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The Arctic with Chinese Characteristics

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Abstract. Year by year, the Arctic is becoming an increasingly complex geopolitical and geoeconomic epicenter of interaction and simultaneous confrontation between Arctic and non-Arctic actors in international relations. In particular, China has already “put its hands” (插手) to the Arctic region, being a non-Arctic state. Using diplomatic language, the PRC was able not only to conduct a number of scientific studies as an official observer at the Arctic Council, but also to build up economic ties with the Arctic countries over a relatively short period of time. The purpose of our study is to identify the institutional features of China’s emerging Arctic identity. The main methodological framework of the study is the analysis of regions through the prism of mega- and meso-areas (Osamu Ieda) and the concept of regional security complexes (B. Buzana and O. Vever). The author is also actively researching the main strategic document of the PRC (the White Paper on the Arctic), the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, a number of relevant international, national conventions and agreements, regulatory legal acts, international reports, statements and media materials. The author considers the identification of institutional features of the Chinese Arctic identity to be the main result of the study. The article also forecasts China’s further geostrategic course towards the Arctic region.

Keywords: *Arctic, China, Russia, international relations, geopolitics, Ice Silk Road, international cooperation, Northern Sea Route, Arctic policy*

*“The Arctic belongs to all the people around the world
as no nation has sovereignty over it”.*

Yin Zhuo, Chinese Rear Admiral ¹

Introduction

The Arctic is one of the most interesting regions, transformed from the epicenter of natural and climatic challenges into a geopolitical space with a high degree of negotiations and discussions. Advantageous transit sea routes from Asia to Europe, rich natural resource complex, strategic importance and a huge “field” for scientific research — all this, as it turned out, can be promised by melting Arctic Sea ice. Cooperation, called for by the global and scientific community, has increasingly been replaced by geopolitical competition, and China has recently begun to set the pace for this.

Meanwhile, Russia considers China exclusively as a collaborator in the Far North. Perhaps, current strategic cooperation is beneficial for both countries, since the existing international situa-

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¹ Chang G. China’s Arctic Play. *Diplomat*. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2010/03/chinas-arctic-play/> (accessed 01 June 2022).

tion requires certain diplomatic maneuvers and strengthening partnerships as opposed to a bloc coalition within the Arctic Council. In this article, the author intends to explore the emerging Chinese Arctic identity through a new methodological framework and identify the challenges and prospects of a Chinese presence in the Arctic.

In foreign literature, a lot of scientific papers are devoted to the analysis of China's strategic activities in the Arctic. Thus, Xu Zhenwei and Xu Yuanyuan in their work, using the theory and the prisoner's dilemma, pay attention to the problem of existing international legal problems between the United States, Canada and the Russian Federation on Arctic issues and offer a number of constructive actions that would allow China to gain a profitable strategic advantage in its struggle for Arctic rights [1]. Cheng Baozhi presents his own vision of solving the main contradictions in the Arctic for China [2]. Mei Hong and Wang Zengzhen substantiate China's Arctic aspirations [3]. Liu Huirong and Yang Fan delve into the reasons for the "fragmentation of international law" in the Arctic, highlight the contradictions in international and national regulations for this region and offer their vision of how to solve a number of Arctic problems [4]. Other Chinese scientists have explored the ontology of China's motives in an effort to keep the Chinese flag on the Arctic front [5; 6; 7; 8], and justified what is the strategic feature and importance of sea routes in northern latitudes for China [9, Xiao Y.; 10, Liu N.; 11, Sun K.; 12, Li Z., Tian Y.; 13, Guo P., Guan Q.]. Mark Lantaigne studied the evolution of China's strategies towards the Far North, and determined the prerequisites for analyzing the current state and future development of China's Arctic policy [14; 15; 16]. N. Joelsen dedicated his work to examining China's interaction with the Arctic Council [17]. The China-Arctic topic was also the subject of Russian works. Thus, Erokhin V., co-authored with Gao Tianmin and Zhang Xuhua, studied the critical points in implementing the Chinese paradigm in the Arctic and a series of other investment projects². Leonov S.N. explores the main reasons for the increased activity of the PRC in the Arctic and identifies a number of problems for the Russian Federation that could potentially arise with a weakening of positions in the Northern Sea Route [18]. However, despite the numerous advantages of the available scientific papers on this topic, they did not adequately reflect the latest processes. Moreover, our article proposes to look at the activities of the Celestial Empire in the Arctic in terms of the new methodological framework.

Methodology

The concept of mega- and meso-areas presented by Osamu Ieda is used as the basis of our study³. In our opinion, this concept can be fruitful for the analysis of spatial units created by geopolitical upheavals of the late 20th century.

² Erokhin V., Gao T., Zhang X. Arctic Blue Economic Corridor: China's Role in the Development of a New Connectivity Paradigm in the North, 2018. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328758312_Arctic_Blue_Economic_Corridor_China%27s_Role_in_the_Development_of_a_New_Connectivity_Paradigm_in_the_North (accessed 01 June 2022).

³ Osamu I. Regional Identities and Meso-Mega Area Dynamics in Slavic Eurasia: Focused on Eastern Europe, 2004. URL: <https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/pdf01/ieda040302.pdf> (accessed 01 June 2022).

This methodology revises the current regional division, based on national-state boundaries, from a new perspective — the mega-area — and its constituent parts — the meso-areas. The new country vision allows for a better understanding of the ontological basis of the changing institutional identities of the world's regions. This conceptual framework significantly expands the angle of the political economy analytical review, allows a new assessment of upcoming trends on the world stage and undoubtedly has heuristic potential.

