the inclusion of cross-sectoral issues in the agenda could be considered a side payment to developing countries. Nevertheless, UNCED inspired China to further integrate and match its policies with global environmental governance. For instance, China was the first country to devise a Local Agenda 21. This domestic-global matching was primarily at a policy level, rather than pertaining a broad commitment by authorities, business, and NGOs.

The broader commitment of business and civil society was a central topic at the 2002 WSSD. Participation had become an issue, even with the Chinese government. China set up a preparation committee for the WSSD in July 2001, consisting of 16 ministries and agencies, amongst them the State Developing Planning Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Science and Technology and the State Environmental Protection Agency (Heggelund 2003: 11). A National Report, the PRC National Report on Sustainable Development, was drafted and approved. In the process environmental NGOs have also been

² More on global framing and the development of transnational institutions see: Chan and Pattberg (2008) *Private Rule-Making and the Politics of Accountability: Analyzing Global Forest Governance*, Global Environmental Politics.

involved, for instance Friends of Nature and Global Village of Beijing, however, according to Heggelund ‘their role may have been mere symbolic’ (Heggelund 2003: 11). Moreover, some 2000 Chinese NGOs were accredited to the Summit. A WSSD bureau member recalled the Chinese delegation being informed on every single one of them.³ The NGO representation was highly organized, with the government controlling for which organizations to be accredited. For instance, the Chinese government vehemently opposed the accreditation of the International Campaign for Tibet. Contrary to popular belief, China seems not to be against NGOs, rather the Chinese government defines the terms of participation domestically, and tries to replicate these terms internationally. This pivotal role of China’s government not only explains why it was so well-informed on each of the accredited NGOs. It also explains China’s initial reluctance with regard to PFSDs. China was concerned about PFSD channeling of funds to private actors, circumventing the state, allowing foreigners to pick and choose their partners, even against the interests of China.⁴

China’s handling of NGOs at the WSSD may be a first indication that China is assuming more of a driver role, (re-)defining the terms of participation in global environmental governance. However, China was not able to stop PFSDs becoming an official outcome of the WSSD.

6. Drivers and Catalysts in PFSDs

In spite of reluctance on the part of the G77 and China, PFSDs were agreed upon as an official outcome of the WSSD. In the run-up to the WSSD it became clear that few or no binding targets and timetables would be agreed upon, not in the last instance because of US resistance; partnerships would possibly be the only significant outcome of the WSSD. At the PFSD regime was not entirely settled upon and still open for renegotiation. However, Jan Pronk, special UN envoy to the WSSD, thinks the PFSD process lost momentum soon after the WSSD, and the guidelines were deliberately loosely formulated and barely renegotiated so it was easy to agreed upon very little.⁵ Within the G77 especially South Africa and Indonesia (hosts to the WSSD process) pressured to have at least PFSDs as visible outcomes to the WSSD. On the other hand, developing countries were promised additional investments partly channeled through partnerships; for instance, a 970 million USD investment in water and sanitation (Mwanza 2005: 105). According to a WSSD bureau member, what was formally agreed upon as the official outcome was the list of partnerships that had registered at the time of the WSSD. In other words, the formal outcome is very limited. ‘If you would really push governments to the wall, they could say they never agreed to the partnerships process.’⁶

The eventual adoption of PFSDs cannot be seen separately from the persistence by proponents like the US, the EU and some non-state actors, for instance the Business Action for Sustainable Development, an alliance of multinational corporations, and the Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future, a NGO promoting partnership arrangements. In the intergovernmental meetings, most commentators would, however, agree that the US assumed the role of driver in the partnership process (Lempert 2002; Whitfield 2005: 363). Of course the US did not stand alone in the case for partnerships; Japan, Australia and the EU was also

³ Personal interview with WSSD bureau member

⁴ Personal interview with EU delegate

⁵ Personal interview with Jan Pronk, Special UN Envoy to the WSSD

⁶ Personal interview with WSSD bureau member

sympathetic. Contrary to the US, Japan and Australia, the EU was not opposing new international commitment and timetables. Moreover, the EU wanted a more exclusive partnerships process by including regular monitoring as a requirement for registration. This caused substantial disagreement and eventually deadlock over additional requirements in the WSSD follow-up process⁷. Therefore the status quo remained in place, resulting in a UN partnerships process that matches closely with the initial US PFSD proposal.

