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Article

Evaluating Institutional Discursive Power in Regional Intergovernmental Organisations

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Abstract: Member states of regional intergovernmental organisations exert institutional discursive power by influencing regional narratives and policy frameworks. This influence operates through formal communications that validate specific viewpoints. The effectiveness of such discursive practices is predicated on the organisation's credibility, structure, and regional geopolitics. The interaction between institutional rhetoric and national interests often yields nuanced discursive outcomes, reflecting a synthesis of supranational and state-level priorities. At the centre of interstate dynamics is the pursuit of institutional discursive power, which has become a crucial avenue for states to participate in the creation of international governance guidelines. We consider the institutional discursive power of nations within Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) to see how it impacts the establishment of global fisheries governance systems and order. As intergovernmental organisations, RFMOs have significant influence on global fisheries governance. In order to evaluate and compare the institutional discursive power of different countries within RFMO, this study has developed an evaluation framework and model that includes competitiveness, constructiveness, and influence as its three main dimensions. It does this by drawing on a thorough understanding of the institutional discursive power within RFMO and its formation mechanisms, as well as by integrating theoretical principles from evaluation science.

Keywords: fisheries; evaluation discursive power; competitiveness; constructiveness

Introduction

Institutional discursive power within regional intergovernmental organisations (RIGOs) manifests through the capacity to shape narratives, norms, and policy agendas across member states. This power is often wielded through mechanisms such as policy papers, communiqués, and formal declarations, which serve to legitimise certain perspectives whilst marginalising others. The efficacy of such discursive strategies is contingent upon the RIGO's perceived legitimacy, its structural composition, and the geopolitical dynamics of the region. Notably, the interplay between institutional discourses and member states' national interests can engender complex negotiation processes, potentially leading to the emergence of hybrid discursive frameworks that reflect both supranational and national priorities.

A vital role in the rule-based global fisheries governance landscape is played by Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs), which are regional intergovernmental organisations that offer a platform for coordinating the actions of nations in the maritime area that lies outside of state jurisdiction in relation to fishing, dispute resolution, and rule-making for the administration and preservation of fisheries. Some members of RFMOs begin to understand the importance of actively participating in global fisheries governance and enhancing discursive power due to the growing knowledge of the necessity to engage in global fisheries governance and the practical needs of the local distant-water fishing industry. The acknowledgement of discursive power in RFMO is also becoming more popular among academics. However, the prevailing research on RFMOs predominantly focuses on managed fish species and management measures within RFMO, lacking specific attention to the issue of discursive power within RFMO. In accordance with existing research, discursive power can be dichotomised into discursive power of public opinion and institutional discursive power. Given the substantial roles and functions of intergovernmental organisations in

shaping international governance rules and structures, the institutional discursive power exercised by members within such organisations assumes heightened significance.

On regional scale, within comprehensive or specialised international organisations, the enhancement of institutional discursive power remains a pivotal topic. In recent years, scholars have endeavoured to incorporate principles from evaluation science into discursive power research, aiming to provide novel perspectives for applying discursive power theory across various fields. Building upon this foundation, this study seeks to construct an evaluation model based on discursive power theory, aiming to assess and compare the institutional discursive power of different members within RFMO, thereby offering theoretical support for them to further elevate its institutional discursive power within RFMO.

The concept of institutional discursive power lacks a unified definition at present. However, scholars generally concur that institutional discursive power is a form of discursive power manifested through institutional formation. Discursive Power The concept of discursive power originates from the integration of "discourse", a linguistic notion, and "power", a political notion, initially proposed by the French philosopher Michel Foucault. Within the theoretical framework of discursive power, Foucault's perspective that "discourse is power" is most renowned. This viewpoint posits that discourse and power, through interaction, give rise to discursive power. Some scholars have further elucidated the process of interaction between discourse and power, asserting that within this dynamic process, power generates discourse, and discourse expands power. Building upon this foundation, scholars have basically reached a consensus on the connotation and definition of discursive power. They perceive discursive power as the capability, exercised through discourse, to alter the thoughts and actions of others. Some scholars, leveraging the theoretical framework of discourse and power, posit that discursive power encompasses such components as discourse subject, discourse content, discourse objects, discourse platform, and discourse effect. It is important to note that Foucault's notion of discursive power refers to the power that emanates from the dominion of discourse, denoting the "effect of speech" rather than the "right to speak." Institutional Discursive Power.