The meso-area represents a component part of the mega-area, which is in a balancing act between the centripetal force inherent in the mega-area (political-economic institutions, behavioral patterns, ecosystems, etc.) and external factors. The imbalance, in turn, is not only related to the weakening of centripetal forces within the mega-area, but can also be caused by encountering external globalization effects in the form of regional trade and economic integration, cultural influences from outside, etc. In other words, the consequences of globalization can cause the fragmentation of a mega-area together with meso-areas, connecting meso-areas within another mega-area with a new regional boundary. In this context, we note that a mezo-area may have access to two mega-areas: an entry mega-area and an exit mega-area.

It is also important that the meso-area is “the interaction of external factors, institutional identity and the self-identity of the meso-area itself”⁴. The dynamics of all three components determine the type of the meso-area movement: evolutionary, reverse, transformational and transitional. According to Osamu Ieda, the more a meso-area is vulnerable to external impulses, the higher the risk that it will transform and move into a new mega-region; and if a meso-area is burdened by institutionalization, it will end up in a “reverse reaction mode”^{5,6}. In terms of meso-area self-identification, it is remarkable that a high self-identification score for a meso-level area may provoke a transformation in both mega-level (entry and exit) areas⁷.

In the context of our study, the Arctic is a meso-area surrounded by mega-areas: for example, Magomedov A.K.⁸ refers to “post-Soviet Northern Eurasia” as a complex mega-area, and Vello Pettai defines the mega-areas of China, the Russian Federation and the USA as mega-areas⁹. The Arctic meso-area can be “outlined” by the political and economic influence, expressed in the concentration of business structures, huge investments, research interest, etc. on the part of the above-mentioned group of countries. However, one of the study's aims is to identify the dynamics of the Arctic's movement as a meso-area (using the above construction as an example).

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Pettai V. The study of Meso- and Mega-Area dynamics: methodological and empirical considerations. URL: https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no7_ses/chapter03.pdf (accessed 01 June 2022).

⁷Ibid.

⁸Magomedov A.K. Energeticheskie mezo-regiony Severnoy Evrazii: menyayushchayasya rol' Kaspiyskogo basseyna i Vostochnoy Sibiri na rubezhe 20-21 stoletiy [Energy Meso-Regions of Northern Eurasia: The Changing Role of the Caspian Basin and Eastern Siberia at the Turn of the 20th-21st Centuries]. URL: <http://lib.ulstu.ru/venec/disk/2017/321.pdf> (accessed 23 July 2022).

⁹Pettai V. The study of Meso- and Mega-Area dynamics: methodological and empirical considerations. URL: https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/publish/no7_ses/chapter03.pdf (accessed 01 July 2022).

The next concept for the analysis of the regional dimension of world politics is the regional security complex by B. Buzan and O. Wæver¹⁰. The basis of this concept is the theory of securitization. This theory is a study devoted to the inter-subjective perception of any processes or even actors that pose a “threat to the referent object”, in connection with which the need to reflect this threat is constructed. Not only the state itself, but also ecosystems, religious and dogmatic trends, human rights, etc. can be represented as an object. In particular, this concept allows us to understand how and why a particular subjective problem has been securitized.

Problem securitization

China has succeeded in politicizing (securitizing) the problem to the level of an existential threat. On the one hand, indeed, as China claims, the natural and climatic problem is real and the entire world community has to reckon with it. In particular, China asserts that global warming leads to melting of the Arctic glaciers, which in turn causes rise of the sea level. Indeed, most provinces and urban districts with major financial and economic centers are located precisely in the eastern coastal area of mainland China. Moreover, Arctic climate changes affect the state of the climate in China through air currents, which explains PRC’s concerns.

It is worth noting that the Arctic has been of academic interest to the Chinese scientific community since 1988: scientific articles and journals on the topic of polar research began to be published, the Polar Research Institute of China was opened (1989)¹¹. Nevertheless, the PRC strengthened its Arctic agenda only “after 2012, having invested more than \$90 billion in Arctic infrastructure and assets”¹². In fact, China expresses the most concern among the non-Arctic countries. The subsequent inclusion of the Arctic region in the Ice Silk Road program and the publication of China’s Arctic Policy (2018) (hereinafter referred to as the White Paper) is not just the securitization of the natural and climatic issue. This is China’s purposeful, strategic approach to entering the northern latitudes, to a region that only at first glance does not have a geographical affiliation to it.

Thus, China’s linguistic tricks to justify its Arctic aspirations still have geographical grounds: China considers it quite reasonable to classify itself as a “subarctic country”, since its northeastern part reaches 50° north latitude¹³. It has also been argued that, since a quarter of the world population lives in China, then a quarter of the reserves of the Arctic hydrocarbon potential should be

¹⁰ Buzan B., Wæver O. Security — A New Framework For Analysis. URL: https://www.academia.edu/39047709/Buzan_Waever_and_De_Wilde_1998_Security_A_New_Framework_For_Analysis (accessed 01 July 2022).

¹¹ Alexeeva O., Lasserre F. China and the Arctic. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/P-Lackenbauer-2/publication/352165129_China%27s_Arctic_Engagement_Following_the_Polar_Silk_Road_to_Greenland_and_Russia/links/60bc3599299bf10dff9c7e80/Chinas-Arctic-Engagement-Following-the-Polar-Silk-Road-to-Greenland-and-Russia.pdf?origin=publication_detail (accessed 01 June 2022).

¹² Morello C. Pompeo warns of the dangers of Russian and Chinese activities in the Arctic. URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/pompeo-warns-of-dangers-of-russian-and-chinese-activities-in-the-arctic/2019/05/06/e2e99690-7001-11e9-9eb4-0828f5389013_story.html (accessed 01 June 2022).