The role of the UN was that of a catalyst. According to a UN official, the idea of partnership was born within the WSSD bureau. PFSDs were meant to be a recognition of non-state efforts in achieving sustainable development, 'just the articulation of relationships that already existed'⁸. However, the idea changed under the influence of the US and corporate lobbyists, with the US being their most visible advocate. The position of the US may also be an expression of a process that began to take ground in the eighties, when Reaganist and Thatcherist reforms in the US and the UK outsourced a large part of public service provision to private parties. These domestic programs to deploy PPPs as a means to provide public goods, have inspired replication at the global level. Another factor in the increasing reliance on partnerships, was the lack of funds the UN was confronted with. However, implicitly in this process it is often assumed that states have a certain implementation capacity and structure. The most ideal state to devise, employ and implement through these instruments seems to be the liberal democratic (Western), free market state. So even when it has been suggested that global governance has changed under the influence of globalization (Kahler and Lake 2003), this may have a varying impact across types of states.

For the UN, the outcome of the Johannesburg process meant a weak mandate on partnerships. While the CSD was designated as the administrator of PFSDs, the registration process relatively unselective.⁹ Yet, the UN's role as a catalyst for partnerships was confirmed being assigned the organization of PFSD fairs during the annual CSD meetings. More important, the idea of partnerships at the UN was born earlier than the WSSD. For instance, the UN Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP) was established in March 1998 with a grant from Ted Turner, to promote partnerships to achieve the Millennium Development goals. In the case of China, for instance, the UNDP Regional Office has been actively promoting partnership development (UN 2006). Even before the WSSD, partnerships had become the preferred UN instrument in global governance, particularly in global environmental governance. These instruments are applied to various implementation contexts: authoritarian countries, liberal democratic, industrialized, developing and emerging economies. The worldwide embracement of such instruments seemingly contradicts the fact that globalism is constituted by different actors with distinct roles. For this reason, it is necessary to look at the particular implementation contexts of partnerships.

7. Constraints to Partnerships in China

Since the reforms of 1979 there have been occasional contractual relations between the Chinese government and private enterprises, especially in the construction of infrastructure. However, in sustainable development such arrangements are fairly new and uncommon (Turner 2003). In the Chinese authoritarian context the emergence of government-business

⁷ Personal communication with national delegate to WSSD and CSD processes

⁸ Personal interview with WSSD Bureau member.

⁹ In a personal interview, a UN official mentioned a partnership that was so controversial it had to be referred to a higher decision-making level. However, the partnership was still registered.

partnerships had been significantly constrained, let alone partnerships including NGOs. Moreover, the few PPPs in China have distinct characteristics as compared to similar arrangements in, for example, the US and the UK. According to a comparative analysis of PPPs in the UK and China, Chinese partnerships on average seem to have a short to medium term running time, whereas UK and US partnerships are generally long term arrangements (Adams, Young et al. 2006). This is a significant difference because long-term arrangements have more institutional consequences for state bureaucracies than short-term arrangements. For instance, an often cited advantage of PPPs is the possibility for governments to reduce bureaucratic 'discretion' and lower spending. However, these 'advantages' cannot be enjoyed when partnerships are limited in scope and in time; the cost of temporary reorganization would be too high. Subsequently, PPPs cannot be framed in a larger program of 'new public management'. According to Adams e.a., the short term focus of Chinese partnerships indicates that the arrangement is often regarded as a budgetary "quick fix" to make up for shortages in investment capital (2006: 388). They also argue that partnerships still do not constitute a substantial part of China's governance. One structural factor that severely constrains the development of partnerships is the institutional context they develop in. In the UK and other Western countries, private ownership was long recognized before the emergence of partnerships. The coincidence of the development of market institutions and PPPs in China means that the legal and organizational context is in a constant flux. For instance, the protection of private asset ownership was only recently codified in a constitutional amendment. The fast changing legal and organizational environment results in additional risks for PPPs. The issue of ownership remains a crucial impediment to the formation of partnerships in China (Brown, Orr et al. 2006: 120). Moreover, when partnerships are implemented locally; policies and procedures are often revised to meet local demands, adding to the risk for private parties to enter PPPs. Partnerships including NGOs meet even more impediments. Civil society is severely constrained in China, with the government requiring a difficult registration procedure and government agency patronage. Potentially, this restriction undercuts the rationale for many PPPs, since increased participation and prior consultation have been associated with better implementation, and NGOs potentially render legitimacy and credibility.

