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China's policy in the Arctic: ambitions and realities

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Abstract. The relevance of the research topic is due to the increasing interest of the PRC in Arctic issues. Despite the fact that China is not one of the Arctic and sub-Arctic states, it plays an active role among non-Arctic players in the issue of internationalization of Arctic governance, seeking to strengthen its voice in Arctic affairs. The purpose of the research is to study the ambitions of Chinese policy in the region. The range of tasks includes issues of the historical, regulatory and legal framework of China's Arctic policy, discourse in the Chinese scientific community. Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that the Chinese side will actively promote the narrative of the need to transform the Arctic into an important artery of international logistics through the implementation of the Polar Silk Road project, and will focus on the need to internationalize the Arctic region and also expand opportunities for access to natural resources as an attractive asset in the Arctic. In view of the increasing fragmentation of international relations and the “blocking” of the Russian Federation's activities during its chairmanship of the Arctic Council, the Chinese side is gaining greater opportunities to be involved in the Arctic agenda due to expanded cooperation with the largest Arctic power — Russia.

Keywords: Northern Sea Route, Polar Silk Road, sustainable development goals, scientific activities of the People's Republic of China

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Политика Китая в Арктике: амбиции и реалии

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Аннотация. Актуальность темы исследования обусловлена увеличивающимся интересом Китайской Народной Республики (КНР) к арктической проблематике. Несмотря на то, что Китай не входит в число арктических и приарктических государств, он играет активную роль среди неарктических игроков в вопросе интернационализации управления Арктикой, стремясь усилить свой голос в делах региона. Цель исследования — изучение политики КНР в Арктике. В круг задач входит изучение исторической, нормативно-правовой базы политики Китая в Арктике, дискурса в китайском научном сообществе. Сделан вывод о намерениях китайской стороны активно продвигать нарратив о необходимости превращения Арктики в важную артерию международной логистики посредством реализации проекта Полярный Шелковый путь, акцентировать внимание на необходимости интернационализации арктического региона, а также расширять возможности доступа к природным ресурсам Арктики как привлекательному активу. Ввиду усиливающейся фрагментации международных отношений, «блокировки» деятельности РФ во время председательствования в Арктическом совете, китайская сторона получает большие возможности по вовлечению в арктическую повестку благодаря расширению сотрудничества с крупнейшей арктической державой — Россией.

Ключевые слова: Китайская Народная Республика, Северный морской путь, Полярный Шелковый путь, цели устойчивого развития, научная деятельность КНР

Заявление о конфликте интересов. Автор заявляет об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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Introduction

The relevance of studying Arctic topics is confirmed by the growing attention from Arctic and non-Arctic states to the Arctic. Competition for “new space” is intensifying both in the sea, space, the Internet, and in the polar regions, and the Arctic chessboard is becoming the object of serious rivalry between states. The recent rise to power of D. Trump and attempts to buy Greenland from Denmark confirm the thesis that the Arctic case will dominate the international agenda in the 21st century. In recent years, interest in the Arctic has increased significantly in the scientific community. Among researchers traditionally involved in various aspects of Arctic issues, it is worth noting, first of all, the work of Dr. A.N. Pilyasov, in particular the works “Russian Arctic — 2035: multi-scale forecast” [1], “Building common

interests in the Arctic and the Arctic Ocean with global involvement” [2], and also “The Magnet of Globalization — China’s Arctic Policy” [3]. Doctor of Economics, Professor V.I. Smorchkova has been involved in international cooperation in the Arctic for many years. It is worth highlighting the following work by a specialist: “Prospects for the development of international cooperation in the Arctic: main directions” [4].

A comprehensive analysis of the prospects for the development of international cooperation in the Arctic was given by V.P. Zhuravel and D.A. Medvedev in the scientific publication “International cooperation of Russia in the Arctic in the conditions of geopolitical transformation” [5]. Of interest is the article “The conflict in Ukraine and the strategic transformation of the US Arctic policy: the logic of “historical chance” [6], the authors of which are A.K. Magomedov and A.E. Shaparov.

The works of K.O. Labetskaya deserve special attention, in which attention is focused on the presence of a conflictogen in the Arctic “‘Conflict-Free Arctic’: Pro et Contra” [7] and on the fierce rivalry in the region “Arctic Front of the World Hybrid War” [8].

Among Chinese works, it is necessary to highlight a comprehensive analysis of cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China in the Arctic, carried out by Li Tianci and Xu Bo [9].