¹³ Seidler v. C. China Dips Toes in Arctic Waters. URL: Growing Chinese Interest in the Arctic Worries International Community — DER SPIEGEL (accessed 01 June 2022).

long to China [19, Dong Yue, Chen Yitong, Li Shengcheng, pp. 17–22; 20, Jia Yu, pp. 6–10; 21, Liu Huirong, Liu Xiu, pp. 1–5; 4, Liu Huirong, Yang Fan, pp. 1–5; 3, Mei Hong, Wang Zengzhen, pp. 23–27]. China's rapid entry into the composition of Arctic Council observers is emotionally justified by historical experience: the Arctic Council is a union of 8 subarctic states, which resonates for China historically with the 19th–20th centuries — also an alliance of 8 states and simultaneously a period of imperialist mockery of the once closed, but self-sufficient Chinese empire¹⁴.

Graduality as one of the advantages of Chinese geopolitics

It is also worth paying attention to the fact that China, apart from securitization of problems, is quite successful in promoting its traditional cultural values around the world. Basic geopolitical, cultural and even economic concepts are sometimes derived from the oldest philosophical and religious canonical texts. The wisdom of the ancestors is not forgotten, but goes to the “benefit of modernity”¹⁵.

As we have argued before, the historical experience of China did not allow the Arctic to become a new symbol of the “Union of Eight”, but, on the contrary, turned it into an indicator of China's involvement in a decisive struggle for its rights in this region. However, this “determined struggle” can be described as a planned and coherent strategy, consistent with the Chinese concept of “gradualism” or trial and error (摸着石头过河). More often, “gradualism” in Chinese literature correlates with the concepts of “reform”, but in the Arctic context, “gradualism” has made a significant contribution. From the recognition of the sovereign rights of the Arctic countries to the inclusion of China in the observer council, the Celestial Empire gradually moved into the Arctic. Purposeful and strategically adjusted steps to the Arctic were very consistent. It is hard to disagree with this. Deng Xiaoping's principle of “hiding one's power and waiting for a favorable moment” (隐蔽力量等待时机) is inappropriate here, as is the desire of world hegemony¹⁶. At the same time, China simply cannot lose its position as a global geopolitical actor — a strong economy does not allow it to “hide its power”. It turns out that China is forced to “put its hands” (插手) to the Arctic affairs. But how can this be done and for what purpose?

Is the Arctic a region of China?

China is a mega-area with a high level of GDP, a strong soft power influence; it is an actor with a high level of military power. China's geopolitical interests extend far beyond its demarcation lines. As the most populous country in the world, China needs not only new markets and integration ties, but also the diversification of energy sources. The Arctic could provide all of this.

¹⁴ Guo P., quoted in Xie Kaihua The Future Influence of the Polar Regions on China Will Be Great: A Visit with Arctic Issues Expert Guo Peiqing of Ocean University of China. URL: express.cetin.net.cn (accessed 01 June 2022).

¹⁵ Reference to Chinese expression: "To put the ancient at the service of the modern" (古为今用).

¹⁶ Xi Jinping: Speech at the China International Friendship Conference and the 60th Anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. URL: http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2014-05/15/c_1110712488.htm (accessed 01 June 2022).

First of all, China needs to maintain its energy balance. According to forecasts, energy consumption in China will increase, as well as hydrocarbon import [22, Shan B., Xu M., Zhu F., Zhang C.; 23, Liu J., Chen W., Liu D.]. Moreover, China needs to achieve its goals by 2049, and for this purpose it will only strengthen its energy security¹⁷ by searching for new sources of energy resources. In addition to black gold and blue fuel, China needs “strategic” resources in the form of minerals¹⁸. The Arctic is a region rich in hydrocarbons and minerals.

Secondly, China is dependent on the supply of hydrocarbons through maritime transport. Most of the energy resources are transported to China through the Strait of Malacca, which, although it is of great economic importance for China, is still potentially conflictogenic¹⁹. China is therefore aware of the need to find other maritime routes for energy supplies. The Arctic region represents this alternative.

Thirdly, according to Li Xing and Rasmus Jedsso Bertelsen, strong economic performance, political stability and preservation of China’s territorial integrity are the main tasks of the Chinese leadership to ensure “the legitimacy of their power”²⁰. Scientists, continuing this idea, postulate that (since China has no sovereign rights over the Arctic region) entering the Far North should have been ensured by the need for scientific research, since climate change has a direct impact not only on the climate of the country itself but also on “agriculture and food security”, and, consequently, on the socio-economic and political stability²¹. In this context, China’s research on natural and climatic changes in the Arctic region is a “justified” way to securitize the problem and thereby to get closer to the Arctic.

Indeed, climate change in the Arctic is more of an economic opportunity for China than an environmental crisis. The issue of environmental security is of little concern to a country that is one of the world leaders in terms of carbon dioxide emissions and is also a major source of black carbon²². Balancing of these indicators would determine the success of further efforts to save the Arctic region. However, while there is an international legal mechanism for influencing China on

¹⁷ Kuhn R.L. Xi Jinping’s Chinese Dream. New York Times. URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/05/opinion/global/xi-jinpings-chinese-dream.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (accessed 10 July 2022).

¹⁸ Andersson P., Kalvig P., Gad U.P. Chinese companies in Arctic mining are gaming the master plan. URL: <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/chinese-companies-in-arctic-mining-are-gaming-the-master-plan> (accessed 18 July 2022).

¹⁹ Seyedi S. Strategicheskoe znachenie Malakskogo proliva v Yugo-Vostochnoy Azii [The strategic importance of the Strait of Malacca in Southeast Asia]. URL: https://www.ankasam.org/author/seyedmohammad_seyedi_asl/?lang=ru (accessed 10 July 2022).