There are also cultural barriers to partnerships. The traditional 'guanxi' system of strong relational bonds (Wong, Tjosvold et al. 2005: 783) dilutes the distinction between public and private. On the one hand this can be an asset to the emergence of partnerships, since ties are already latent and guanxi ties represent (social) capital (Wank 1996: 852). However, PPPs could also suffer from a lack of transparency and the thin line between corruption and loyalty (Adams, Young et al. 2006: 395). The bureaucratic state poses additional cultural and capability constraints to PPPs. In a survey among government managers, Peter Koehn found that they generally lacked the 'transnational capacity' to act in an intercultural (international, intersectoral) environment. Therefore, 'findings are not encouraging' (2007: 262) for PRC officials to partner with non-Chinese firms, and the private sector. Although some scholars find increasing 'associational activity' (Unger 1996), the emergence of PPPs in China is still severely constrained. This has led to considerable pessimism in regard to the potential of partnerships. 'Without major reforms, which will take a very long time, this constraint is likely to be a binding one on the future development of PPP in China' (Adams, Young et al. 2006: 393). This pessimism regarding PPPs in China stands in stark contrast with the strong belief displayed by IOs, the UN in particular. For instance, the UN Development Assistance Framework for China 2006-2010, explicitly promotes partnerships involving civil society and 'greater public participation' (UN 2006: 14, 19) and sees partnerships as a means for 'strengthening China's multilateralism' (UN 2006: 20). The relative high proportion of

PFSDs active in China also reflects the priority that the UN attach to partnerships in China. However, this poses a paradox in the light of the earlier discussed constraints. On the one hand, PPPs are not an integrated part of Chinese governance, since there are too many constraints. On the other hand, PFSDs in China are fairly well represented among UN registered partnerships. To explain this paradox we build on the earlier introduced model. The main assertion is that China is a second-mover in the PFSD process. The emergence of PFSDs in China should not be seen as a matching between domestic institutions and the global governance system, or the outcome of a domestic process. Rather, China followed in a process that was defined and promoted by other countries, the US in particular. The lack of fit between China's domestic governance and the PFSD process resulted in a disjointed partnerships process, a process *in* China but not *by* China.

8. Expected Patterns of Emergence in China

If China is a second-mover in the partnerships process, then this should be reflected in several features of the partnerships that claim to be implementing in China. While second-movers may not have much leverage over the internationally formulated or implied features of the partnerships process, they still can be selective in the partnerships they participate in, or which partnerships are invited to implement domestically. Moreover, the partnership arrangement may be domestically adjusted to better correspond with local and national contexts. Side-payments may also be sought in better connections in international networks and the provision of 'best practices' to showcase in intergovernmental meetings. The side-payments can also be material; partnerships potentially bring in investments and budgetary 'quick fixes'. The second-mover role will accordingly be reflected in certain patterns relating to participation, leadership, and geography. Moreover, patterns of effectiveness show the potential of PFSD in China.

Participation

Given the constraints for civil society we would expect a below average participation of Chinese NGOs. Although many scholars pointed out Chinese NGOs are on the rise, many of them are not registered and cannot enter into contractual relations. If they participate, this would probably occur through a government hosting institution. The participation of government (local and central) is therefore expected to be relatively high. In the specific case of China, there are also so-called GONGOs, governmentally organized NGOs, often been set up for political or administrative reasons, for instance to meet participatory requirements by some foreign funders. These GONGOs cannot be automatically discounted as the extended arm of the government, of them develop relative independence over time (Wu 2002).

Leadership

The relative lack of experience with the phenomenon of partnerships inhibits a leadership role for Chinese (government) actors in the initiation and administration of partnerships. Consequently, most of the (global and regional) partnerships are administered in foreign based secretariats. Moreover, Chinese partners are not likely to lead in PFSDs. Instead, leading partners come from the first-mover countries.