The essence of institutional discursive power revolves around two core components of "discursive power" and "institution". By merging discursive power theory with institutional theory, scholars have unravelled a nuanced and profound interpretation of institutional discursive power. Joseph S. Nye asserts that beyond cultural values, institutions represent the third major source of discursive power, underscoring the intrinsic connection between discursive power and institutions. In contrast to other new institutionalisms, discursive institutionalism places a notable emphasis on the role of discourse in shaping institutions. It posits that institutions are rooted not in hierarchical structures or formal arrangements, but rather in shared communicative interactions. Moreover, institutions are moulded through the dissemination of ideas within established frameworks. Building upon the formed theoretical foundations, some researchers have endeavoured to define the concept of institutional discursive power through combining components of discursive power and shaping institutions. Highlighting the process of discourse effect generated from discourse content and platform, which illustrates the path to realise institutional discursive power.

From the aforementioned definitions, it is clear that the distinctive essence of institutional discursive power lies in the fact that its emergence is rooted in international systems and contingent upon the characteristics and influence of these systems, setting it apart from other forms of discursive power. At its core, from the perspective of power composition, institutional discursive power embodies a combination of discursive power and institutional power, constituting a potent form of compound power. Discursive power can be understood simply as power derived from the output of discourse, emphasizing the entirety of the process from the discourse subject to the discourse effect. In contrast, institutional power pertains to the capacity to indirectly guide and constrain the behaviours of others through institutions. Institutions encompass components such as norms, regulations, rules, and decision-making procedures, characterised by a broad scope of influence, long duration, and strong acceptability. However, by transforming discourse into power in the form of institutions, the potency of discursive power is enhanced. This is akin to overlaying institutional

power upon discursive power, amplifying the energy generated in the phase of discourse output and significantly elevating discourse effects. Thus, institutional power serves as a safeguard for discursive power. Institutional discursive power is also a fusion of structural power and relational power, serving as a concentrated manifestation of the conversion of the discourse subject's strength and discourse output capacity into power. Structural power refers to the capability to shape and determine various global structures, political or economic. It emanates from the strength and status of actors within the international system, quantifiable through "hard power" such as political, economic, military, and technological prowess. Structural power is characterised by its "indirect institutional, non-intentional, and non-individual creativity" nature.

Opportunity for Developing Countries

Robust national strength often yields greater influence, transitioning imperceptibly into structural power, becoming an inherent advantage" in a nation's construction of international systems. On the other hand, relational power accentuates interactions between actors driven by their respective preferences and expectations. It leverages international institutions to achieve control, influence, and domination over the actions of others. Unlike structural power, relational power emerges from interactions reoriented toward explicit objectives. It evolves along with the content and delivery of discourse during interactions, resulting in significant variability, rapid transformation, and multiple possibilities for change. Relational power can serve as a "subsequent empowerment" in a nation's construction of international systems. In the present era centred around the theme of "peace and development," the interdependence of international politics, economics, environment, and security has deepened, escalating the complexity of international relations. Consequently, the efficacy of military force as a means to resolve international disputes, construct global order, and drive national development has diminished.

With proliferation of regional intergovernmental organisations and agreements, institutional arrangements become a pivotal means for nations to initiate dialogue, negotiate relationships, and exercise mutual constraints and influence. However, the current international rules, mechanisms, and predominant discourse are still dominated by western developed countries within the framework of rule-based global governance. Through mastering institutional discursive power, they continue to solidify the international order shaped by their "unilateral" value systems in institutional forms. Nonetheless, the foundational principles of international relations advocated by the United Nations Charter confer equal rights for all sovereign states to participate in the establishment of international institutions. Thus, developing countries possess the opportunity to alter the "imbalance" within the international order by participating in institutional development. Leveraging their specific advantages in certain domains, they can strategically pursue institutional discursive power, thereby achieving a reallocation of power and resources, facilitating the creation of a more conducive environment for their development and the cultivation of increased momentum.

