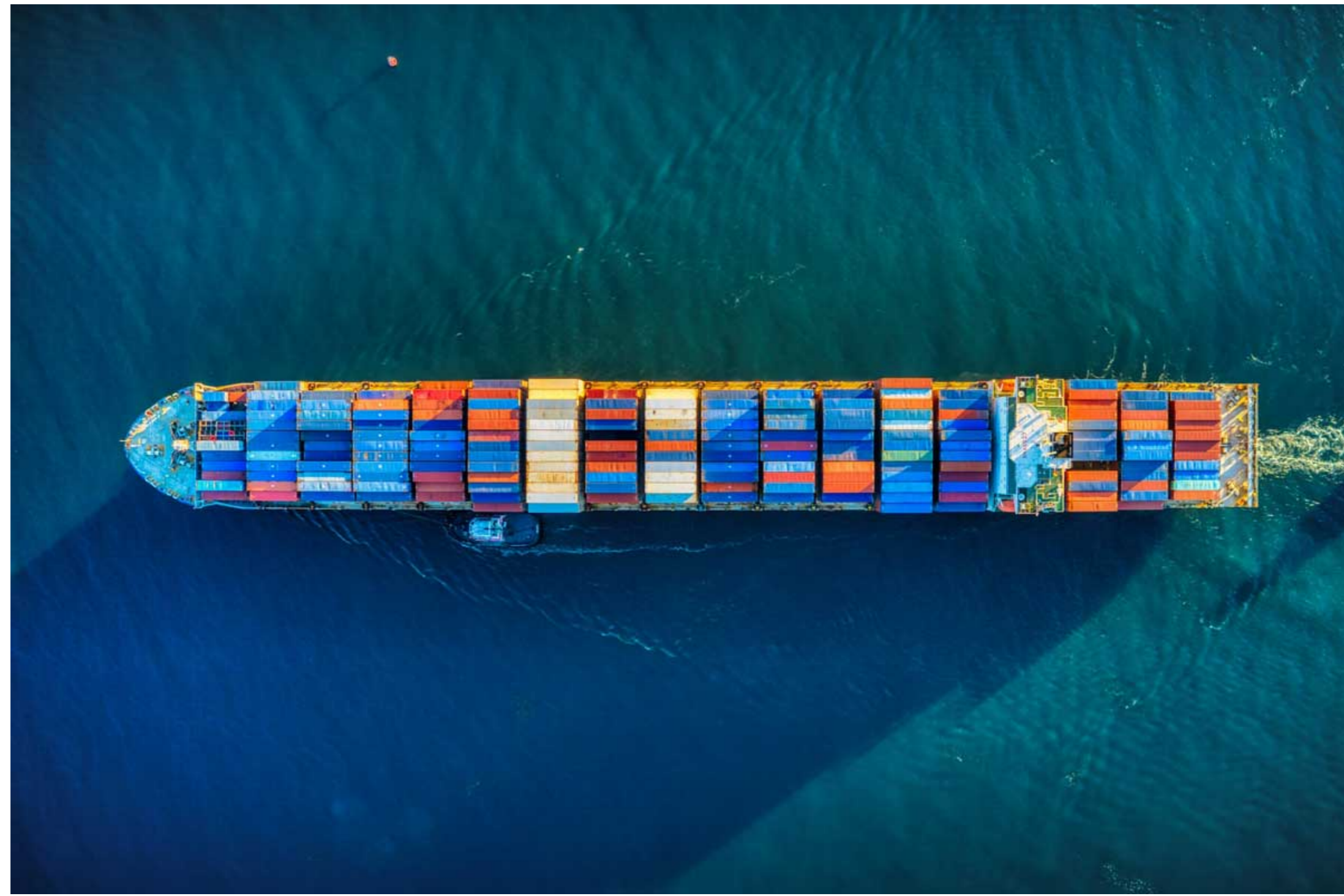


The Need for Chinese Stakeholder Participation in Maritime Environmental Governance