The theoretical basis of this study is the concept of “hybrid wars”. The interpretation of this concept was made by A.V. Fenenko. “Hybrid warfare” in its most general sense means a type of hostile action in which the attacking side does not resort to a classic military invasion, but suppresses its opponent using a combination of covert operations, sabotage, cyber influence, and also providing support to insurgents operating on enemy territory [10].

It seems that the administration of D. Trump on Arctic issues will rely on a policy of aggressive (offensive realism according to J. Mearsheimer), moving away from the balanced one inherent in D. Biden (defensive realism according to K. Waltz). This point of view is predetermined by the fact that in his first presidential term, D. Trump focused attention on domestic political and economic issues with the goal of returning the former greatness of the United States, but nevertheless, it was under him that negotiations on Ukraine came to a standstill, and the expansion of anti-Russian sanctions received a new round. Taking into account the dominant position of the Russian Federation on many Arctic issues and the expanding cooperation between the Russian Federation and China in the Arctic, the United States will rely on strengthening its position in order to ensure security.

Among the non-Arctic states seeking to participate in the Arctic agenda, China occupies an increasingly prominent place, whose rights in the Arctic are limited primarily due to the fact that the northernmost point of the country’s territory is located 1000 nautical miles from the Arctic Circle. China’s interest in Arctic

affairs is partially reflected in the 2018 White Paper “China’s Arctic Policy”¹, the official rhetoric of the PRC leadership, as well as the scientific works of Chinese experts.

The irresponsible approach of the Arctic states, which was reflected in blocking the activities of the Russian Federation in the Arctic Council, as well as the suspension of activities in the Barents/Euro-Arctic Region Council, the Nordic Council of Ministers, the Northern Dimension, which primarily affects the small indigenous peoples of the North of the Arctic states, became a driver for expanding interaction between Russia and non-Arctic states, primarily China, which created a window of opportunity for the Chinese side.

After the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, which took place in 2012 under the leadership of Xi Jinping, the Party Central Committee identified two important tracks as the national strategy for future development: turning the PRC into a maritime power and polar exploration. In 2013, China became an observer country in the Arctic Council. This year also saw the rise to power of a new chairman in China, Xi Jinping, whose foreign policy vector has become more pragmatic and rational. It was under Xi Jinping that the first conceptual document of the PRC on the Arctic was published in 2018.

Historical and regulatory legal framework of China’s Arctic policy

China’s policy in the Arctic, according to the author, can be divided into several chronological stages. The first stage is the last decades of the past and the beginning of the new century, when the Chinese side is just beginning to show interest in the Arctic. Although it should be said that the Chinese side sees this issue with its own specifics. So, in the 13th century, after Marco Polo discovered China to European countries as “a paradise on earth, where gold, mountains of jewelry and many beautiful girls are everywhere,” Europeans began to look for the shortest route to China along the Maritime Silk Road. Europeans believed that by sea from Norway towards the East or towards the West, one could reach China. In the 15th century the rise of the Ottoman Empire broke the traditional ties between the East and the West, which became a trigger for the search for new routes of cooperation — through the North [11. P. 37].

The second stage — from 2004 to 2013 — is a period of active implementation of China’s economic and political ambitions (opening an Arctic station, creating scientific institutes, building an icebreaker fleet, intensifying bilateral and multilateral cooperation on Arctic issues, including resource development). The third stage — 2013 to the present, is characterized by the coming to power in China of the fifth

¹ China’s Arctic Policy. The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China: [Internet]. 26.01.2018. Available from: http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm [Accessed: Sep 28, 2024].

generation of leaders led by Xi Jinping, whose main political task is to realize the dream of the “great revival of the Chinese nation” and the achievement of the former greatness of China, which was lost due to foreign interference in the affairs of the state during the Opium Wars.

The important objectives of China’s 14th Five-Year Plan (2021–2025) are to achieve a qualitatively new level of economic power, scientific and technological potential, the overall power of the country and improve the standard of living of the population. The key task of the national economic and social development program for the period until 2035 is the implementation of socialist modernization². Thus, it is worth noting that ideas about the implementation of the “Chinese dream” can be traced in all areas of Chinese policy, including the Arctic agenda (table 1, 2).