Geography

Domestically, the constraining environment still allows for partnerships. However, since partnerships are not embedded in domestic governance, they are not ubiquitous. Partnerships are more likely to emerge in areas where interaction with foreign partners is most dense, in the case of China: the urban East-Coast. This pattern would confirm the gap between China's 'ultraconnected urban areas and its muffled hinterlands' (Kalathil 2001: 74). Moreover,

partnerships are not supposed to conflict with the present domestic governance system. Such conflict is more likely in politically contested areas and minority areas, such as Tibet, Uyghuristan and Inner-Mongolia.

At the global level, China is likely to participate in partnerships with a global or regional scope. A broader scope increases the distance between domestic governance and global governance, so institutional conflicts between domestic and global arrangements are less likely to occur.

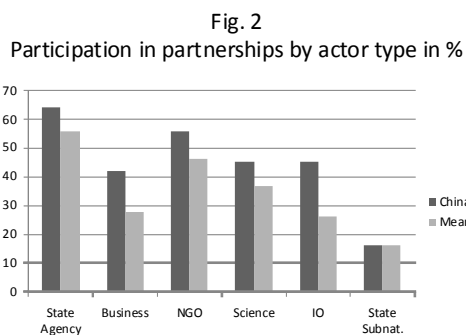
Effectiveness

The relatively partnership constraining environment in China could reflect in lower effectiveness of PFSDs. However the relation between effectiveness and the second-mover role is obscure. First, there are many factors determining effectiveness. China’s relatively well functioning government and developed infrastructure may actually constitute a better environment for effective implementation. Second, China also seeks side-payments and continued foreign investments, for which it needs to showcase effectiveness of existing partnerships. In spite of the obscure relation between the role of China in global governance and the effectiveness of partnerships, it is important to look at effectiveness. Patterns of effectiveness reveal the potential that PFSDs have, even when PPPs are not (yet) an integrated part of domestic governance.

9. Actual patterns of emergence in China

To test whether the suggested patterns of emergence occur in a second-mover context, we make use of the Global Sustainability Partnerships Database (GSDP), developed the Institute of Environmental Studies of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (see: Biermann, Chan et al. 2007). The GSDP consists of more than hundred variables concerning a set of 331 partnerships registered with the CSD. The variables were developed and gathered around three topics, emergence, effectiveness and participation. It includes data on output, actual production by partnerships, such as the organization of conferences, workshops and meetings; the publication of research, reports; the provision of technical and infrastructural services, etc. This data was gathered through the study of websites, (self-) reports, newsletters, news articles, and emails. Of course, output does not necessarily result in change in the physical environment (impact) or behavioral change (outcome). Yet, output is a necessary condition for other forms of effectiveness, such as impact and outcome. Moreover, the GSDP developers have defined 11 functions, for instance knowledge provision, training, lobbying, infrastructure and technology transfer, and classified the partnerships in up to three of these functions. These functions were matched with the output expected to be necessary to fulfill them. For instance, to establish infrastructure, one would need new and existing physical facilities (e.g. roads, buildings, water reservoirs, technical installations) and/or the application and transferring of (new) technologies. This resulted in an indicator which is called ‘Function-Output-Fit’ (FOF).

Participation



Contrary to the expectations based on the constrained environment for civil society actors in China, the participation by NGO actors in partnerships that implement in China is above average (figure 2). However, many Chinese NGOs are in fact governmentally organized. More importantly, NGO participation is

relatively high in the sample, because many of the partnerships implementing in China are in fact global partnerships that involve NGOs, but not necessarily NGOs in China. A closer look at partners within the PFSDs implementing in China reveals that there are few Chinese NGOs involved.

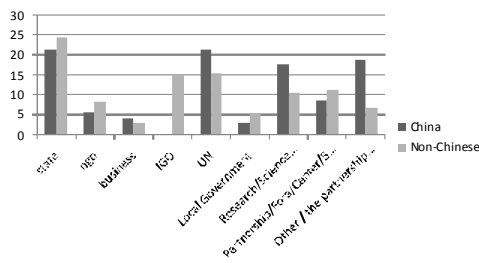
The high participation of IOs in partnerships implementing in China is consistent with the theoretical expectation that IOs are important players as catalysts of the partnership arrangement. The findings even exceed the high level of participation in the mean by IOs in PFSDs.