Components of Institutional Discursive Power

Drawing upon discursive power and institutional discursive power theories, institutional discursive power within RFMO should encompass fundamental components such as discourse subjects, discourse platforms, discourse contents, discourse objects, and discourse effects. However, this study contends that the understanding of the institutional formation process is of significance to the analysis of institutional discursive power, and we have to understand that the process covers the transition from discourse contents to discourse effects and the transition requires the specific means for discourse delivery, which means that discourse content and discourse delivery can be integrated as discourse output for analysis. In light of this, the components constituting institutional discursive power within RFMO are deemed to include RFMO discourse subjects, RFMO discourse platforms, RFMO discourse outputs, RFMO discourse objects, and RFMO discourse effects.

(1) Discourse Subjects

RFMO discourse subjects encompass formal RFMO members entitled to partake in RFMO activities and contribute to RFMO regulations formulation, and coastal states, distant-water fishing

nations, fishing entities, and regional economic integration organisations are some of the typical RFMO discourse subjects. While RFMO encourages multifaceted participation to enhance cooperation between nations with vested fishing interests and nations, governments, and non-governmental organisations aiming to improve resource conservation management efficacy and organisational transparency, it is important to note that, according to the conventions of each RFMO, nations, entities, and organisations participating in RFMO as cooperating non-contracting parties/members or observers do not possess voting rights. Hence, in this study, they are not considered discourse subjects for institutional discursive power. Additionally, given the research's focus on discussing nations' discursive power within RFMO, the discourse subjects in this study refer exclusively to RFMO member states.

(2) Discourse Platforms

RFMO discourse platforms refer to the conduits through which RFMO discourse outputs are conveyed and which provide the settings for exercising discursive power. According to the rule of procedure of each RFMO, main functional bodies, as well as specialised working groups, convene regular meetings, during which reports and proposals submitted by members and committees are discussed for decision making.

(3) Discourse Outputs

RFMO discourse outputs refers to the delivery of discourse content with specific delivery means. RFMO implements a number of conservation and management strategies to guarantee the long-term preservation, sustainable utilisation of fishing resources, and the protection of marine ecosystems which form the core framework of RFMO regulations. Proposals of new and amendment measures concerning the development and utilisation of fishery resources, monitoring of fishing activities, monitoring, control, and surveillance (MCS), environmental and ecosystem protection, constitute the most crucial discourse content through which RFMO members attain institutional discursive power. Additionally, opinions and suggestions regarding the organisational operation and performance assessment of RFMO also constitute significant discourse content. All these discourse content exert influence on RFMO; institutional development. At various RFMO meetings, RFMO members usually deliver such discourse content through proposals, suggestions, statements, reports, etc., in pursuit of acceptance and acknowledgment from other stakeholders.

(4) RFMO Discourse Objects

RFMO discourse objects refer to entities subject to the constraints imposed by rules ratified by RFMO. Within RFMO framework, adopted rules are universally binding for all members (excluding cases of opposition), thereby designating RFMO members as the predominant discourse objects. Moreover, the requirements for cooperating non-contracting parties diverge across different RFMOs. Notably, some RFMOs explicitly stipulate the obligation of parties to fully collaborate and implement conservation measures endorsed by the commission. Conversely, other RFMOs do not explicitly request the implementation of conservation measures from cooperating non-contracting parties in their conventions. Nevertheless, a substantial portion of their conservation measures encompasses provisions applicable to cooperating non-contracting parties. Thus, this study lists cooperating non-contracting parties as RFMO discourse objects as well.

(5) RFMO Discourse Effects

The direct manifestation of RFMO discourse effects is the conversion of discourse content from discourse subjects into enforceable rules. Within RFMO, proposals introduced by members undergo iterative deliberations and determinations, culminating in the establishment of rules possessing both binding force and substantive impact.