²⁰ Li X., Bertelsen R.G. The Drivers of Chinese Arctic Interests: Political Stability and Energy and Transportation Security. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/P-Lackenbauer-2/publication/352165129_China%27s_Arctic_Engagement_Following_the_Polar_Silk_Road_to_Greenland_and_Russia/links/60bc3599299bf10dff9c7e80/Chinas-Arctic-Engagement-Following-the-Polar-Silk-Road-to-Greenland-and-Russia.pdf?origin=publication_detail (accessed 03 July 2022).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Yamineva Y. China in the Arctic: climate agenda as a space for multilateral cooperation amidst great power competition. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351746375_China_in_the_Arctic_Climate_agenda_as_a_space_for_multilateral_cooperation_amidst_great_power_competition (accessed 07 June 2022).

greenhouse gas issues, the problem of reducing black carbon emissions remains unresolved. Greenhouse effect issues are regulated by the Paris Agreement until 2030²³. At the same time, there is also an Arctic strategy of China [14; 15; 16, Lanteigne M.]. The Paris Agreement calls for reduction of greenhouse gases by all countries of the world, while China's strategy does not provide for additional measures to level greenhouse gas indicators, since the country does not consider its impact on the Arctic extensive and destructive²⁴. In this case, it is reasonable to believe that the Arctic's natural-climatic problem is a successful securitization, because China invests heavily in a region that provokes natural challenges, but at the same time (albeit partially) provokes these problems in this region itself.

Thus, as we see once again, the goals of China's "entry" to the Arctic region are clear: securitizing of the natural-climatic component brought China closer to substantiating its interest and the need to participate in circumpolar cooperation. However, how did China act to get closer to the Arctic?

Firstly, through international political instruments. China recognized the problems in the Arctic as generally regional, but rapidly trying to expand their international dimension. In particular, China managed to securitize this aspect through the prism of the natural resource potential of the Arctic and its sea routes.

In a relatively recent published White Paper, China describes itself as a "country close to the Arctic"²⁵ (in Russian-language literature, the translation "sub-Arctic country" is more common). China positions itself as a country that has legitimate rights in the Arctic region, since the Arctic is included in the space "community of destiny"²⁶. Accordingly, the Arctic is a shared global space. The legitimate rights to conduct various kinds of research and other practices should be respected not only by the Arctic states to each other, but also to China [4, Liu Huirong, Yang Fan].

China understands that the Arctic is more of an ocean, and accordingly, issues in the international legal field should be resolved through the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. The problem is that this Convention itself is a stumbling block, since it contains "flaws" that allow territorial countries to interpret the articles of the document in their own way (in accordance with their national rights and interests). In this context, the words of Li Zhenfu are interesting: "China should at the national level rely on real strengths in the formulation of international law, scientific research and jurisdiction over resources and sea routes and do its best in the Arctic to make its own voice heard and strengthen its right to speak out. Only those, who become owners of re-

²³ Paris Agreement. URL: https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/paris_agreement_russian_.pdf (accessed 10 July 2022).

²⁴ Yamineva Y. China in the Arctic: climate agenda as a space for multilateral cooperation amidst great power competition. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351746375_China_in_the_Arctic_Climate_agenda_as_a_space_for_multilateral_cooperation_amidst_great_power_competition (accessed 10 July 2022).

²⁵ China's Arctic policy (In Chinese). URL: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1618203/1618203.htm> (accessed 01 June 2022).

²⁶ Ibid.

sources, will be able to receive their legitimate value” [5; 24, Li Zhenfu]. The author argues that the Arctic countries are still struggling to develop sustainable international mechanisms that would resolve conflicts over Arctic issues internationally; it would be to China’s advantage to become actively involved in these matters, rather than to be a passive observer. Otherwise, the strategic value of this region will slip out from the Celestial Empire’s grasp, depriving it of “legitimate rights and interests”²⁷.

Xu Zhenwei and Xu Yuanyuan argue that the three Arctic countries — the United States, the Russian Federation and Canada — do not use a cooperative approach to resolving the problems of the Arctic region [1]. The authors compare the approaches of these countries with the stage, when one side gives its arguments, and the other side refutes them and says: “when you finish singing, I will go up to the stage”. In this context, the authors believe that it is necessary to adopt a multilateral national strategy for the Arctic Sea passages.

Moreover, China emphasizes that it guarantees and in no way disputes the rights to the Arctic of adjacent territorial countries. It was this rhetoric that enabled the Celestial Empire to approach the Arctic Council [17, Joelsen N.]. In a relatively short period of time, China managed to form its “Arctic identity” [14; 15; 16, Lanteigne M.] and become an Arctic Council observer (2013), having convinced the main body of the council of its “legitimate” interest. China supports the legitimate rights to “presence” in the Arctic Council by joining international agreements and organizations. Thus, Beijing supported the provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea²⁸, joined the Treaty on the Svalbard Islands²⁹, the Agreement on the Prevention of Unregulated Fishing in the High Seas in the Central Arctic Ocean³⁰, as well as the Polar Code³¹. The latter is one of the most important documents for China, since its articles unambiguously postulate a globalist vision of the Arctic region, which facilitates the official statements of the Chinese government regarding the Arctic agenda. Moreover, China is an active player in such organizations as the International Maritime Organization, the International Arctic Science Committee; China was one of the first countries to organize the Week of the Arctic Science Summit of the High-Level Conference on Arctic Issues (2005). In this context, it seems relevant to remind the international community that China is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and therefore issues in the Arctic region are the same prerogative for the PRC, whose activities represent an important mission “to ensure peace and security” in the region³².

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. URL: https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_r.pdf (accessed 10 July 2022).

²⁹ Treaty of Svalbard dated February 9, 1920. URL: <https://base.garant.ru/2540212/> (accessed 10 July 2022).

³⁰ Agreement on the Prevention of Unregulated Fishing in the High Seas in the Central Arctic Ocean. URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202106280035> (accessed 10 July 2022).

³¹ Polar Code. URL: <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/420376046> (accessed 10 July 2022).

³² China’s Arctic policy (In Chinese). URL: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1618203/1618203.htm> (accessed 10 July 2022).

