

Research on the Current Situation and Countermeasures of China-Russia Arctic Cooperative Relationships

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Abstract: Since the beginning of the 21st century, geopolitical tensions in the Arctic have been increasing. Over the past decades, due to the rapid melting of glaciers caused by global warming, the development of the Arctic region has also increasingly attracted the attention of countries around the world, especially attracting the special attention of environmentalists, oil and gas experts, and politicians. Geopolitical changes have resulted in the Arctic becoming yet another platform for intense competition between nations. With China's all-encompassing rise to global prominence, it is inevitable that China will be involved in the "Arctic race". As a non-Arctic country, China hopes to gain significant benefits by exploiting the Arctic's potential natural resources and Arctic transportation routes. To achieve these goals, China is trying to cooperate with Russia around the Arctic region. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the problems of cooperation between China and Russia in the Arctic region, and then explore effective ways to solve these problems.

1. Introduction

In recent years, Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic region has become a hot research topic in domestic and foreign academic circles. Especially since the establishment of the Sino-Russian comprehensive strategic cooperation partnership, the cooperation between China and Russia in the Arctic region has accelerated significantly, and the Arctic cooperation has been integrated into the Sino-Russian cooperation, and the importance of Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic region has been further emphasized. As an important area of China-Russia comprehensive strategic cooperation, Arctic cooperation is of great significance to the development of China-Russia relations.

2. Current Status of China-Russia Arctic Cooperation

In recent years, Arctic cooperation has become an important aspect of Sino-Russian cooperation. As a non-Arctic country, China has been involved in Arctic affairs for a long time, and strengthening cooperation with Russia has become the basic path for China to further participate in Arctic affairs. With the release of the Joint Declaration on the Development of Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in the New Era, Arctic cooperation between China and Russia has further expanded to include the development and utilization of Arctic shipping routes, Arctic infrastructure,

Arctic resource development, Arctic tourism, polar ecology and environmental protection, and polar scientific research. Meanwhile, under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, China has put forward a plan to build the Silk Road on Ice, including the development of Arctic shipping routes, and has proposed to promote the exploration and knowledge of the Arctic, the protection of the Arctic ecosystem and the response to climate change,^[1] the rational utilization of Arctic resources, participation in Arctic governance and international cooperation. It has put forward five major policy proposals for participation in Arctic affairs, including exploration and knowledge of the Arctic, protection of the Arctic ecosystem and response to climate change, rational utilization of Arctic resources in accordance with the law, participation in Arctic governance and international cooperation, and promotion of peace and stability in the Arctic, and has actively dovetailed with Russia's Arctic development strategy. In addition to the ongoing cooperation project in the Arctic port of Sabetta, China and Russia have signed a framework agreement on the financing of up to 70 cooperation projects in the Arctic by banks of the two countries.

With Russian support, China has successfully participated in Arctic development and cooperation, and in addition to its status as an observer member of the Arctic Council, a number of Sino-Russian Arctic cooperation projects are underway. However, cooperation between China and Russia in the Arctic is still in its infancy, and the two sides differ greatly in their views on the status of the Arctic region under international law, the prospects for its development, their international identities in Arctic governance, and their respective strategies for Arctic development, as well as contradictions at the higher political, economic, and legal levels. Russia believes that the development of the Arctic region should be more internal to the Arctic states, while China believes that the Arctic region is the common heritage of all mankind and needs to be jointly developed and governed by all countries. However, China-Russia Arctic cooperation has not stopped because of these contradictions. In recent years, China-Russia Arctic cooperation has been advancing rapidly, involving energy, infrastructure construction, scientific research, environmental management, and other aspects.

3. Problems with China-Russia Arctic Cooperation

3.1 China and Russia's Arctic Strategies Don't Match

Russia's and China's interests in the Arctic are quite different in scope and nature. Although Russia's main Asian partner in the Arctic is China, China's Arctic strategy is not fully complementary in nature to the approaches of Arctic states, including Russia. Russia strives to maintain its dominant position in the Arctic region in terms of sovereignty, territorial integrity, international shipping, and international law, etc. From its own national interests, Russia divides Sino-Russian Arctic cooperation into four aspects, from low to high, according to its sensitivity level: ecological and environmental cooperation, economic and trade cooperation, political cooperation, and military cooperation. China's insistence on the Arctic as the heritage of all mankind contrasts sharply with the Nordic countries' exclusive stance on their rights to the Arctic.