Although divergent rule types vary in their degrees of binding efficacy, they collectively reflect the consensus and feedback from various stakeholders to discourse subjects, leading to the generation of institutional discursive power within RFMO. Formation Mechanism of Institutional Discursive Power within RFMO The formation of institutional discursive power within RFMO is a cyclical process determined by the interactions among its constituent

Creation of Institutional Discursive Power

The constituent components exert influence across these phases on the eventual configuration and potency of institutional discursive power

(1) Discourse Generation

The foundational prerequisite for the emergence of institutional discursive power within RFMO is the generation of discourse intrinsically linked to the construction of RFMO institutions. The generation of discourse hinges on the volition and capabilities of the discourse subjects themselves. Specifically, RFMO members must exhibit an active and profound "stewardship" mentality in the establishment of RFMO institutions, transcending mere "follower" roles. Furthermore, the generation of discourse that harmonises the attainment of RFMO management objectives with the pursuit of individual development needs mandates a robust research foundation, substantial research capabilities and research investment by RFMO members. This process should occur in parallel with the understanding, from the perspective of national strategy, of the interplay between advancing nation's own development agenda and participating in the construction of RFMO institutions. The generated discourse thus forms an essential prerequisite for attaining institutional discursive power within RFMO.

(2) Discourse Transmission

In the context of RFMO, discourse transmission refers to the entire process through which discourse is conveyed from discourse platforms to discourse objects, resulting in the generation of discourse effects. In other words, RFMO members, adhering to RFMO rules of procedure, convey their generated discourse to other RFMO members and cooperating non-contracting parties through RFMO meetings at various levels. Discourse transmission constitutes the central phase in the formation of institutional discursive power. Among the five constituent components of institutional discursive power within RFMO, the discourse platforms and discourse objects are determined by the fundamental regulations and member composition of RFMO.

(3) Discourse Feedback

Institutional discursive power within Regional Fisheries Management Organisations (RFMOs) operates through a feedback mechanism encompassing discourse effects, subjects, and outputs. This system is established when RFMO members successfully translate their proposals and statements into binding rules, such as conservation measures or resolutions. The resultant discourse effects reciprocally influence the members, potentially enhancing their credibility or resource allocation advantages. Even when discourse fails to become codified, the ensuing discussions still generate effects, prompting members to refine their discourse strategies. Evaluating institutional discursive power within RFMOs necessitates a mixed-methods approach to analyse its distribution, emphasis, and composition. This methodology aims to objectify discursive power, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of members' roles in shaping the institutional framework, their relative strengths and weaknesses, and the anticipated trajectory of RFMO development. The evaluation framework, grounded in evaluation science principles, primarily focuses on discourse subjects, outputs, and effects, as discourse platforms and objects remain relatively constant. Drawing from extant discursive power evaluation systems and expert opinions from relevant sectors, this study proposes an evaluation framework for institutional discursive power within RFMOs. This approach seeks to comprehend and analyse the extent of RFMO members' mastery over this power and its composition, thereby rendering the concept more tangible and amenable to empirical research.

Dimensions of Institutional Discursive Power Evaluation

The dimensions are determined by the competitive strength of the discourse subjects, the constructive power of discourse outputs, and the influence of discourse effects. These three dimensions are further deconstructed layer by layer to identify evaluation components, followed by the determination of their specific components

(3) Competitiveness

Competitiveness refers to the inherent capacity of RFMO members as discourse subjects, embodying their structural power. Competitiveness exhibits in various forms and is assessed based

on criteria such as representativeness and relevance. In this study, comprehensive national strength and fisheries level are selected as evaluation components for the competitiveness of RFMO members. The comprehensive national power in political, economic, and military domains demonstrates their international status and influence as sovereign states. Meanwhile, their capacity in fisheries production and governance reflects their competency to engage in international fisheries affairs. These two components, uninfluenced by RFMO, combine to form competitiveness, determining the "starting point" for members' engagement in RFMO's institutional formulation.