Such a great track record is a good tool for China to strengthen its international political positions on the Arctic agenda. For China, membership in various kinds of associations and organizations is not a goal in itself, but rather a compliance with the rules in international relations and a kind of tribute to trends. In this context, it would be appropriate to cite the theory of hegemonic stability of C.P. Kindleberger, according to which the hegemon, as a global actor, “promotes and implements the creation of a common good through the observance of general rules” [25, Kindleberger C.P.].

Secondly, through economic influence. It is no secret that one of the reasons for China to become an Arctic Council observer was dictated by the need to find profitable investors^{33, 34}. Moreover, the official recognition of China’s observer status coincides with the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative, a large-scale global investment project to develop infrastructure, oil and gas, industrial and other components on the territory of other countries. The initiative is aimed at expanding China’s economic opportunities and aims to redirect its domestic excess capacity and capital towards regional infrastructure development in partner countries. The Chinese project does not represent gratuitous financial assistance. On the contrary, it has long been dubbed China’s “Marshall Plan”. The format of this Plan is in line with the idea of developing “South-South” dialogue and cooperation, and is also “inspired by the principles of openness, inclusiveness and common win”³⁵.

However, in practice the situation may look slightly different. Thus, in one of The Economist articles it was suggested that there are not only “secondary motivations” behind the Initiative, but the ultimate goal of this mega-project is to transform the Eurasian region into a trade and economic environment competitive to areas of American influence: “from the placement of foreign exchange reserves to the creation of new markets”³⁶. The article declares that China, through the expansion of the Belt and Road, is strengthening its position in various regions, including in the South China Sea and in Central Asia, etc. Fears that such a “construct” will be successfully continued and implemented in the Far North will not be unfounded, especially since this “construct” has already received its name — “Ice Silk Road”. Moreover, if we take into account that “The World

³³ Chalenko A. Daniya teryaet Grenlandiyu? Ekonomika Kitaya igraet v protivoves militaristskim ambitsiyam SShA [Is Denmark losing Greenland? The Chinese economy is playing against the militaristic ambitions of the United States]. URL: <https://goarctic.ru/politics/daniya-teryayet-grenlandiyu-ekonomika-kitaya-igraet-v-protivoves-militaristskim-ambitsiyam-ssha/> (accessed 12 July 2022).

³⁴ Erokhin V., Gao T., Zhang X. Arctic Blue Economic Corridor: China’s Role in the Development of a New Connectivity Paradigm in the North, 2018. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328758312_Arctic_Blue_Economic_Corridor_China%27s_Role_in_the_Development_of_a_New_Connectivity_Paradigm_in_the_North (accessed 01 July 2022).

³⁵ Denisov I.E. Vneshnyaya politika Kitaya pri Si Tsin'pine: preemstvennost' i novatorstvo [Denisov I.E. Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping: continuity and innovation]. URL: https://mgimo.ru/upload/iblock/bbd/Outlines%20of%20Global%20Transformations_5_2017-Denisov.pdf?ysclid=I5zhh1v86s410693633 (accessed 23 July 2022).

³⁶ What is China’s belt and road initiative? URL: <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2017/05/14/what-is-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative> (accessed 10 July 2022).

Bank, based on political considerations, lends to (US-friendly) countries”³⁷, then why is the activity of the “Belt and Road” to approve loans to countries loyal to Chinese policy (albeit with some differences in application) perceived as something “unsafe” by the collective West ³⁸?

The Belt and Road Initiative has two dissimilar aspects to analyze. The first aspect is that the Initiative itself is a new platform for successful interaction with China in order to implement large-scale infrastructure, industrial and oil and gas projects. The northern direction is no exception. China has been very successful in building up its zone of economic influence in the Arctic region. This can be expressed not only in the creation of infrastructure capital, but also in the acquisition of controlling stakes in large companies in the Arctic countries. For example, the Chinese corporation CNOOC Ltd. acquired the Canadian company Nexen Inc. ³⁹ Leone Aglukkak, Canada’s former health minister, Nunavut Inuk leader and former chair of the Arctic Council, said that “the benefits (from Chinese projects in the Arctic) are too great to pass up” ⁴⁰. China is interested in mining in the Canadian part of the Arctic — about \$19 billion was invested by China in this direction ⁴¹. Moreover, “the Chinese company Jilin Jien Nickel Industry Co., Ltd. owns Canadian Royalty Inc., a Canadian mining company; the Chinese company Jinduicheng Molybdenum Group Co., Ltd. (JDC) acquired Yukon Zinc for US\$113 million; Yunnan Metallurgical Group Co., Ltd, a Chinese company, invested US\$100 million in a zinc and lead mining joint venture with Selwyn Resources in 2010 (50/50) and then invested additional US\$50 million in 2013 to take full control of the Yukon project ⁴².

The PRC is also successfully pursuing its policy in the oil and gas sector. Australia (Greenland Minerals) transferred the “leading role” to China (Shenghe Resources Ltd.) in the processing and marketing of rare earth metals and uranium mining ⁴³. Shenghe Resources Ltd., together with Ironbark (Australia) mines zinc, etc. ⁴⁴ This also includes Iceland as well as Svalbard, where China acquired certain rights under the 1920 Treaty ⁴⁵.

China is indeed investing heavily in the Arctic region. Thus, according to CNA Analysis, in the period 2005–2017, “cumulative Chinese investments in the Arctic countries amounted to more

³⁷ Devonshire-Ellis C. China’s Overseas Sovereign Debt Financing Is Built On Sound Financial Principles & Debt Repackaging Strategies. URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/f78ebff8-a4d9-419c-9a76-dcf6cddb3ad9> (accessed 10 July 2022).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Vlasti SShA odobrili sdelku po pokupke Nexen kitayskoy Cnooc [US approves deal to buy Nexen from China's Cnooc]. URL: <https://globalstocks.ru/vlasti-ssha-odobrili-sdelku-po-pokupke-nexen-kitayskoy-cnooc/> (accessed 19 July 2022).