Table 1

Formation and development of China’s Arctic policy

Years	Main events
1	2
1925	The Chinese side acceded to the Spitsbergen Treaty (1920) in 1925, but did not take any real part in the Arctic agenda, although it received the right to participate in fishing and trading activities in the Arctic waters
1951	Since 1951, Chinese foreign students have started their internships in the Arctic Circle. The first internship took place with Gao Shiliu at the University of Toronto, then in 1958 Chinese students began practicing at Moscow State University. In 1958, Chinese journalist Li Nan, working in the Moscow office of Xinhua, became the first Chinese to reach the North Pole, thanks to the USSR. The first woman from China to visit the Arctic was Hong Kong journalist Li Yueshi in 1993
1958	Convention on the Continental Shelf 1958 The PRC did not take part in the development, Taiwan did, but the document still has legal force
1964	The State Oceanic Administration of China is being created; paragraph 6 of the body’s main regulations states: “to carry out work on marine research in Antarctica and the Arctic.” In fact, this is the first political decision of the PRC on the Arctic [11. P. 153]. Due to the difficult internal political situation in China itself (cultural revolution from 1966–1976), the body existed only on paper. Real functioning began after 1978, which is associated with the launch of the reform and opening-up policy. In 1977, the body issued a new document, which noted the task of advancement in three oceans, but there was no talk about the Arctic Ocean [11. P. 153]
1981	The Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration was created, whose activities were focused on organizing scientific projects
1982	The PRC signed the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which became a driver for polar scientific research, but mostly in Antarctica
1989	On the basis of the Shanghai Institute of International Studies, the Polar Research Institute of China opened its doors, which has become a key body for collecting and analyzing information on polar topics. The activities of this institute are accountable to the State Oceanographic Administration of China
1991	The Chinese side at the provincial level (Heilongjiang) became a participant in the Northern Forum
1991	The Chinese side participated in scientific research on a German ship and planted the Chinese flag in the Arctic for the first time

² The Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for the Socio-Economic PRC and Long-Term Goals for 2035 (draft)”. Official news website of the Communist Party of China. 06.03.2021. Available from: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0306/c64387-32044137.html> (accessed 26.11.2024). (In Chin.).

1	2
1993	China acquired a diesel-electric icebreaker from the Ukrainian side, which was named Xue Long (雪龙 Xue Long — “Snow Dragon”), it was this purchase that gave new impetus to the development of Arctic policy. However, it is worth saying that nuclear icebreakers are of much greater value, since they do not require transporting large amounts of fuel or making many stops, which is especially important in the Arctic due to the lack of infrastructure
1994	The first scientific conference on the topic “Priority directions and key projects of the Chinese scientific Arctic expedition” was held in the PRC
1995	The Chinese Academy of Sciences has established a Polar Science Committee to better promote research in Antarctica and the Arctic
1995	The Chinese Arctic Expedition has completed the first expedition to the North Pole organized by the Chinese themselves
1996	The PRC has joined the International Arctic Scientific Committee
1996	The Office of Polar Expeditions of the State Oceanic Administration was created, which marks the formal inclusion of Arctic issues under the responsibility of the government
1999	The first scientific expedition of the People’s Republic of China set off from Shanghai on the icebreaker “Snow Dragon”
2003	The PRC has joined the Arctic Operators Forum, whose goal is to improve logistics and support scientific research.
2004	Chinese organizations, with the support of the Polar Research Institute of China, opened the Yellow River Arctic station in the village of New Ålesund, Spitsbergen
2005	China hosted Arctic Science Week, becoming the first Asian country to host a high-level international conference on the Arctic. In the same year, the country was vice-chairman of the newly created Pacific Arctic Group, a non-governmental association whose purpose is scientific research of the Arctic Ocean and the North Pacific Ocean
2007	China first applied for observer status in the Arctic Council (AC) in Tromsø, Norway, after which it became a temporary observer in the AC
2011	An interdepartmental group to coordinate Arctic activities was created on the basis of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China
2012	The China Polar Research Center was created, which became the second body implementing Arctic policy along with the Polar Expedition Office of the State Oceanic Research Administration
2013	China became an observer in the AU, which significantly increased the country’s participation in Arctic issues. It is worth noting that at that time there was a diplomatic scandal between the PRC and Norway due to the Norwegian Nobel Committee awarding the Peace Prize to Chinese human rights activist and dissident Liu Xiaobo, but Norway did not disagree with the issue of China receiving observer status in the AU, although the conflict was observed later. Thus, in 2015, Chinese naval vessels carried out goodwill visits to the Arctic countries, but there were no stops in Norway
2013	The China National Petroleum Corporation and the Russian company Novatek signed a framework agreement to acquire a 20 % stake in the Yamal LNG project, thus the PRC officially began to participate in the development of Arctic energy
2013	The vessel “Yongsheng”, owned by the China COSCO group, sailed along the Arctic route on an experimental basis for the first time. This became a trigger for greater attention from the PRC leadership in the Arctic transport route
2014 2015	In 2014, China released a guide to the Arctic (northeast route), and in 2015, a guide to the northwest route. References materials serve not only as guidance in the field of navigation, scientific work, but also politics. In addition to the fact that the materials provide detailed information on climate, geography, and sea routes of the Northern Sea Route, they also contain extensive data on the laws and regulations of the Arctic states, which contributed to the intensification of political dialogue