Russian academics see the need to express a balanced approach to China's actions in the Arctic. According to Article 234 of the 1982 Convention on the Law of the Sea, Russia, as a coastal state, has the right to adopt laws in the field of navigation and environmental protection in ice-covered areas. China, as a potential participant in the transit of goods through the Arctic, advocates freedom of navigation in polar waters and disputes the rules of navigation within the 200-mile exclusive economic zone set by Russia and Canada. China insists that Russia should revise its tariff policy for ice-breaking voyages on the Northern Sea Route, as the high unit price significantly reduces the commercial advantages of the route's use. In addition, China is concerned about the sovereign rights of Arctic states and the expansion of Russia's EEZ, because thereby the area of international Arctic

waters is significantly reduced. Therefore, China may demand that the Northern Sea Route be granted the status of neutral waters, arguing that Russia should provide favorable conditions for China to pass through the Northern Sea Route, which it considers to be "a global common wealth that cannot be managed by individual countries."

3.2 China, Russia Compete in Arctic Cooperation

The internal acrimony between China and Russia in the Arctic is an important constraint on Sino-Russian Arctic cooperation. A number of Arctic countries, including Russia, and their development partners are increasingly concerned about China's active presence in the region and fear that China's dominant position in world politics and economics is expanding.^[2]

On the one hand, Russia is concerned about over-reliance on Chinese investment and technology. Further development of the Arctic region will inevitably require special technologies, infrastructure that avoids damage to the fragile Arctic ecosystems, and appropriate logistics networks. All of this requires significant investment in harsh conditions. However, raising funds for long-term projects is one of the obstacles to successful development in the Arctic. In addition to the difficulties in financing Arctic projects, macroeconomic and geopolitical instability have had a significant impact. Sanctions on the supply of Russian equipment and the refusal of Western partners to fund projects from 2014 to 2022 have naturally pushed Russia and China to expand their cooperation in the Arctic. This increasingly increases the risk of rapidly accelerating Russia's dependence on China, which has been negatively assessed by Russian academics. Right now, 80 percent of the equipment for the Yamal LNG project is made in China or with Chinese materials, and this trend will only increase.

On the other hand, Russia is concerned about China's involvement in Arctic affairs. Russian academics fear that the same interest in the Northern Sea Route on the part of China could lead it to seek monopolistic access to this transportation artery in order to reduce transportation costs and worsen conditions for its potential competitors, which would be detrimental to Russia in general. Despite China's repeated statements of commitment to the principles and norms of international law for the development and exploitation of the Arctic, Russian researchers believe that China counts on getting special access to the Northern Sea Route and in the future on its internationalization. This is reflected in a negative attitude towards Russia's actions to expand the continental shelf in the Arctic, opposition to the licensing system allowing ships to pass through the Northern Sea Route, invoking the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea because of China's commitment to the independent development of energy resources for further transportation to China, and support for initiatives aimed at revising the Arctic legal regime.

3.3 Western Constraints on Sino-Russian Arctic Cooperation

The constraints imposed by Western countries on Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic region include a number of aspects, and there is a difference in the content of the constraints imposed on China and Russia, with military constraints on Russia being the main constraint. China's constraints, because China's role in the Arctic region to play a limited role in the energy, environment, some U.S. officials will be listed as China's factors after climate change and Russia's Arctic "third major destabilizing factor". Since the end of the Cold War, the Arctic has been the United States geopolitical and military strategic interests of the priority areas. In the context of maintaining its own national security, the United States is introducing air and anti-missile defense elements, working closely with Canada within the framework of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). The new 2019 version of the U.S. Arctic Strategy recognizes the activities of Russia and China in the Arctic as a national security threat. In addition, the strategy describes the relationship between Arctic states as "strategic competition."

The Russian-Chinese partnership has been strengthened for at least ten to fifteen years, posing an increasingly serious challenge to the interests of the West, led by the United States. The United States has actively tried to counter the strengthening of the Sino-Russian alliance by playing on the contradictions between the two countries' Arctic strategies. As a result, the United States continues to develop the export capacity of its natural gas liquefaction terminals. "CovePoint," "Freeport," "Cameron," "SabinePass "CovePoint, Freeport, Cameron, SabinePass, and CorpusCristi terminals are now successfully operating and expanding their potential to a total plant capacity of 70 million tons of LNG. According to the EIA report, by 2022, U.S. LNG exports will reach 9.2 billion cubic feet per day, which in turn will affect the cost growth of LNG production projects.