While the representation of business in the total sample of partnerships is relatively low, business seems to be involved in those partnerships that implement in China. Indeed, in many partnerships we observe that business benefit from participation, by delivering products and attracting new clients. For instance, in the Sino-Italian Partnership, Italian businesses are provided with business opportunities. The relatively high participation of business actors is at par with the general economic trend of China attracting more FDI.

The theoretical model assumes that second-movers could use partnerships arrangements as a means to catch up with knowledge and technical development. In the patterns of participation this is indicated by the involvement of an above average number of scientific organizations.

Leadership

Fig. 3
Types of Lead Partners



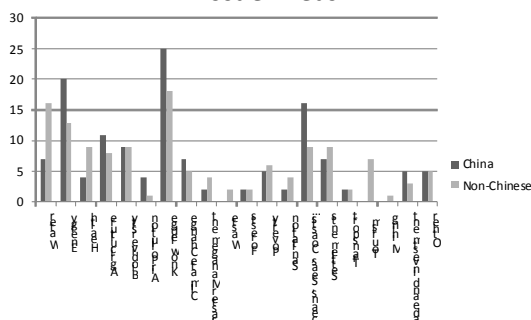
Participation itself does not necessarily reveal the main drivers of the partnership process. To understand the roles of the partners, data was gathered on the leading partners. Leaders are either in charge of the administration of the partnership, and/or in charge of the registration of the partnership with the CSD, and probably the initiators of the partnership.

The GSDP output shows that partnerships in China are mostly led by other states or the UN (figure 3). Only one partnership is (co-)lead by the Chinese government (the Sino-Italian Partnership).

95% of all the non-UN leading partners, such as research organizations, state agencies and NGOs, are based in OECD countries, with partners from the main ‘driver countries’ (US, Japan, Canada and Australia) leading 74 % of all partnerships claiming to implement in China. This particular pattern of leading partners confirms the leading roles of partners from the countries identified as the drivers in the partnerships process in China. Moreover, the leading role of the UN also suggests it is actively propagating partnerships. Leaders in PFSDs are also often science related, which could reflect China’s aspiration to catch up technologically and scientifically in sustainable development.

Policy and function areas

Fig. 4
Issue Areas

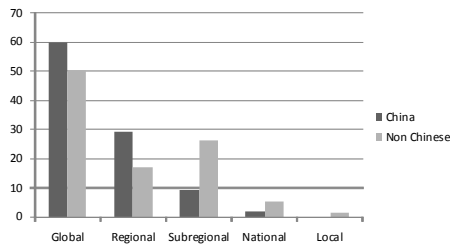


As a second-mover China seeks side-payments in accordance to its domestic policy priorities (figure 4). For instance, environmental policy and energy policy are subject to organizational integration. The relative large number of partnerships in the energy indicates that China is successful at attracting resources for the area it is most concerned about. The high proportion of knowledge partnerships, relates to the high

number of research partners in partnerships implementing in China. The structural reason behind this may be the fact that knowledge sharing is relatively uncontroversial. Moreover, it contributes to China's catching up with first-movers in global sustainable development policies.

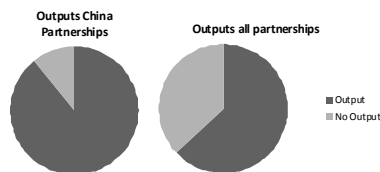
Geography

Fig. 5
Geographical Scope



Domestically, partnerships seem to be more present on the urban East coast where interaction with foreign partners is most dense, than the underdeveloped West. However, there are some notable exceptions. Three PFSDs report activities in China's South-West, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia. These cases are particularly interesting, because China is particularly concerned about (foreign) partners and NGOs in minority regions. Further study will be instructive to interaction between government, NGOs and foreign partners in an authoritarian context. However, most partnerships that claim to be implementing in China are not actually based there. This is due to their broad geographical scope (figure 5). A remarkable 90% of the PFSDs are not exclusively implementing in China, rather they have other projects in the region or globally. This is explained by the fact that partnerships are still largely a foreign phenomenon in China, initiated and led by foreign partners, and implemented at a global level, rather than domestically. Consequently, most of the partnerships are actually administered in foreign secretariats. Moreover, Chinese actors within these partnerships are not likely to be leading.