Ending of table 1

1	2
2016	Five ships of the Chinese COSCO group were sent along the Northern Sea Route. In the same year, China issues navigation advisories off the northwest coast of Canada. Chinese Maritime Security Administration spokesman Liu Pengfei states that “Chinese ships will pass through the Northwest Passage in the future,” without specifying a time frame. In the same year, a representative of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, Stéphane Dion, states that “there is no automatic right of transit passage on the waterways of the Northwest Passage,” and the Director of Public Affairs of the Canadian Department of International Trade, Joseph Pickerill, emphasizes that “Canada Welcomes shipping that complies with our rules and regulations. Canada has the unrestricted right to regulate its internal waters”. The further actions of the Chinese side are noteworthy here, since in the summer of 2017 the PRC sent a state research icebreaker to the coast of Canada without an official request to the Canadian side to enter the country’s internal waters, but requested permission to conduct marine scientific research, citing this possibility according to the Marine law
2016	Construction of the first Chinese-made nuclear icebreaker Xue Long 2 (雪龙 Xue Long — “Snow Dragon 2”) begins in cooperation with the Finnish side, which is launched in 2019. It is worth saying that the PLA also has small icebreakers that are based in Qingdao and Lushunkou (Port Arthur)
2016	China in the city of Kirun (Sweden) opens a satellite ground station at the Esrange Space Research Center
2017	Xue Long crossed the Central Arctic (the area between Severnaya Zemlya and the New Siberian Islands) for the first time
2017	During his visit to the Russian Federation, Xi Jinping initiates the joint construction of the Polar Silk Road
2018	The Chinese side, together with Iceland, opened a scientific laboratory in the Arctic. Thus, China has three bases beyond the Arctic Circle where scientific research is carried out
2018	China adopts its first Arctic policy
2019	The PRC launched the Chinese-built vessel Jidi (极地 Polar Region), which uses two-way icebreaking technology that breaks through ice using both the bow and stern
2024	The Chinese Coast Guard entered the Arctic Ocean for the first time as part of the large-scale naval and air project Ocean–24, jointly with the Russian Federation

Source: compiled by the A.A. Zabella based on literature in Chinese [9, 11, 12].

Table 2

Scientific research expeditions in China in the Arctic

Nº	Departure time	End time	Vessel name	Departure point
1	1.07.1999	9.09.1999	Xue Long	Shanghai
2	15.07.2003	26.09.2003	Xue Long	Dalian
3	11.07.2008	24.09.2008	Xue Long	Shanghai
4	02.07.2010	20.09.2010	Xue Long	Xiamen
5	02.07.2012	27.09.2012	Xue Long	Qingdao
6	11.07.2014	23.09.2014	Xue Long	Shanghai
7	11.07.2016	26.09.2017	Xue Long	Shanghai
8	20.07.2017	10.10.2017	Xue Long	Shanghai
9	20.07.2018	26.09.2018	Xue Long	Shanghai
10	10.08.2019	27.09.2019	Xiangyang hong 1	Qingdao
11	15.07.2020	27.09.2020	Xue Long 2	Shanghai

Source: compiled by A.A. Zabella based on literature in Chinese [9, 11, 12].

The actions of the PRC in 2017 off the coast of Canada confirm the fact that the Chinese side is challenging the rules of navigation in the exclusive economic zones established by Russia and Canada. China is not a supporter of expanding the sovereign rights of the Arctic states and exclusive economic zones, which reduces the area of international Arctic waters [13. P. 27]. This suggests the conclusion that there is a possibility that in the medium term, China will demand that the Northern Sea Route be granted the status of neutral waters. It is necessary to take into account an important reason for China's interest in the Arctic: for example, the route from Europe to China via the NSR requires 25 days and 625 tons of fuel oil, and through the Suez Canal — 35 days and 875 tons of fuel oil, which is undoubtedly interesting to the Chinese side [5. P. 7]. Among other things, the implementation of projects within the BRI, and in the case of the Arctic this is the “Polar Silk Road,” involves settlements in Chinese currency, that is, the internationalization of the yuan. Taking into account the growing need to solve the “middle income trap” and the need to ensure energy security, the Chinese side will increasingly promote an Arctic agenda that is beneficial to China. We cannot rule out propaganda for the internationalization of the NSR by Western countries, especially taking into account the anti-Russian course. So, back in 2007, Russian polar explorer A.N. Chilingarov dived to the bottom of the North Pole and proved that the Lomonosov Ridge is a continuation of the Siberian continental platform. Acceptance of Chilingarov's arguments would contribute to increasing the continental shelf of the Russian Federation from 200 nautical miles from the coast to 350 miles. The Arctic Council countries did not recognize the results of the study, and Denmark and Canada put forward territorial claims to this territory.