⁴⁰ Oddleifson E., Alton T., Romaniuk S.N. China in the Canadian Arctic: Context, Issues, and Considerations for 2021 and Beyond. URL: https://www.ualberta.ca/china-institute/research/analysis-briefs/2021/arctic_analysis_brief.html (accessed 10 July 2022).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Chalenko A. Daniya teryaet Grenlandiyu? Ekonomika Kitaya igraet v protivoves militaristskim ambitsiyam SShA [Is Denmark losing Greenland? The Chinese economy is playing against the militaristic ambitions of the United States]. URL: <https://goarctic.ru/politics/daniya-teryaet-grenlandiyu-ekonomika-kitaya-igraet-v-protivoves-militaristskim-ambitsiyam-ssha/> (accessed 12 July 2022).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Treaty of Svalbard dated February 9, 1920 URL: <https://base.garant.ru/2540212/> (accessed 10 July 2022).

than \$1.4 trillion”, most of which was invested in “mining, infrastructure and energy projects”⁴⁶. According to TASS, the Chinese corporation CNPC will import 3 million tons of LNG annually⁴⁷. China is also investing heavily in the oil and gas sector. For example, it invests in the development of “the Payaha oil field, which is worth more than US\$5 billion, and two large Arctic ports”⁴⁸. It should also be said that the Arctic seems to be a profitable region for China in the development of its own shipping, as well as in the expansion of mining in order to strengthen its energy component and economic opportunities⁴⁹.

Such a policy would allow the Celestial Empire to strengthen its own institutional identity in the region. This, in turn, leads to an increase in centripetal forces that form a unique meso-area (according to Osamu Ieda). In other words, the above examples demonstrate China’s expanding economic interaction with the Arctic countries within the framework of project activities, which, according to China, cannot contain “destructive” imperatives for regional countries, since the Initiative is full of ideas of promoting dialogue and cooperation⁵⁰. However, more and more countries are beginning to doubt this.

Thus, the second aspect for analysis could be the thesis that the “Ice Silk Road” is a tool to strengthen China’s geo-economic influence and hegemon status. This thesis is actively promoted by the collective West, in particular the United States, which is not surprising in the context of the active geopolitical rivalry between the US and the PRC. As Mike Pompeo, now a former US Secretary of State, stated, Chinese companies are implementing the directives of the CPC Central Committee or, in other words, using a “coordinated” strategic approach in the (Arctic) region⁵¹. This approach undoubtedly provokes thorough “checks on the security of investments in various infrastructure facilities”, which may ultimately lead to the obstruction of various projects⁵². It is not surprising that European countries have created a special Committee on Foreign Investment in the EU (CFIEU), the main purpose of which is “screening of investments by third countries in the stra-

⁴⁶ Rosen M.E., Thuringer C.B. Unconstrained Foreign Direct Investment: An Emerging Challenge to Arctic Security. URL: https://www.cna.org/archive/CNA_Files/pdf/cop-2017-u-015944-1rev.pdf (accessed 10 July 2022).

⁴⁷ NOVATEK podpisał kontrakt s kitayskoy CNPC na postavku 3 mln tonn SPG v god [NOVATEK signed a contract with Chinese CNPC for the supply of 3 million tons of LNG per year] URL: https://tass.ru/ekonomika/1198575?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com (accessed 10 July 2022).

⁴⁸ China’s ‘Arctic Silk Road’ projects. URL: <https://chinadialogueocean.net/en/climate/12569-chinas-arctic-silk-road-projects/> (accessed 10 July 2022).

⁴⁹ China’s Arctic policy (In Chinese). URL: <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1618203/1618203.htm> (accessed 10 July 2022).

⁵⁰ Denisov I.E. Vneshnyaya politika Kitaya pri Si Tszin'pine: preemstvennost' i novatorstvo [Denisov I.E. Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping: continuity and innovation]. URL: https://mgimo.ru/upload/iblock/bbd/Outlines%20of%20Global%20Transformations_5_2017-Denisov.pdf?ysclid=I5zhh1v86s410693633 (accessed 23 July 2022).

⁵¹ Andersson P., Kalvig P., Gad U.P. Chinese companies in Arctic mining are gaming the master plan. URL: <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/chinese-companies-in-arctic-mining-are-gaming-the-master-plan> (accessed 18 July 2022).

⁵² Ibid.

tegic sectors of European states”⁵³. The reasons for this could be, above all, national security concerns. For example, the construction of airports in Greenland by the Chinese or the purchase of a naval base in Greenland has been blocked by the United States^{54,55}. At first glance, this example illustrates the confrontation between the PRC and the US. In reality, the reasons for the refusal may have been much deeper: most Greenlandic parties were against the Chinese presence (although Chinese investments are more profitable and have a long-term perspective, unlike those of Denmark and the US)⁵⁶. The case with Finnulp is almost similar⁵⁷ (it is noteworthy that the Chinese company Hengan International holds a 36.5% stake in Finnulp). However, Chinese analysts voiced a different idea. Thus, the US withdrawal from the IRNF Treaty and attempts to acquire Greenland (under President Donald Trump) are anti-Chinese in nature: the Arctic is not only turning into a strategic front to counter Chinese (and Russian) activities, but is also beginning to be considered as “part of a wider US strategy to strengthen nuclear deterrence (of China and Russia), which may include the installation of a missile defense network”⁵⁸.

Perhaps the concerns of the Arctic countries regarding the “Ice Silk Road” are well-founded, because, as noted earlier, China is actively investing in “Arctic capital” and buying controlling stakes in large companies. Such Chinese penetration into the Arctic could provide a platform for lobbying Chinese interests, as well as a legal precedent for a completely legitimate justification for conducting a military campaign to protect its capital in the event of martial law or war with another state. In other words, China’s entry into the High North has a “dual purpose” — securitized by scientific research, but in fact, according to the report of the US Department of Defense to Congress “Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China, 2019”, serves as a pretext for China’s military infrastructure (remarkably, Denmark came to the same opinion)⁵⁹.

