Sino-Indian Climate Cooperation under Global Development Initiative: History, Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract. In 2021, President Xi Jinping put forward the Global Development Initiative, and climate change is the key cooperation area of the initiative. Both China and India are developing countries and share many common interests in climate control, which has laid a solid foundation for climate cooperation between the two countries. Sino-Indian climate cooperation began in the 1990s and has gone through many stages, such as exploration, preliminary cooperation, and collaborative leadership. The two countries have conducted extensive cooperation in tackling climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and developing renewable energy, and have achieved fruitful results. However, China and India also face many challenges in climate cooperation, such as territorial boundaries and differences in economic development. Nevertheless, both sides are aware of their complementary advantages and common national interests, which has created favorable conditions for further deepening cooperation. On the whole, China and India have more opportunities than challenges in the field of climate cooperation; At the same time, the Global Development Initiative will inject new impetus into the cooperation between China and India in the field of climate change. Under the guidance of this initiative, China and India will further strengthen cooperation, jointly meet the challenges brought by global climate change, and promote the construction of a more sustainable and prosperous world.

Keywords: Global Development Initiative; Climate Cooperation; India; Sino-Indian Relations.

1. Introduction

In September 2021, President Xi Jinping put forward the Global Development Initiative for the first time at the 76th UN General Assembly (Zhou, 2023). Among them, climate governance and cooperation are the important topics of the initiative, and countries promote the implementation of the Paris Agreement with the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”. Climate control is a common problem and challenge for all countries in the world. In recent years, climate change has led to frequent extreme weather events. The report Global Climate in 2021 points out that in 2021, extreme weather events all over the world have repeatedly broken records, from torrential rains and extreme cold to wildfires and high-temperature heat waves. The increasingly obvious climate disaster will cause incalculable damage to life and the ecological environment on Earth. As the two largest developing countries in the world, China and India have significantly increased their greenhouse gas emissions in recent years and become the focus of international climate negotiations. In the international climate negotiations in the post-Kyoto era, China and India bear the heavy burden of reducing emissions. The confrontation of various interest groups makes it necessary for China and India to jointly respond to the pressure of public opinion in developed countries in order to achieve cooperation in the field of climate change.

For climate control in China and India, academia at home and abroad have made extensive explorations and achieved many research results. Some scholars have summarized the climate cooperation between China and India in different historical periods, mainly involving the policy practice, strategic objectives, core principles, and main features of climate change between China and India (Zhang, 2011, 86-88). Some scholars have discussed the international roles and domestic policy preferences of China and India in international climate negotiations (Michael Owa K. & Michael Owa A., 2012, 575-590) (Sun F., Xiaojia H., Rummy P. & Lauzon K., 2015, 21-390). Some scholars have
also made in-depth discussions on the path selection of Sino-Indian climate cooperation, such as ensuring the security of water, energy and food links (Kang Xiao, 2021, 151-171), promoting the system construction of green transformation and development (Wang Mou, 2017, 53-62), and strengthening the communication and coordination between the leaders of the two countries in international negotiations on climate change (Wang Suli & Faye Ting, 2012, 67). Some scholars tried to analyze the global significance of Sino-Indian climate cooperation, including improving the development of renewable energy (Gao Xiang & Zhu Qinhan, 2016, 32-38), promoting the realization of “G8+5” power center (Jiang Shu, 2010, 21-26), and improving the level of global climate governance (Yu Yuan, 2010, 63-66). The existing literature has conducted extensive and in-depth research on Sino-Indian climate cooperation and achieved a series of important achievements, but there is a lack of systematic discussion on Sino-Indian climate cooperation under the background of China’s Global Development Initiative in 2021. In view of this, this paper mainly discusses the achievements, challenges, opportunities, and coping strategies of Sino-India climate cooperation under the background of Global Development Initiatives.