“The shelf fields of the Arctic Ocean account for a quarter of the world's proven hydrocarbon reserves, and contradictions regarding their economic development are becoming increasingly dangerous in the conditions of destabilization and chaos in international relations, the crisis of the currently formed model of globalism, the renaissance of the principle of national-state sovereignty, a new cold hybrid war, strengthening trends of regionalization and fragmentation of the world economy, the practice of neo-protectionism and the spread of various models of globalization of economic and other social interactions” emphasized Professor N.D. Eletsy [14. P. 85].

Regulatory legal framework for China's Arctic policy

The fundamental document is the White Paper “China's Arctic Policy” of 2018, but other equally important ones were published before this source. Thus, in 1996, on the basis of the State Oceanological Administration, a basic document was published to guide the sustainable development of the World Ocean — “China's Ocean Agenda in the 21st Century”³.

³ China's ocean agenda in the 21st century. National People's Congress. Available from: http://www.npc.gov.cn/zgrdw/huiyi/lfzt/hdbhf/2009-10/31/content_1525058.htm (accessed 26.10.2024). (In Chin.).

The document mentions the Arctic 7 times, with the main emphasis on cooperation in the field of science. In 1998, the State Council of the People's Republic of China published the White Paper "Development of China's Maritime Economy"; The Arctic was mentioned only 2 times in the context of international cooperation⁴.

Since 1998, the PRC began to publish White Papers "National Defense of China" on a regular basis (once every two years), but they did not talk about Artika until 2015. The 2015 Defense White Paper, China's Military Strategy, contains a number of new provisions related to the projection of power beyond national territory. It is interesting that for the first time the protection of maritime rights and interests is identified as a long-term goal of China⁵.

Noteworthy is the speech of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China Zhang Ming at the Third Assembly of the Arctic Circle in Reykjavik (Iceland), which contained a plan for the Arctic policy of the People's Republic of China, which included six pillars: 1) study of the region; 2) protection and "rational use"; 3) protection of the rights of Arctic states and indigenous peoples; 4) respect for the rights of non-Arctic states and the international community; 5) creation of a multi-level cooperation structure; 6) compliance with international law (UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, Spitsbergen Treaty)⁶.

In 2017, the Concept of Maritime Cooperation was developed within the framework of the BRI initiative. According to this concept, the Chinese government is ready to encourage the participation of Chinese enterprises in the commercial use of the NSR. The Chinese government would like to cooperate with the relevant Arctic countries in assessing the resource potential of the Arctic territories⁷.

The 2019 defense white paper "China's National Defense in a New Era" notes that the PLA promotes international security, military cooperation and improves mechanisms for protecting China's overseas interests, including through the creation of a deep sea force, the development of overseas logistics facilities and the expansion of capabilities to perform military tasks⁸.

⁴ Development of the world economy of China. National historical website of the PRC. Available from: http://www.hprc.org.cn/wxzl/zfbps/zhefbpp/200906/t20090628_3950128_4.html (accessed 26.10.2024). (In Chin.).

⁵ China's Military Strategy (full text). The State Council of the People's Republic of China: [Internet]. 27.05.2015. Available from: http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2015/05/27/content_281475115610833.htm [Accessed: Sep 26, 2024].

⁶ Keynote Speech by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming at the China Country Session of the Third Arctic Circle Assembly/China in the Arctic: Practices and Policies/Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Iceland: [Internet]. 18.10.2015. Available from: http://is.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zbgx/kjl/201510/t20151018_3164910.htm [Accessed: Nov 26, 2024].

⁷ Full text of the Concept of maritime cooperation within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. Xinhua. Available from: https://russian.news.cn/2017-06/20/c_136381457.htm (Accessed: 22.10.2024). (In Chin.).

⁸ China's National Defense in the New Era. The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China: [Internet]. 07.2019. Available from: <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/specials/whitewateronnationaldefenseinnewera.pdf> [Accessed: Sep 26, 2024].