Regarding interaction with Russia, China benefits only from cooperation, not rivalry. This is due to the fact that, as we have previously stated, international political problems are primarily on the “Arctic” agenda, in particular the issues of geological belonging to sovereign territories, the expansion of the Arctic shelves and a number of other issues. Another “stumbling block” is the problem related to the significant natural-resource potential located in the exclusive economic

⁵³ Poyas, put', proekty i problemy [Belt, Road, Projects and Problems]. URL: https://atomicexpert.com/silkway_belt_and_path (accessed 12 July 2022).

⁵⁴ Chalenko A. Daniya teryaet Grenlandiyu? Ekonomika Kitaya igraet v protivoves militaristskim ambitsiyam SShA [Is Denmark losing Greenland? The Chinese economy is playing against the militaristic ambitions of the United States]. URL: <https://goarctic.ru/politics/daniya-teryayet-grenlandiyu-ekonomika-kitaya-igraet-v-protivoves-militaristskim-ambitsiyam-ssha/> (accessed 12 July 2022).

⁵⁵ Mamchits R. Kitay i SShA boryutsya za Grenlandiyu [China and the US fight over Greenland]. URL: https://news.rambler.ru/other/41625648/?utm_content=news_media&utm_medium=read_more&utm_source=copy_link (accessed 18 July 2022).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Finnulp otkazalas' ot stroitel'stva tsellyuloznogo zavoda v Finlyandii [Finnulp refuses to build a pulp mill in Finland]. URL: <https://lesprominform.ru/news.html?id=17378> (accessed 23 July 2022).

⁵⁸ China’s strategic interest in the Arctic goes beyond economics. URL: <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/05/11/chinas-strategic-interest-in-the-arctic-goes-beyond-economics/> (accessed 10 July 2022).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

zones [26, Komissina I.N.]. When resolving international legal disputes, it significantly reduces China's ability to claim Arctic energy resources, as the international Arctic waters are limited. Of course, China benefits from the withdrawal of the Northern Sea Route from the national jurisdiction of the Russian Federation and permission for free navigation. The problem of this sea route is that the NSR passes through a large number of international straits. In fact, there are many other problems. For example, there is still no clearly defined international legal regime for Arctic maritime spaces, and there is no concept accepted by all actors in the High North regarding the delimitation of Arctic spaces. The lack of a single universally accepted concept has provoked China to put forward its concept of inclusive Arctic rights (or internationalization). In this context, it is not surprising that China has rapidly begun to assert itself as a new standard-setter and initiator of a revision of the existing provisions of the regulations on the Arctic.

It should also be noted that cooperation between the PRC and the Russian Federation in the Arctic is beneficial to both countries, since although Russia is potentially in a good position to exercise its rights to the underwater part of the Northern Sea Route, this issue is unlikely to be resolved in coming decades due to the Commission's procedure to resolve legal disputes in the Arctic territories⁶⁰ [27, Moroz E.N.]. In contrast to the Suez Strait, the Northern Sea Route is the most profitable transport artery for shipping cargo to Europe, because the Northwest Passage and the Transpolar Sea Route seem to be very expensive to sail and navigate and because of the potential for rescue efforts [18, Leonov S.N.]. It is also worth bearing in mind that China's interest in the Northern Sea Route is to establish the delivery of gas, natural resources, as well as to accumulate and consolidate experience in navigation, train crews (who will then move to new Chinese ice-breakers) and conduct transport exploration of those routes that constitute an alternative to the Russian NSR. Perhaps one should not ignore the fact that China is interested in political economy access to regions that have rich natural resources and are cut off from the Russia by land.

However, despite the above, relations between China and Russia in the Arctic region should be considered in the context of strategic cooperation, especially now. This is due to the fact that the next sanctions package against the Russian Federation affected the logistics component of tankers transporting Russian oil⁶¹. Perhaps, in this situation, China could become an alternative to Europe for Russia in the future, although the PRC is already successfully implementing its Arctic cooperation with the Russian Federation today. This is reflected in China's presence in Russia's major Yamal LNG project (where Chinese CNPC and the Silk Road Fund own almost a third of the

⁶⁰ Submissions, through the Secretary-General of the United Nations, to the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, pursuant to article 76, paragraph 8, of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 10 December 1982. URL: https://www.un.org/Depts/los/clcs_new/commission_submissions.htm (accessed 10 July 2022).

⁶¹ Ivanovskiy D. Evropa ukhodit, Kitay prikhodit — zarubezhnye SMI ob Arktike [Europe is leaving, China is coming - foreign media about the Arctic]. URL: <https://goarctic.ru/politics/evropa-ukhodit-kitay-prikhodit-zarubezhnye-smi-ob-arktike/> (accessed 23 July 2022).

project)⁶². China produced the Boris Sokolov oil tanker⁶³. China took part in joint work with the Russian Federation in the construction of a port in Arkhangelsk [28, Morozov Yu.V., Klimenko A.F.]. Indeed, the Far North has lately become a theatre of military operations⁶⁴. At the time of writing this paper, Finland and Sweden were in the process of joining NATO, and thus the number of NATO member states in the Arctic Council will increase by two countries, which will ultimately create a strong anti-Russian coalition on the Arctic front. The President of the Russian Federation V.V. Putin told his Finnish colleague: “abandoning the traditional policy of military neutrality would be a mistake”⁶⁵. The Kremlin says that although the entry of Finland and Sweden does not pose an “existential threat” to Russia⁶⁶, the deployment of the alliance’s military infrastructure will create a trigger for a “mirror response” from the Russian Federation⁶⁷.