(2) Constructiveness

Constructiveness refers to the capability of RFMO members to guide and propel the process of RFMO's institutional formulation through their discourse outputs. This capability is manifested through agenda-setting, rule compliance, and rule shaping. Firstly, whether RFMO members can directly participate in agenda-setting through proposals or indirectly through suggestions and declarations significantly influences their capacity to guide RFMO in making decisions on prioritizing management issues, formulating preservation and administration procedures, and evaluating management effectiveness, according to their interest preferences. Secondly, evaluating the extent to which RFMO members comply with RFMO rules is a crucial consideration in determining their potential to play a driving role in constructing the RFMO framework. RFMO members with high compliance capabilities can enhance the recognition of the RFMO rules and their own credibility by meeting compliance standards, thereby exerting robust impetus on the effective operation of the existing RFMO rules. Moreover, their research capacities, team dynamics, and language advantages also determine their capability to shape rules by proposing claims and interpreting regulations.

(3) Influence

Influence can be evaluated from two aspects: institutional transformation and degree of involvement. Institutional transformation refers to the efficiency with which the claims put forth by RFMO members through discourse outputs can be translated into formal rules. Within RFMO, only rules that become official conservation and management measures, resolutions, or recommendations possess a certain degree of binding force, affecting the fishing behaviour of stakeholders.

Construction of Evaluation Model

Based on the evaluation framework, this study defines the three evaluation dimensions, namely, the competitiveness of the discourse subjects, the constructiveness of the discourse outputs, and the influence of the discourse effects, as tier 1 indicators. The evaluation components are identified as tier 2 indicators, and the components of them are further categorised as tier 3 indicators. Under this structure, a three-tiered evaluation indicator system is designed. Subsequently, weights are assigned to the evaluation indicators at each tier, and data collection and analysis methods are developed to construct the evaluation model for institutional discursive power within RFMO. Evaluation Indicator System Following the principles of systematicity, comprehensiveness, comparability, quantifiability, and operability as advocated by the theory of scientific evaluation, this study designs a three-tiered indicator system, comprising three tier 1 indicators, seven tier 2 indicators, and twenty-seven tier 3 indicators, for evaluating institutional discursive power within RFMO. In terms of competitiveness, in addition to conventional economic and military indicators, this study includes fisheries-related indicator to assess the comprehensive strength of RFMO members. Considering that RFMO manages high seas fisheries, this study selects indicators such as trade volume of aquatic products, volume of marine capture production, and fisheries subsidies to reflect a nation's fisheries production level, while excluding aquaculture production from the evaluation indicator system.

This study posits that the constructiveness of RFMO members is determined by their agenda-setting capability, as evidenced by the quantity, content, and purpose of their submitted proposals. Rule compliance is assessed through routine adherence and abstention from illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Members also leverage research and negotiation advantages to influence rule formulation via scientific reports and formal declarations. The influence of RFMO members is primarily evaluated by their ability to transform proposals into rules. Specific indicators, such as the

quantity, content, and purpose of adopted proposals, serve to assess this potential influence. The study also considers members' multiple identities within the RFMO (e.g., fishing party, enforcement party, geopolitical dominant party), their engagement performance, and resource investment as means to evaluate their influence. The weighting of evaluation indicators, crucial for the model's scientific rigour and fairness, was determined using the Analytic Hierarchy Process. This process involved pairwise comparisons between indicators at the same tier. The Delphi method was employed in conjunction, inviting experts from relevant Chinese authorities, RFMO delegation members, and think tank scholars to participate in scoring. These combined approaches led to the stepwise determination of indicator weights. Data collection relied on reputable sources such as the World Bank, FAO, United Nations Treaty databases, and official RFMO websites to ensure authenticity and objectivity. All data utilised are publicly accessible from official sources.