In 2018, the State Council of the People's Republic of China published the official document "China's Arctic Policy"⁹, which documented the country's desire to participate in the Arctic race for the region.

The main goal of the PRC is the internationalization of the Arctic, which will allow the PRC to freely participate in the governance of the region. The main message is that the processes occurring in the Circumpolar region have a significant impact on the environmental and climate situation in the PRC, which requires the leadership of the PRC to urgently participate in Arctic affairs.

The document identifies China as a "Near-Arctic State"¹⁰ (近北极国家), one of the continental states closest to the Arctic Circle, as well as an "interested Arctic country" ("Arctic stakeholder" (北极利害关系国)). The closest point of China to the Arctic Circle is in Mohe County (Heilongjiang), at 53°33' or 1400 kilometers.

Of interest is the opinion of one of the leading Russian experts on the Arctic — A.N. Pilyasov, who is convinced that: "not a single national strategy, not a single international official document fights for globalization in the Arctic as persistently, unequivocally, even fiercely as the Chinese Arctic strategy" [3. P. 113].

The next document that deserves analysis is the "14th Five-Year Plan 2021–2025" — the first five-year plan that deals with the Arctic. Previously, the 13th Five-Year Plan 2016–2020 emphasized the need to proactively formulate international rules in areas such as the Internet, the deep sea, *polar regions* and aerospace. The current plan emphasizes the following:

"We will actively develop the Blue Partnership, fully participate in the development and implementation of international maritime governance mechanisms and rules, and contribute to the construction of a fair and equitable international maritime order and the development of a maritime community with a shared future.

We will expand practical cooperation with coastal countries in the fields of marine environmental monitoring and protection, scientific research and maritime search and rescue operations, and intensify the exploration and assessment of deep-sea strategic resources and biodiversity. We will join practical cooperation in the Arctic and build the Polar Silk Road.

We will expand our ability to participate in the conservation and use of Antarctica. We will intensify efforts to study and assess situations, prevent risks and resolve legal issues, and strengthen the construction of the maritime judicial system to resolutely protect China's maritime rights and interests and promote the orderly formulation of basic maritime law¹¹.

⁹ China's Arctic Policy. The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China: [Internet]. 26.01.2018. Available from: http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm [Accessed: Sep 28, 2024].

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The 14th five-year plan and long-range objectives through 2035. National Development and Reform Commission : [Internet]. 03.2023. Available from: <https://en.ndrc.gov.cn/policies/202303/P020230322507760242190.pdf> [Accessed: Oct 25, 2024].

Thus, it is worth noting that China’s regulatory policy framework is quite representative and ambitious. It is worth noting that the PRC is not the first state that, in its documents on Arctic issues, refers to the importance of implementing scientific projects to protect the environment, address the issue of global warming, etc. However, what lies behind the official rhetoric deserves special study.

According to the author, the possibility of a tightening of the PRC’s foreign policy and the perception of the sovereign interests of the Arctic countries as a “rudiment” cannot be ruled out, since China has already accumulated sufficient weight to shape the international narrative in the modern world.

Table 3

Connotations of China’s Arctic Policy with the UN Sustainable Development Goals

China’s Arctic Policy	UN Sustainable Development Goals
Deepening the study and enriching the understanding of the Arctic; Conducting interdisciplinary research, incl. international; Monitoring and assessment of climate change; Conducting Arctic expeditions, constructing scientific stations, maintaining security platforms; Development of technological innovations; Encouraging scientific exchanges, creating cooperation networks “Arctic University”	SDG 4 — Quality education SDG 9 — Industrialization, innovation and infrastructure SDG 13 — Climate Action SDG 14 — Conservation of marine ecosystems SDG 15 — Conservation of terrestrial ecosystems
Protecting the ecological environment and addressing climate change issues; Control of pollution of marine and terrestrial ecosystems; Conservation and protection of flora and fauna; Strengthening environmental management; Preservation of the region’s biodiversity; Meeting international commitments to reduce emissions; Predict risks; Raising global awareness of the impact of climate change on the region.	SDG 13 — Climate Action SDG 14 — Conservation of marine ecosystems SDG 15 — Conservation of terrestrial ecosystems SDG 16 — Peace, justice and strong institutions SDG 17 — Partnerships for sustainable development
Using Arctic resources in a legal and sustainable manner; Incentivizing enterprises to participate in the construction of Arctic waterway infrastructure, including through the Polar Silk Road; Promotion of commercial use of Arctic waterways; Sustainable development of the region’s resources together with other Arctic states; Strengthening cooperation in the field of clean energy; Development of renewable energy sources; Development of sustainable fisheries; Research of regional fish stocks; Carrying out hunting activities; Development of sustainable tourism	SDG 7 — Affordable and clean energy SDG 9 — Industrialization, innovation and infrastructure SDG 12 — Responsible production and consumption SDG 13 — Climate action SDG 14 — Conservation of marine ecosystems SDG 15 — Conservation of terrestrial ecosystems SDG 17 — Partnerships for sustainable development
Active participation in Arctic governance and international cooperation; Maintaining the current system of international governance of the Arctic, which is based on the UN Charter and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea; Coordination of Arctic policies and strategies by all states; Intensifying cooperation within international platforms; Promoting digital communications in the Arctic; Promoting practical; cooperation in various regions of the Arctic.	SDG 16 — Peace, justice and strong institutions SDG 17 — Partnerships for sustainable development
Promoting peace and stability in the Arctic; Ensure the safety of maritime trade, maritime operations and transportation; Strengthen international cooperation with Arctic countries in the areas of search and rescue at sea and in the air, early warning at sea, emergency response, intelligence sharing, etc.	SDG 9 — Industrialization, innovation and infrastructure SDG 16 — Peace, justice and strong institutions SDG 17 — Partnerships for sustainable development