2. Global Development Initiatives and Climate Cooperation

Peace and development are the themes of the present, and people all over the world look forward to realizing their yearning for a better life through sustainable development. The digital economy and green development have brought new opportunities for the leap-forward development of developing countries. However, the changes in the past 100 years and the epidemic situation in the century have resonated, and the ups and downs of the epidemic situation in COVID-19 have cast a shadow on global development. The global implementation of the 2030 Agenda is facing severe challenges, for example, the development gap between the North and the South continues to widen, the food security situation is grim, and the gap in development resources is increasing, so it is a long way to go to realize the rational global distribution of vaccines (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, April, 2023). In this context, in September 2021, President Xi Jinping put forward the Global Development Initiative, which aims to jointly respond to global challenges, seize development opportunities, promote post-epidemic recovery, and open up bright prospects for achieving sustainable development and building a community of global development destiny.

The main contents of Global Development Initiatives include “The Principles of Six Persistence”: adhering to development priority, people-centered, inclusive, innovation-driven, harmonious coexistence between man and nature, and action-oriented (Li Zhiqiang, 2022). The above-mentioned “The Principles of Six Persistence” clearly answer three major questions: why development is placed in the prominent position of global macro-policies; who development is for and how to develop it. Since mankind entered the industrial civilization, urbanization and industrialization have developed rapidly. People have created huge material wealth and accelerated the grab of natural resources, which has also broken the cycle and balance of the original ecosystem of the earth, leading to the tension between man and nature. At present, the global extreme climate has caused frequent natural disasters and reduced biodiversity, and the situation of harmonious coexistence between man and nature is in jeopardy. Climate change has challenged the social, economic, political, and sustainable development of all countries. Considering responsibility from a global perspective, Global Development Initiatives have helped to achieve seventeen sustainable development goals, and climate change and green development are included as key cooperation areas (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, 2023, 22). This initiative follows the concept of harmonious coexistence between man and nature, effectively implements the Paris Agreement climate agreement, dialectically analyzes the relationship between environmental protection and economic development, and starts to promote South-South cooperation, build an exchange platform, strengthen global climate and environmental governance, and promote the green and low-carbon transformation of production and consumption, so as to achieve a greener and healthier global development.

Throughout the course of global climate governance, the existing global climate governance system has experienced many repetitions and retrogression. From the United Nations Framework Convention
on Climate Change to the Kyoto Protocol, to the Copenhagen Agreement, and finally to the Paris Agreement, the bargaining power of developing countries has been continuously weakened. In the absence of climate funds and scientific and technological assistance, compared with developed countries, the cost of carbon neutrality in developing countries and peak carbon dioxide emissions is rising, and the gap in the low-carbon field is widening. Since the launch of the Global Development Initiative in 2021, in terms of the fact that the cost of developing countries’ participation in global climate governance is too high and the benefits are too low, China, as a responsible developing country, has set an example, not only fulfilling the established carbon emission targets, but also adhering to the concept of “teaching people to fish”, providing practical help to developing countries according to their different needs, and vigorously supporting the development of green energy and low carbon in developing countries. Up to now, China has invested a total of RMB 1.2 billion to actively carry out South-South cooperation on climate change, signed up to 50 cooperation documents with 41 developing countries, and trained more than 2,400 relevant professionals for nearly 120 developing countries (Ministry of Ecology and Environment of the People’s Republic of China, 2023). From the African climate remote sensing satellite to the low-carbon demonstration zone in Southeast Asia, to the energy-saving lamps in small island countries, the South-South cooperation of the China government in tackling climate change has achieved tangible results. China is committed to improving the participation and voice of developing countries and emerging countries in global climate governance in the existing cooperation mechanism, so as to enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of the existing mechanism and firmly safeguard the core principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” for climate change. Under the guidance of Global Development Initiatives, China has placed climate change in a prominent position in national governance, continuously increased the reduction of carbon emissions, and strengthened the goal of independent contribution, so as to maximize the ability to cope with climate change, promote the overall green transformation of domestic economic and social development, and thus build industrialization and modernization in which man and nature coexist harmoniously.