3.4 Ecological constraints in the Arctic

Russian and Chinese scientists have taken comprehensive note of the impact of environmental factors on the region's economic indicators, and environmental discussions on the Russian-Chinese Arctic continue, with ecological issues being an important element of Russian-Chinese Arctic cooperation. The growing economic activity in the Arctic immediately affects the growing need for a new level of responsible international environmental cooperation in the region. Ecological security should be prioritized. For example, the extraction, processing and combustion of oil and gas lead to the emission of large amounts of carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄) into the atmosphere, which produces a greenhouse effect. This problem is exacerbated by the increase in maritime transportation, which significantly increases the emission of greenhouse gases such as CO₂, NO_X, and carbon black/suspended particles. Carbon black emissions from ships will increase fivefold by 2050 compared to 2004 due to increased demand for maritime transportation.^[3]

For Russia, protecting the Arctic environment is a matter of strategic necessity for Russia. Russian President Vladimir Putin has stated that different attitudes towards environmental protection in the Arctic could lead to "not a global advantage, but a global problem". Therefore, ecological and environmental issues are an important element of Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic, and the resulting environmental problems pose an important challenge to Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic.

4. Solutions to the Problems of China-Russia Arctic Cooperation

4.1 Enhancing Strategic Mutual Trust in Sino-Russian Arctic Cooperation

Strategic mutual trust is the first and foremost issue facing Sino-Russian Arctic cooperation, and the Sino-Russian strategic partnership based on a high degree of mutual trust and mutual benefit and win-win situation is an important cornerstone for Arctic cooperation between the two countries. With regard to future Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic region, it is an urgent issue for China and Russia to resolve their strategic distrust of China's participation in Arctic governance, to eliminate the concerns of all sectors of Russian society about China's participation in Arctic cooperation, and to actively attract Chinese and Russian domestic capital, technology and other resources to participate in Arctic governance. To this end, China and Russia need to make a "harmonious but different" docking of each other's Arctic strategies, and under the guidance of China-Russia comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, provide effective strategic mutual trust solutions for future Arctic cooperation between the two sides, and then set up a cooperation mechanism of mutual trust and mutual benefit for many parties including China and Russia, so as to promote the development of China-Russia Arctic cooperation in many fields with the guidance of the top-level design. The top-level design will be used as a guide to promote the in-depth development of China-Russia Arctic cooperation in various fields.

Promoting Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic is part of the China-Russia comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperative relations, and is a necessary condition for China and Russia to realize effective governance in the Arctic. To this end, China and Russia need to strengthen coordination in international organizations such as the Arctic Council, jointly explore the formulation of medium- and long-term plans for Arctic cooperation, and gradually expand China-Russia Arctic cooperation from the low-level to the high-level political sphere. In the dialogue and communication and practical cooperation, ^[4]we should increase mutual trust and strategic mutual trust, so as to stimulate the endogenous momentum of China-Russia Arctic practical cooperation, and ultimately realize the steady development and deepening innovation of China-Russia Arctic cooperation, which will lead to the enhancement of mutual political trust between the two sides on the Arctic issue.

4.2 Building a Platform and Mechanism for Sino-Russian Arctic Cooperation

Despite differences in the strategic conception and management of the future of the Arctic, China and Russia have great potential for tactical cooperation in the region. At present, China-Russia Arctic cooperation has just started, and China and Russia still need to coordinate and adapt to each other in terms of policy communication, mechanism construction, and exploration of specific cooperation projects. The existing Sino-Russian Arctic development cooperation is carried out within the general framework of Arctic governance, and strengthening cooperation with Russia has become the basic path for China to further intervene in Arctic affairs. Existing Sino-Russian cooperation in energy development, infrastructure construction and the opening up of Arctic shipping routes has laid a good foundation for further cooperation, but there are problems such as a weak foundation for cooperation, a narrow scope of cooperation and limited cooperation channels. For this reason, China and Russia should actively explore the establishment of bilateral or multilateral cooperation mechanisms in the Arctic, continuously increase the field, scope and breadth of cooperation between the two sides, and set up more cooperation platforms in the way of project construction, so as to ultimately form a new mode of Arctic cooperation unique to China and Russia with economic and trade, energy, polar scientific research, and the opening up of shipping routes as the main contents, and humanities, science and technology, information, environment and security as the important supplements, so as to make the Arctic cooperation between China and Russia more mature and more finalized. Arctic cooperation will become more mature and finalized. To this end, China and Russia need to clarify the content of cooperation that needs to be deepened, with the development of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two sides as the lead, and on this basis, coordinate the differences in the positions of the two sides on the basis of the principle of seeking common ground while reserving differences.