Source: Compiled by A.A. Zabella based on the White Paper “China’s Arctic Policy” and the UN SDGs.

Xi Jinping's policy is characterized by a departure from Deng Xiaoping's concept of "keeping a low profile and hiding one's capabilities." The Chairman of the People's Republic of China is actively putting forward various concepts and foreign policy initiatives: B&R, Community of a Shared Destiny for Mankind.

Speaking about global initiatives and their correlation with the Arctic policy of the PRC, it is worth highlighting, first of all, the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, launched in 2013, and the Polar Silk Road that stems from it. The importance of the B&R is confirmed by the fact that in 2017, at the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China, the B&R was included in the Party Charter.

An important task of the BRI is to remove China from the semi-periphery of the world economy and transform it into the core. At the moment, this is hampered by low income per capita, social stratification, environmental problems, etc. Internal dynamics, that is, internal financial problems, can slow down or delay the rise of the PRC as a hegemon [15].

In 2021, the White Paper 2021 on International Development Cooperation in a New Era was published. The focus is on the concept of the Community of a Shared Future for Humanity, as well as South-South and BRI cooperation. Key Goal: Help other developing countries implement the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The importance of jointly solving global problems is emphasized. According to the 2021 White Paper, China will continue to be guided by the concept of the Community of a Shared Future for Mankind, with a correct view of justice and interests as value orientations, and will actively pursue international development cooperation within its capabilities to harness China's power for global development¹².

Chinese Arctic thinking is a map centered on the North Pole: the primary "no man's" sea space, the land margins are secondary [3. P. 115].

Thus, it can be seen that the main directions of China's Arctic policy correspond to the SDGs, and also serve as the basis for promoting globalization of the Arctic in the Chinese way, that is, taking into account free international trade, financial interstate integration, joint research work, and the development of a new legal document on Arctic, and subsequently access of all players to the use and regulation of assets in the Arctic zone.

China's Arctic Policy: The View of the Chinese Scientific Community

Li Zhenfu emphasized: "Whoever gains control of the Arctic route will control the new path of the world economy... The Arctic has serious military significance, and other countries recognize this fact"¹³. Chinese Rear Admiral

¹² China's International Development Cooperation in the New Era. The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China : [Internet]. 01.2019. Available from: <https://english.mee.gov.cn/Resources/publications/Whitep/202101/P020210122374486901993.pdf> [Accessed: Oct 25, 2024].

¹³ Zhukov M. Kto hoziain v Arctike? [Who is the boss in the Arctic?]. *Parlamentskaya gazeta*. Available from: <https://www.pnp.ru/comment/detail/15665> (accessed 22.10.2024). (In Russ.).

Yin Zhuo declared back in 2010 that: “The Arctic belongs to the whole world, so no nation has sole power over it”¹⁴.

Li Yuansheng, stated the need to provide China with direct access to the Northern Sea Route: “For us, the issue of Arctic development is key. And we would like Russia not only to cooperate in terms of research, but also to provide favorable conditions for the passage of our ships through its waters.” Yuan Zongze, stated: “The Northern Sea Route is a global common property and cannot be controlled by individual states”¹⁵.

A number of Chinese experts express full agreement with the thesis that China is a “near-Arctic state” located in close proximity to the Arctic Circle [16].