Ecological civilization is related to human destiny, and building a green home is the common dream of people all over the world. Under the guidance of Global Development Initiatives, countries have achieved in-depth cooperation in the field of climate governance, thus continuously improving the operational mechanism of climate change and continuously enhancing the game ability of emerging countries in global climate governance. As an active leader in global climate governance, an activist in implementing the Paris Agreement, and a contributor to global ecological construction, China will continue to go hand in hand with other countries, effectively implement Global Development Initiatives, and contribute Chinese wisdom and China’s strength to world sustainable development.

3. The Course of Sino-India Climate Cooperation

Sino-Indian climate cooperation began in the 1990s. So far, the two countries have experienced many stages in the process of climate cooperation, such as exploration, initial cooperation, and collaborative leadership. The climate cooperation between China and India presents the periodic characteristics of “exploring interaction-heat decline-active cooperation-leading the world”. In 1992, China and India signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (hereinafter referred to as the Convention) and played an important role in the follow-up negotiations. In 1997, China and India adopted the Kyoto Protocol (hereinafter referred to as the Protocol) to lead the development and breakthrough of new energy technologies. From 1998 to 2004, Sino-India relations entered a new stage of all-round development. Since 2005, Sino-Indian relations have continued to heat up. In 2009, the two countries reached a bilateral agreement on emission reduction targets and financial support of developed countries at the “Sino-India High-level Conference on Climate Change Technology Development and Transfer”, which laid the foundation for the success of the conference. In 2010, China and India announced new emission reduction commitments and green economy cooperation in Beijing, which provided impetus for the conclusion of the Paris Agreement in 2015 and led the global process of tackling climate change.
Since the establishment of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee by the United Nations General Assembly in 1990, China and India began to cooperate on climate issues. During the negotiation of the Convention, China and India cooperated through the mechanism of “Group of 77 countries plus China” (Mou Chufu & Wang Limao, 2015, 232). In order to protect the earth’s ecological environment by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change, China and India, which have great political and economic influence, are committed to taking the lead in studying the science of climate change and have a deeper understanding of the related issues of climate change, which has significantly enhanced the negotiating position of developing countries. During the negotiations, China and India took the same position on many issues, such as emphasizing “common but differentiated responsibilities”, and insisting on sustainable development, demanding that developed countries take more responsibilities and provide more funds and technology to developing countries. During the negotiation of the Protocol in 1997, developing countries, led by China and India, fought fiercely with developed countries on issues such as financial mechanisms, technology transfer, national capacity building, and sustainable development, so as to promote the development and perfection of the international climate system and take an important step to achieve the goal of greenhouse gas emission reduction (Zhang Le, 2011, 86). Globally, emerging economies account for a large share of total greenhouse gas emissions, but China and India are far less wasteful of fossil fuels than the United States and the European Union (After calculation, the average greenhouse gas emission of Chinese residents is only half that of American residents. Indian per capita consumption of carbon dioxide, methane and other harmful gases is only one-seventh that of American residents.). Nowadays, clean energy technologies such as wind energy, solar energy, battery storage, and electric vehicles are more competitive in the market than traditional energy, and it is emerging developing economies such as China and India that lead this progress.