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The marine resources of the People's Republic of China are of a wide variety. It has a crucial role in the national economy as it supports marine transportation and communication, coastal tourism, fisheries and sources of natural gas, offshore oil and sea salt. China has been aspiring to become the maritime power but the degrading maritime environment has become a shortcoming to this national objective. The South China Sea, one of the most resource-rich marine areas has been facing sea-level rise as a result of climate change. Construction of ports, military installations, and airstrips has caused dredging of the islands. In the case of *Philippines v. China*, The Permanent Court of Arbitration pointed out that 27 percent of the shallow reef area of the seven reefs in the South China Sea have been permanently lost and China failed to protect the marine environment of the South China Sea. On the other hand, in many parts of the Pacific Ocean constituting the Chinese fishing fleet, overfishing has implied a threat to the rare flora and fauna. Such damage to the marine environment transcends territorial waters and entails the violation of principles of the UNCLOS and the CBD to which China is a signatory.

China is an active participant in formulating international treaties concerning shipping safety and security, and prevention of vessel-induced pollution under the framework of the International Maritime Organization. Further on maritime environment legislation, the State Council of the PRC has promulgated several regulations.

The China Ocean Agenda 21 formulated by China in 1996 puts forward a sustainable development strategy for China's marine programs. China has proposed the "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" initiative, which calls for maritime cooperation among States based on the principles of consultation, contribution and shared benefits to jointly address risks and challenges. Blue economy, a strategic framework based on SDG 14 to ecologically, economically and socially benefit the marine environment has been constantly promoted by China. In compliance with this, China has taken exemplary initiations of the Shandong Peninsula Blue Economic Zone and the Qingdao Blue Silicon Valley to ensure improved quality of the marine environment and develop scientifically equipped marine governance.

Stakeholder participation, otherwise known as public participation, is an indispensable factor for the successful implementation and protection of comprehensive maritime governance. Under the guidance of China's marine environmental governance policy, the country's marine environment is developing effectively, but there are still many aspects to be improved. In China, environmental protection including maritime governance is highly dependent on the Government's leadership. The matter of marine resources is political, but public involvement in its scrutiny is vital and needs to be present. The stakeholders in this matter are citizens, local and provincial level governments, civil society, researchers, NGO and INGO workers, fishers, scientists, media, etc. The participation of these stakeholders can be put into practice by ensuring equitable and relevant participation. Different local, sectoral and thematic interests could participate in a formalized and structured process of representation and consultation. From the early proposal stage to the later negotiation process, stakeholders must be encouraged to give their full input. For this to take place, the role and performance of each stakeholder must be objectified and clearly stated out. The indigenous and local knowledge of such stakeholders should be discussed and articulated. This assists to fill gaps in information and knowledge management. While doing so, it is inevitable to face differences of opinions, methods, and approaches between different stakeholders as their interest in the given issue can vary; hence the Government or relevant institutions initiating the project must ensure respect and consider every proposition. Such participation enables stakeholders to gain some control over the policy process, which can lead to the more appropriate policy and implementation decisions. The implementation gap i.e., the divergence between the Central Government's national environmental policies and the actual outcomes at the local levels can be resolved through this informal incentive.

In China, marine governance is of a vertical governance structure i.e., it follows a top-down command control from central to provincial then grassroots Governments. The general public faces difficulties presenting their concerns because they lack sufficient technology support as the environmental experts are more lenient to the Government agencies. For this, a socially supportive system that reintegrates and supports the domestic sustainability agenda at local and provincial levels can be beneficial. Since 2008, The Environment Information Disclosure has enabled the public of China to report and protest against environmental catastrophes and allow diversification and pluralism for environmental governance. This has institutionalized public participation, such as petitioning, which functions as leverage against the Government apart from as a platform for policy feedback. On the other hand, land source pollution is the main source of marine pollution in China.

Marine environmental issues are cross-regional, complex and possess non-linear characteristics. The modern marine environment governance transforms the role of the central Government from omnipotence to meta-governance. It considers the active participation of the stakeholders and thus encourages a polycentric approach, allowing diverse actors to partake in decision-making, implementation, supervision, and other aspects of marine environmental governance.

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