According to the author, the works of Zhang Cheng are of great interest. Thus, the main thesis of one of the works boils down to the following: China needs to firmly protect and expand its own rights and interests in the Arctic, support the position of non-Arctic countries, turn the Arctic region into a “common land” (“公地化 gundihua”); pragmatically recognize the priority rights of the Arctic countries and avoid structural conflicts with them¹⁶. Zhang Cheng also believes that “Russian Arctic policy pursues three main goals: environmental protection, national security and socio-economic development. “Russia’s Pivot to the East” will help China further strengthen its participation in Arctic affairs and at the same time strengthen and deepen comprehensive cooperation between the PRC and the Russian Federation on Arctic affairs. The Russian Federation and China need to strengthen cooperation within the framework of the “One Belt, One Road” initiative. Under the Trump administration, the United States has lost its leading position in the Arctic and has become a “wavering” (“摇摆者” yaobaizhe) state, and on some issues a “lagging” (“拖后腿者” touhou tui zhe) state”¹⁷.

According to Zhao Ningning, as China’s presence in the Arctic increases, pressure from the United States will increase. The PRC will be accused of attempting to recklessly undermine Arctic governance. The task of the PRC: to respond to climate change through scientific research to better use the “public domain” (gongyu) of the Arctic. The following thesis is also interesting: “against the backdrop of US and European sanctions, the Russian Federation will rely more on the political and economic support of China. China’s goal: to strengthen its participation in the development of Russian Arctic oil and gas resources, as well as to develop the Northern Sea Route”¹⁸.

¹⁴ Zhukov M. Kto hoziain v Arctike? [Who is the boss in the Arctic?]. *Parlamentskaya gazeta*. Available from: <https://www.pnp.ru/comment/detail/15665> (accessed 22.10.2024). (In Russ.).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Zhang Ch, Gu X. A realistic guideline for building a governance system model in the Arctic. China Ocean Development Research Center. Available from: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/5Bcu5wB09HEJibyp0K5hug> (accessed 25.10.2024). (In Chin.).

¹⁷ Zhang Ch. Study of globalization against the background of Arctic governance and interaction strategies of China. At the border of time and space. Available from: https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/86ZVChBtgtyXqPz_4qObGw (accessed 27.10.2024). (In Chin.).

¹⁸ Zhao N. Analysis of Biden’s Arctic strategy and prospects for its implementation. Border and Oceanological Institute at Wuhan University. Available from: <https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/4X-e6uRr2c0s6X1iISk3kQ> (accessed 27.10.2024). (In Chin.).

Lecturer, School of Marxism, Hubei University of Economics, Doctor of Law. Zhu Baolin believes that China's participation in Arctic governance requires a peaceful and stable environment. Military actions by Arctic countries have increased geopolitical security risks in the Arctic and brought many uncertainties to China's participation in Arctic governance. China is viewed by some Arctic countries as a threat to Arctic security, which limits China's participation in Arctic governance. He believes that the creation in the Arctic of a "mechanism for the Community of a Common Destiny for Humanity" meets the common interests of all humanity [12].

In general, from the above theses of Chinese experts, it becomes obvious that the Arctic agenda has become extremely relevant in the scientific community of China. This is also evidenced by statistical data on the Wanfang Data and CNKI express platform, according to which the number of master's and postgraduate students defending their Arctic studies ("北极") in China has increased many times in recent years.

Conclusion

The Arctic region is one of the centers of international politics, gradually turning into the center of a multipolar world, an important artery of international trade, as well as an arena of increasing rivalry.

The formation and development of China's policy in the Arctic goes back decades, but the peak came with the arrival of the fifth generation of leaders led by Xi Jinping. The Arctic is not a priority area of China's foreign policy, but interest and ambitions in the Arctic are gradually increasing. In order to strengthen its position in the region, the leadership of the People's Republic of China has not only created government bodies to implement the Arctic strategy, actively participates in international research expeditions, and builds icebreakers, but has also firmly enshrined Arctic issues in China's regulatory legal documents. According to the author, many non-Arctic states, when implementing Arctic policy, focus on the fact that the process taking place in the circumpolar region is reflected throughout the world, which is indisputable, but one cannot ignore the modern realities of China, the need to maintain social well-being while economic growth is slowing, ensuring energy security. The PRC seeks to participate in the management of the Arctic and achieve the internationalization of the region. The author does not rule out that in the medium term the Arctic agenda will become one of the main directions of Chinese policy, which could lead to a tougher position on defending China's ambitions in the Arctic.

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