During the seven years from 1998 to 2004, China and India focused on improving bilateral relations and tried to find common solutions in sensitive areas such as border issues, but no significant progress was made in low-political areas such as climate cooperation. Despite this, the strengthening of bilateral relations between China and India has also provided a fundamental guarantee for the subsequent deepening cooperation between the two countries in the climate field. Since 2005, China and India have actively cooperated in the field of climate change. On April 11th, 2005, during Premier Wen Jiabao’s visit to India, he formally discussed with the Indian government the cooperation in energy security and energy conservation. China, led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and composed of delegations from the National Development and Reform Commission, the State Environmental Protection Administration, and the China Meteorological Bureau, and led by the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests, held four rounds of climate change consultations in turn (Wang Suli & Faye Ting, June 7, 2012). At the Bali Conference in 2007, developing countries such as China and India played a difficult game with developed countries on climate change plans, which led to the birth of the Bali Road Map and established the “dual track” negotiation process under the background of the Convention and the Protocol. Since 2009, China and India have strengthened exchanges and cooperation on climate change. On October 22nd, 2009, Xie Zhenhua, Deputy Director of the Development and Reform Commission of China, attended the Sino-India High-level Conference on Climate Change Technology Development and Transfer and signed the Agreement between the Government of China and the Government of India on Cooperation in Addressing Climate Change, which specifically includes: emphasizing that the Convention and the Protocol are the most appropriate framework for addressing climate change, and reaffirming the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities”, especially that developed countries should take the lead in and continuously reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and provide them to developing countries. The agreement confirmed the establishment of a partnership between China and India to deal with climate change and marked the normalization and institutionalization of ministerial consultations between the two countries (Chinese Government Network, 2009). In December of the same year, Premier Wen Jiabao and Prime Minister Singh attended the Copenhagen Conference, and the leaders of the two countries closely communicated and coordinated, pushing the negotiation process forward and promoting the conference to reach an agreement (Zhao Cheng, Tian Fan & Wei Dongze, 2009).
2010, when Premier Wen Jiabao visited India, in the joint communique issued by the two governments, the issue of climate change had risen to the first place except for bilateral relations (Wang Suli & Faye Ting, 2012, 68). On May 8th of the same year, China and India held an international cooperation conference on green economy and climate change in Beijing and signed the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of India on green technology cooperation. During the meeting, Mr. Ramesh, Minister of State of the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests, recognized China’s leadership in emerging technologies and pointed out that the climate cooperation between the two countries is a very constructive world cooperation relationship, which not only broke the deadlock in international negotiations but also brought more fairness to developing countries in international agreements (Zhang Li, Li Tong & Du Yanfei, 2010). At present, Chinese and Indian ministers have maintained close contact on climate issues on various international occasions.

Before the Paris Agreement was issued in 2015, China and India adopted the Joint Statement of the Government of the People’s Republic of China and the Government of the Republic of India on Climate Change, which further strengthened the climate change partnership between the two countries and enhanced the status of this relationship in the cooperation between the two countries. These include: the implementation of the Bali Road Map results will improve the momentum before 2020 and build mutual trust. Although the two countries are facing enormous challenges in socio-economic development and poverty eradication, both China and India have actively taken domestic actions to deal with climate change by formulating and implementing mitigation policies and measures. To this end, the two sides decided to strengthen high-level dialogue on their domestic climate change policies and multilateral negotiations (Geng Cong, 2015). Under the framework of the Sino-India Strategic Political and Economic Dialogue, the relevant departments of the two countries have held many meetings on energy conservation and environmental protection and reached a number of cooperation agreements, further deepening the pragmatic cooperation between the two sides in the fields of renewable energy, sustainable transportation including electric vehicles and bicycles, and low-carbon cities. It is worthy of recognition that the achievements of Sino-Indian cooperation are obvious to all. In Chennai, an Indian city known as “Detroit in South Asia”, China and India have jointly produced zero-emission and pure electric green buses, which will be driven to all parts of India after leaving the factory to help India achieve the goal of “fully electrifying cars in 2030” (Chinese Government Network, 2019). This shows that the economic and ecological benefits of climate cooperation between the two countries are very significant. 2015 is a landmark year for global climate governance, which has led to the Paris Climate negotiations and the adoption of a new climate agreement: the Paris Agreement. As the two largest developing countries, China and India have huge space for cooperation in dealing with climate change and green economic development, which not only injects strong energy into coping with global climate change but also leads the development of global ecological civilization through green economic cooperation (Tang Xinhua, 2015).