Prior to data analysis, this study employs qualitative judgement to score certain data, distinguishing importance within evaluation indicators. The range standardisation method is then applied to render data dimensionless, eliminating the impact of units and numerical ranges on comparability and interpretability. This process involves determining the maximum and minimum values of each indicator, calculating the range, and then normalising each observation value to fall between zero and one. This transformation ensures consistent directional effects for both positive and inverse indicators. The weighted sum method is utilised, multiplying standardised scores of third-tier indicators by their respective weights. The sum of these scores yields an overall score representing a member's institutional discursive power. The North Pacific Fisheries Commission (NPFC) serves as a case study to apply and validate the effectiveness of this evaluation model. The study focuses on formal member states, excluding cooperating parties and entities.

Evaluation Results and Discussion

Qualitative analysis was conducted to assess the content and purpose of the documents. Following this, relevant data for indicators such as Agenda Setting, Rule Compliance, Rule Shaping and Rule Transformation went through grading and adjustment procedures. Actual catch by each member states, representing their existing fisheries interests within the RFMO, are utilised as a surrogate for allocations. Following the standardisation and calculations of the data, overall scores for the institutional discursive power of NPFC member states were obtained. The results indicate that Japan holds the highest institutional discursive power among all the evaluated targets, with a significantly higher score than the other aforementioned member states. The USA, Canada, China, and the Republic of Korea follow closely in the 2nd to 5th positions, with almost similar scores. The Russian Federation receives the lowest score, indicating comparatively weaker institutional discursive power within the organisation compared to the aforementioned member states. Further analysis of the evaluation results reveals that, within the tier indicators, although both China and the USA exhibit more substantial Competitiveness, Japan holds a notable advantage in the more critical domains of Constructiveness and Influence. The competition for institutional discursive power stands as a primary mechanism through which nations assert their predominance in the realm of global governance, thereby representing a pivotal facet of contemporary interstate competition. This study, in light of the definition of institutional discursive power and with consideration of the unique characteristics of RFMOs, has dissected the components of institutional discursive power within RFMO and the mechanisms underpinning the formation of institutional discursive power within RFMO and offered an analysis into its fundamentals. With an agreement on the components of institutional discursive power within RFMO, the study employs principles of evaluation science to formulate a rigorous framework and model for assessing institutional discursive power within RFMO, with evaluation. Subsequently, through data collection, standardisation and calculation, the study concludes with overall scores representing each member states' institutional discursive power within RFMO. It is noteworthy that this model, crafted by integrating subjective and objectives assessments and harmonizing qualitative and quantitative evaluations, furnishes a comprehensive and scientifically rigorous approach for assessing and comparing the institutional discursive power of member states. Moreover, this model possesses a certain degree of universality, making it

applicable to research across different RFMOs and conducive to ongoing research within the same RFMO. The model offers an intuitive understanding of the role that each member state plays in advancing the establishment of RFMO institutions and equip stakeholders with insights drawn from sound international practices.

Conclusion

A crucial aspect of modern interstate competition is the struggle for institutional discursive power, which is the main means by which countries claim control in the field of global governance. This study attempts to analyse the elements of institutional discursive power within RFMO and the mechanisms underlying the formation of institutional discursive power within RFMO in order to provide a sophisticated analysis into its fundamentals. It does this by taking into account the definition of institutional discursive power as well as the distinctive features of RFMOs.

A rigorous framework and model for evaluating institutional discursive power within RFMO are developed by the model using the principles of evaluation science. Evaluation dimensions are designated as tier 1 indicators, evaluation elements as tier 2 indicators, and particular parts of these evaluation elements as tier 3 indicators. The weights given to each of these indicators are established using the Analytic Hierarchy Process. Following data collection, standardisation, and computation, the study culminates in total ratings that indicate the institutional discursive power of each member state within RFMO.

It is significant that this model provides a thorough and rigorously scientific method for evaluating and comparing the institutional discursive power of member states. It was created by combining subjective and objective assessments and harmonising qualitative and quantitative evaluations. Additionally, this model has some universality, which means that it may be used for study in and support ongoing research within various intergovernmental institutions. The model provides stakeholders with insights derived from strong international practices and provides a more intuitive understanding of the role that each member state plays in supporting the establishment of intergovernmental institutions.

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