In fact, the collective West views “China and Russia as a threat to the world order”⁶⁸. When it comes to the Arctic space, Russia, as a country with enormous military-strategic potential, may indeed cause serious concerns for the seven NATO member states (as part of the Arctic Council). Regarding China’s military and strategic involvement in the Arctic, there are several opinions. Thus, Li Zhenfu stated that the complete resolution of all Arctic problems “will be directly related to world security” [5; 24, Li Zhenfu]. The probability of a military resolution of the Arctic issues was also presented in one of the military surveys in China [29, Li D.]. Therefore, it is impossible to exclude this way of resolution of the Arctic problems⁶⁹. Another interesting question remains: would Russia and China engage in military confrontation with each other on the Arctic front?

Until recently, it was widely believed that such fears were not misguided. Thus, Mei Hong and Wang Zengzhen stated that Russia would defend its interests from the PRC by increasing its military potential [3]. Russia’s position was similar, stating that it would not “concede a span” to

⁶² Yamal SPG [Yamal LNG] URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/business/news/2015/12/17/621420-fond-shelkovogo-putiyamal-spg> (accessed 10 July 2022).

⁶³ Poyas, put', proekty i problemy [Belt, Road, Projects and Problems]. URL: https://atomicexpert.com/silkway_belt_and_path (accessed 10.07.2022).

⁶⁴ Arktika prevrashchaetsya v teatr voennykh deystviy, zayavili v MID [The Arctic is turning into a theater of war, the Foreign Ministry said]. URL: <https://ria.ru/20220522/arktika-1789986809.html> (accessed 13 July 2022).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Arktika prevrashchaetsya v teatr voennykh deystviy, zayavili v MID [The Arctic is turning into a theater of war, the Foreign Ministry said]. URL: <https://ria.ru/20220522/arktika-1789986809.html> (accessed 12 July 2022).

Medvedev schel, chto Shvetsiya i Finlyandiya v sostave NATO ne ugrozhayut Rossii [Medvedev considered that Sweden and Finland as part of NATO do not threaten Russia]. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/28/06/2022/62ba38149a79475ce97dfc7b> (accessed 10 July 2022).

⁶⁷ Putin poobeshchal «zerkal'nyy otvet» na vstuplenie Shvetsii i Finlyandii v NATO [Putin promised a "mirror response" to the entry of Sweden and Finland into NATO]. URL: <https://www.fontanka.ru/2022/06/29/71449883/> (accessed 19 July 2022).

⁶⁸ Blinken nazval Rossiyu i Kitay ugrozoy sushchestvuyushchemu miroporiyadku [Blinken called Russia and China a threat to the existing world order]. URL: <https://kommersant-ru.turbopages.org/kommersant.ru/s/doc/5458511> (accessed 10 July 2022).

⁶⁹ Hinshaw D., Page J. How the Pentagon Countered China’s Designs on Greenland. Wall Street Journal, 2019. URL: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-the-pentagon-countered-chinas-designs-on-greenland-11549812296> (accessed 04 July 2022).

China⁷⁰. Despite the statements presented, a military confrontation between the Russian Federation and China in the Arctic is poorly represented, since there are no good reasons for this, even if the Northern Sea Route would hypothetically be a stumbling block. Moreover, the concentration of Chinese military infrastructure in the Arctic seems inappropriate to some scientists⁷¹.

It would remain advantageous and acceptable for China to build up economic ties with the Arctic countries as opposed to military and strategic mobilization. This is consistent not only with the narrative of the White Paper, the strategic vision of the Chinese party under the Belt and Road Initiative, but also with the logic of the behavior of the “Asian dragon” on the world stage. Of course, it is not a question of China ceasing to build up its military capacity or abandoning militarized rhetoric (as the case with Taiwan calls for). However, the Beijing consensus with ambitious goal-setting creates fundamentally new political and economic incentives that provoke the formation of a new paradigm structure of the world order.

In other words, China’s gradual build-up of economic ties in the Arctic region will not only bring more economic dividends, but will probably strengthen the formation of the Chinese mega-area. We cannot exclude that in the future, China and the Arctic region will establish their institutional ties through trade, economic, oil and gas, infrastructure and other projects, as is currently the case. Thus, the Arctic region, being a meso-area, becomes vulnerable to external impulses (represented by the PRC), which will ultimately turn the Arctic meso-area into a Chinese mega-area, which corresponds to the transitional type according to the Osamu Ieda model⁷². It will not be a question of violating the sovereign rights or territorial integrity of the Arctic countries. China is a peaceful actor in international relations: observing the UN Charter, it will rapidly increase its geopolitical influence — and in such a struggle it cannot be said that someone will lose, because then it will not correspond to the declared Chinese principles of equality, “common win” or “South–South” dialogue. On the contrary, all the countries joined in the Chinese initiatives are expected to receive economic dividends from the partnership with the PRC and thus enter the Chinese mega-area “umbrella”.

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⁷⁰ Faulconbridge G. Russian Navy Boss Warns of China’s Race for Arctic. Reuters Africa, 2010. URL: af.reuters.com/ (accessed 10 July 2022).

⁷¹ Alexeeva O., Lasserre F. China and the Arctic. URL: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/P-Lackenbauer-2/publication/352165129_China%27s_Arctic_Engagement_Following_the_Polar_Silk_Road_to_Greenland_and_Russia/links/60bc3599299bf10dff9c7e80/Chinas-Arctic-Engagement-Following-the-Polar-Silk-Road-to-Greenland-and-Russia.pdf?origin=publication_detail (accessed 01 July 2022).

⁷² Osamu I. Regional Identities and Meso-Mega Area Dynamics in Slavic Eurasia: Focused on Eastern Europe, 2004. URL: <https://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/coe21/pdf01/ieda040302.pdf> (accessed 10 July 2022).

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