Up to now, China and India have had frequent contacts in the multilateral international arena such as the United Nations, G20, and APEC summits, and have shown a positive cooperative attitude and practical actions on many global and regional multilateral issues. In the process of climate governance cooperation, China and India are pursuing their respective national interests and making outstanding contributions to global mitigation and adaptation to climate change. With the increasingly severe global climate problems, the practical cooperation between China and India in the field of climate change is of great significance in promoting global climate governance.

4. Challenges and Opportunities of Sino-India Climate Cooperation

Since 2003, the issue of climate change has appeared many times in the legally significant national documents signed by China and India, and the climate cooperation between the two sides has gradually deepened. In the process of climate control, cooperation between China and India is possible mainly because the national conditions of the two countries are similar and the positions of
international climate negotiations are the same, which makes the cooperation between the two sides show a positive and good development trend. However, despite this, there are still some differences between the two countries on related issues, especially due to the problems left over from the history of China and India, the territorial dispute between the two countries has not stopped. Therefore, although China and India have made some progress in climate cooperation, simultaneously, we cannot ignore the challenges brought by history and reality.

India has publicly declared that “China is the biggest threat to India’s strategic autonomy, the biggest external resistance to India’s rise, and a competitor of India’s global influence” (Lan Jianxue, 2023, 63). Obviously, the Indian government and people have a persistent tendency of hostility and distrust towards China, and regard it as a potential hostile force, especially in the territorial struggle between China and India. Since the Sino-Indian border war in 1962, the border conflict has caused great harm to the relations between the two countries, leading to the stagnation or even retrogression of Sino-Indian relations from time to time. The Gallowan Valley incident in June 2020 had the most serious impact on Sino-Indian relations since the normalization of relations in 1988. After this incident, Sino-Indian relations fell into a state of “low ebb and friction” (Lan Jianxue, 2023, 55). Even in the past two years, the Indian government has allowed Tibetan separatists to continue their activities to split China. In addition, under the background of strategic competition between China and the United States, India actively participated in the American strategy to contain China. In November 2017, Trump officially announced the Indo-Pacific Strategy. After Biden came to power in 2022, he continued the Trump administration’s strategy on China’s competition, and promulgated the Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, emphasizing the strategic objectives and policy measures of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region, so as to curb the peaceful rise of China and reduce the development space of China (U.S. Development of State, April 2019). Biden administration regards India as a key factor in promoting the Indo-Pacific Strategy, strengthens the cooperation between the United States and India in the political, economic, trade, and security fields, and woos India to join the camp of balancing China’s development. In this context, Sino-India bilateral relations are facing severe challenges. At the same time, this tendency to strengthen cooperation between the United States and India may have a certain impact on climate cooperation between China and India, which will lead to certain restrictions on cooperation between China and India on climate issues.

Although China and India face challenges in climate cooperation, there are still potential opportunities. It is a common challenge for China and India to actively respond to global climate change while developing the economy, and it is also a new hot spot for cooperation opportunities between the two countries. Over the past 30 years, China and India have continuously strengthened their comprehensive national strength and rapidly improved their economic level, which has gradually shifted the center of world economic development to Asia. Meanwhile, China and India have the will to become spokesmen for developing countries. China’s diplomacy as a big country with characteristics holds that the international status and discourse power of developing countries should be improved in order to balance the dominant power of developed countries. After Indian Prime Minister Modi came to power, India showed a positive attitude towards domestic and international public affairs, and strived to promote the reform of the global rules system and assume more international responsibilities by participating in global governance (China Center for South Asia Studies of Sichuan University, 2022, 57). In the practice of global climate governance, China and India have always maintained the common interests of developing countries through active cooperation. In addition, the common interests of China and India in establishing a multipolar world order, maintaining global economic development, and maintaining Russia’s strong independence have largely guaranteed the continuity and controllability of Sino-Indian relations. First of all, China and India have a consensus on maintaining domestic economic development and stopping the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Secondly, China and India have a consensus on building a multipolar world order and opposing American unilateralism. Finally, China and India have reached a consensus on maintaining Russia’s strong independence (Yu Huan, Xing Jiangtao & Wang Han, 2023, 95). As two founding members of the United Nations, China and India have jointly promoted the
The democratization of international relations on the stage of the United Nations. On the basis of abiding by the UN Charter, China and India have played the role of responsible big countries in UN peacekeeping operations, UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and global climate change, and made outstanding contributions to the cause of UN peace and development. Therefore, the United Nations is an important stage for China and India to establish their international image, realize their national interests, and enhance their international influence (Zhang Guihong & Yang Liwei, 2022, 01). Although China and India are constrained by many factors in the multilateral interaction under the framework of the United Nations, it does not affect the cooperation between the two countries on many issues. We have reason to believe that China and India can jointly promote the friendly development of the Sino-India strategic partnership in the new era and make positive contributions to the stability and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region and the world in line with the need to grasp historical friendship and realize practical interests.