Fig. 6
Outputs



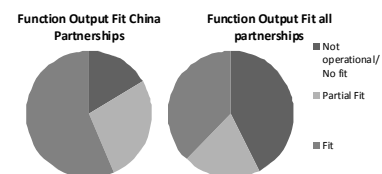
Effectiveness

The findings from the GSDP show that proportion of operational partnerships in China, partnerships that have some kind of output, is remarkably high compared to the mean (figure 6). This indicates that partnerships are not merely a political tool, they are operational at a practical level. Moreover, the Function-Output-Fit also compares well with the mean (figure 7). Partnerships implemented in China create better opportunities to reach behavioral

change and/or impact on the ground. This may be facilitated by a relatively well functioning, stable government, and developed infrastructure. This could also be an indication that China is successfully appropriating the partnership arrangement to its own benefit, using it to catch up with other (first-mover) countries in terms of environmental governance or maybe gather resources to quick-fix the budgets of individual partnership projects.

The expected patterns of emergence and the actual patterns generally seem to coincide, supporting the notion that China is a second-mover in the partnerships process rather than a driver. Especially the leadership and geographic patterns are compelling. Chinese partnerships are in fact led by foreign players, and

Fig. 7
Function Output Fit



Chinese partnerships are not so Chinese when closer observed, rather Chinese activities represent only a small proportion of most partnerships' activities. Yet, if China is a second-mover, it does not mean that partnerships in China are mere political tools and showcases, rather the GSPD findings on effectiveness indicate that individual partnerships active in China are quite effective. It seems like partnerships, even when they are not an integrated part of China's domestic sustainable development or environmental governance, still have much potential on an individual basis.

10. Conclusion

The central paradox with regard to China and PFSDs, is that China constitutes a relatively unfavorable environment for partnerships, yet PFSDs are relatively often implemented in China. The paradox becomes even more pronounced when one takes into account China's skepticism about partnerships in the WSSD process. The paradox can be understood through an analytical model which identifies different actors in global governance: first-mover/drivers, second-movers and catalysts. The case of partnerships in China shows that the UN are an important catalyst for the partnership model. This is confirmed by data from the GSPD concerning leadership. Also the China's second-mover role was confirmed by a deeper investigation into the patterns of emergence of PFSDs. In the partnership process most geographic, policy area, participatory, leadership patterns and effectiveness coincided with the second-mover role of China.

The findings of the study brings us back to the main question of this paper. Is China assuming more of a driver role in global environmental governance?

The findings do not unequivocally point towards one conclusion. There are a few indications that China is moving into another (perhaps driver) role. In particular, the relatively high effectiveness of PFSDs in China points to a certain functionality, potential and added value of partnerships in China's sustainable development. Partnerships are clearly not mere political smokescreens or showcases of best practices at international forums. Moreover, China tried to (re-)define the terms of participation in the PFSD regime. However, the evidence for China's driver role is not yet compelling enough to go with the now popular argument that China is actually a driver in global environmental governance. China seems to lack the will or the capability to define the partnerships regime in global environmental governance (Chan, Lee et al. 2008). The most global aspect to China's role, it is not so much its political activity, but the sheer size of China creating pressures on the architecture of global environmental governance (Gu, Humphrey et al. 2008). However, there is no evidence that this pressure has led to a reshaping of the global governance architecture, at least in the case of PFSDs.

Could one assert that China is a mere subject to global environmental governance? The UN facilitated and foreign backed partnership process shows that partnerships are relatively disjointed from the China's domestic environmental policy. So rather than a subject to global environmental governance, China is maintaining a domestic policy that functions separately from the global partnerships process. This shows that the gap between global and domestic governance is still considerable, keeping China in a second-mover position. To this account, the question could be asked how globalised Chinese environmental policy really is. If the experience with PFSDs proves to be more general, China may be experiencing what Solinger (2001: 173) calls 'virtual globalization ... a largely internally generated set of effects fashioned after, but not itself directly generated by, external patterns.'

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