As for the construction of Arctic cooperation mechanism, China and Russia should gradually build up a multi-subject, multi-channel and multi-field Arctic cooperation mechanism led by the diplomacy of the heads of state, promoted by the policy advocacy of the two governments, and supplemented by the enterprises, scientific research institutes, and civil exchanges of the two countries, so as to realize the complementarities of the two countries in terms of policies, funds, technologies, resources, talents, and so on. In the face of existing problems, China-Russia Arctic cooperation needs high-level coordination between the two governments to break through the obstacles of political mutual trust, and gradually form a cooperation model guided by shipping and energy, so as to promote China-Russia Arctic multidisciplinary cooperation. Gradually, China-Russia Arctic cooperation should be upgraded from the low-level political field to the high-level political field. At the same time, China and Russia should continue to develop and institutionalize more cooperation platforms that meet the common interests of the two countries, so

as to ensure the basis for expanding cooperation between the two countries in the Arctic region.

4.3 Jointly addressing Western constraints in the Arctic

In the field of Arctic security and military and other political issues, China and Russia have not yet formed the basis of cooperation, and the two sides are far from putting such issues on the agenda, but the cooperation between China and Russia in the Arctic is obviously restricted by Western countries. In the field of Arctic security, led by the China-Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in the new era, China will remain Russia's main partner in the Arctic region in the political and military fields, and China-Russia cooperation in the Arctic region will gradually expand into the political and military fields to cope with the constraints imposed by Western countries. The world's changing geopolitical environment requires Russia and China to coordinate their security policies in the Arctic. Under the constraints of the U.S. and other Western countries, if China loses the opportunity to utilize the Northern Sea Route, it will directly harm China's national interests and weaken the existing mutually beneficial cooperation among Arctic parties. All along, China has respected the sovereignty and national security of the Arctic countries, hoping that the Arctic can become a place of peace, and will not easily deploy military forces in the Arctic. At the same time, Russia's development in the Arctic, especially the increase in military power, has been opposed and resisted by Western countries. Therefore, China and Russia should join hands to deal with the constraints and challenges of the West.^[5]

The rapid deterioration of Russia's relations with the West with the start of Russia's "special military operation" in Ukraine in 2022 provides an opportunity to advance the process of Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic. According to Russian scholar Alexei Maslov, this situation could be both a catalyst for expanding bilateral ties between Russia and China and a major challenge for Russia. As a result, Chinese companies are likely to enter areas of the Russian market that were previously off-limits. Moreover, the issue of expanding Chinese investment and Chinese technology exports will arise in different ways. In addition, the issue of an alternative way of development is likely to arise due to the restrictions on the transportation of Chinese products to Europe via Russia, whereby the process of building the infrastructure of the Northern Sea Route will be accelerated. Given that the West is likely to reduce its purchases of gas and oil from Russia, the price of raw materials is likely to be set on the Russian and Chinese sides, which will strengthen China's negotiating position with regard to new gas and oil contracts. Therefore, there are both challenges and opportunities for Sino-Russian Arctic cooperation in the face of Western intervention, and China and Russia should continue to strengthen cooperation in the economic, ^[6]infrastructure and energy sectors to increase the basis for mutual cooperation. Meanwhile, in the high-level political arena, the two sides should follow the principles of seeking common ground while reserving differences, making peace with differences and managing differences to enhance mutual strategic trust and increase strategic consensus between the two sides.

5. Conclusion

Sino-Russian Arctic cooperation still requires enhanced political mutual trust and policy coordination between the two governments in order to break through the barriers of differing Arctic strategies and achieve orderly Arctic cooperation between the two sides. Cooperation between China and Russia in the Arctic will be sustainable only if the interaction between the two countries meets the interests of both countries.

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