At present, China is accelerating the development of ecological civilization. The Belt and Road Initiative and action plan have put forward the concept of ecological civilization, strengthened cooperation in climate change and biodiversity, and the idea of jointly building the Green Silk Road with other countries. Expanding cooperation between China and India in tackling climate change is not only an important part of the construction of the Green Silk Road, but also an action demonstration in tackling climate change, which not only helps to maintain the fairness of global climate governance, promote green economic growth but also makes great contributions to global ecological security.

5. Conclusion

Since President Xi Jinping put forward the Global Development Initiative in 2021, the issue of climate change has attracted increasing attention in the international arena. As the largest developing country, China takes the lead in vigorously promoting the development of green and low-carbon energy industry in China and pays attention to the docking and coordination of the Belt and Road green cooperation and Global Development Initiatives. Under the guidance of Global Development Initiatives, China has consolidated its cooperation with many countries on climate change and enhanced the overall game ability of developing countries in global climate change governance. Among them, Sino-India climate cooperation has attracted much attention, and both populous countries are facing the common problems of economic growth and green development. Since the 1990s, the two countries have started the journey of cooperation. According to the satellite monitoring data from 2000 to 2017, the global green area increased by 5%, equivalent to an entire Amazon rainforest, with China and India contributing one-third (Su Jiexi, 2019). At the same time, a research report released by NASA in February 2019 also shows that the earth is greener than it was 20 years ago, and China and India have made the greatest contribution to global greening (Central People’s Government of People’s Republic of China, 2019).

In the process of climate cooperation between China and India, the two countries are faced with challenges such as territorial ownership and development differences, but they also see opportunities such as complementary advantages and common national interests. Among them, China has advantages in clean energy and technological innovation, and its investment capacity in infrastructure is strong, while India has advantages in software development and service industry, and faces huge investment demand in infrastructure and clean energy. Therefore, the cooperation between China and India in renewable energy and low-carbon technologies has reduced the research and development costs of the two countries and promoted technological innovation, which is conducive to accelerating the transformation of the two countries to a low-carbon economy. On the whole, the opportunities for climate cooperation between China and India outweigh the challenges, and some differences in bilateral relations between China and India will not hinder the two countries from actively cooperating on issues of common interest such as global climate change governance. At the same time, under the guidance of Global Development Initiatives, the positive governance trend of China and India in the field of climate change will be strengthened.
Climate cooperation is not only an important field of Sino-Indian cooperation but also a key field and opportunity for the two countries to establish common ground and enhance cooperation, thus actively promoting the development of Sino-Indian relations (Wang Mou, 2017, 60). As a topic in the low political field, climate cooperation has relatively low sensitivity and political nature, so it is relatively easy to carry out cooperation. China and India can increase the interaction between China and India through cooperation in the field of climate, so as to gradually improve India’s negative perception of China-China is not an enemy of India, but can become a friend. With the gradual improvement of trust between China and India, it is expected to develop more high-level cooperation at an appropriate time, including cooperation in the fields of military security and counter-terrorism. Therefore, in the post-Paris Agreement period, it is necessary to continue to maintain and promote climate cooperation between China and India and to make active attempts in pragmatic actions.

References


