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Positions of Russian and Chinese Expert and Analytical Centers on Russian-Chinese Cooperation in the Arctic

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Abstract. Today, Russia and China are each other's most important partners in the international arena. The article discusses such an important area of their relations as interaction in the Arctic region and evolution of its development. In recent years, the role of analytic centers has grown, especially as the world faces complex global challenges such as climate change, economic inequality and political polarization. That is why the positions of the expert and analytical community of the Russian Federation and China on the issue of Russian-Chinese cooperation in the Arctic are of great interest in the article. In particular, the concept of "think tanks" is considered, the expert and analytical communities of Russia and China are studied, the developments of Russian and Chinese "think tanks" in such key areas as the development of natural resources of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and the transport infrastructure of the Russian Arctic, including the Northern Sea Route, scientific and technological cooperation. The article identifies similarities and differences in the views of Russian and Chinese scientists on these issues. The article considers the period from the beginning of Russian-Chinese co-operation in the Far North up to the present time, that is, approximately for the last 10 years.

Keywords: *Russia, China, Arctic, Russian-Chinese cooperation in the Arctic, expert and analytical centers, think tanks, development of natural resources in the Arctic zone, development of the transport structure of the Russian Arctic, scientific and technical cooperation*

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Introduction

In recent years, climate change and acceleration of glacier melting have led to an imbalance in the ecological balance in the Arctic region. Currently, there is a trend towards increased integration of global regional development and economic globalization. The Arctic has gradually marked its important position in the fields of environmental protection, scientific research, resource strategy, economic development, waterways and water transport, and has received widespread attention from the international community. The Arctic issue is not only between countries or regions in the Arctic, but also affects the interests of the international community beyond. Cooperation and investment between countries are growing. The Chinese government is encouraging Chinese companies to engage in direct investment in Arctic countries. Disputes in the Arctic

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region continue, but it is worth noting that international cooperation has always affected the development and use of Arctic waterways. This interaction was relatively fragmented, so it has not received the attention it deserves. Expert and analytical centers of both countries play an important role in the development of cooperation between Russia and China.

Expert and analytical centers of the Russian Federation and China

Expert-analytical centers are independent research organizations engaged in analyzing and solving complex social problems. They are composed of experts in various fields, including academia, government, and industry, who work together to produce reports, policy briefs, and other documents that inform and influence public policy. Think tanks play a crucial role in shaping public policy. They provide policymakers with research and analysis on a wide range of issues, from economic policy to international relations. By conducting research, producing reports, and convening experts and policymakers, think tanks help inform the public and shape policy decisions. They also provide a forum for stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue and develop solutions to complex problems. In recent years, the role of think tanks has become increasingly important in both Russia and China, especially as the world faces complex global challenges such as climate change, economic inequality and political polarization.

Russia has a long history of state-controlled research institutions dating back to the Soviet era. However, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of independent think tanks has increased. According to a report from the University of Pennsylvania, there are currently more than 140 think tanks in Russia¹. However, most of them still have close ties to the government, and their research is often linked to a political agenda. One example of a government-supported think tank is the Valdai Discussion Club, which was founded in 2004 and is supported by the Russian government. The Valdai Club brings together Russian and foreign experts to discuss issues related to Russia's role in the world. The club has been criticized for being a propaganda tool for the Kremlin, as its events are often attended by high-ranking government officials and its publications tend to support Kremlin policies.

China has a different approach to think tanks than Russia. Although the Chinese government has historically controlled research institutions, there have been recent attempts to establish independent think tanks. According to a report from the University of Pennsylvania, there are currently more than 1400 think tanks in China². However, independent think tanks in China operate in a highly controlled environment, and their research is often censored or suppressed if it contradicts the government's political agenda. One example of an independent think tank in China is the China Development Society, founded in 2007 and focusing on economic and social policy issues. The China Development Society has managed to maintain some degree of independence, but its research is still closely monitored by the government. The Chinese government has also es-

¹ McGann J.G. 2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index Reportю TTCSP Global Go To Think Tank Index Reports. 2021. 18. P. 46. URL: https://repository.upenn.edu/think_tanks/18 (accessed 05 April 2023).

² Ibid. P. 45.

tablished several authoritative think tanks, such as the China Institute of Contemporary International Relations and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. These think tanks are closely tied to the political agenda, and their research often supports government policy.

Formation of Russian-Chinese Arctic relations

Russia and China have a long-standing relationship, and one area of growing interest to both countries is the Arctic region. Russian-Chinese dialogue on the region began in 2013. As climate change transforms the landscape and opens up new opportunities for resource extraction and transportation, Russia and China are seeking to increase their presence and influence in the region. The region is believed to have significant oil, gas and mineral reserves. The Russian Arctic region is a storehouse of many minerals. Russia has huge hydrocarbon reserves on the Arctic shelf: about 106 billion tons of oil equivalent, including 69.5 trillion m³ of natural gas. The Arctic continent is rich in gold, diamonds, mercury, tungsten and rare earth metals. These mineral deposits are the basis for the development of modern technologies in Russia. The development of these regions and the formation of new production capacities will lead to an increase in exports. China has turned into a market with enormous resources and great investment potential, it is ready to participate in investing in new production capacities [1, Kheifets B.A.]. Russia and China have the same interests in developing the transboundary transport potential of Arctic waterways.

Russia has long been present in the Arctic and has invested heavily in infrastructure and military development in the region. Meanwhile, China views the Arctic as a key part of its “One Belt, One Road” initiative and is investing in research and exploration in the region [2, Lukin A.L. et al.]. China, namely the Chinese Academy of Meteorological Sciences and the China Environmental Research Institute, work closely with the University of the Arctic, which brings together universities and training centers engaged in Arctic research³.

China has participated in several projects closely related to the development of the Russian Arctic region and Arctic waterways. An example of active involvement is the project for the production of liquefied natural gas in Yamal, which is the result of cooperation between Russia’s Novatek, China’s CNPC and the Silk Road Fund. Chinese investors own 29.9% of Yamal LNG in the Arctic (Silk Road Fund — 9.9%, China National Petroleum Corporation — 20%) [3, Tulupov D.].

Positions of expert and analytical centers of Russia and China on Russian-Chinese cooperation in the Arctic

Expert and analytical centers of both countries are analyzing the potential for cooperation in the Arctic. The Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) are two examples of organizations that regularly produce reports on this topic. Their reports highlight the potential for interaction in areas such as energy development, shipping

³ Background material for the event “Russian-Chinese cooperation in the field of sustainable development of the Arctic region”. Jointly Russian Congress and Higher School of Economics, 2022. URL: <https://roscongress.org/materials/rossii-sko-kitai-skoe-sotrudnichestvo-v-oblasti-ustoi-chivogo-razvitiya/> (accessed 05 April 2023).

and scientific research [4, Kornev K.; 5, Pryakhin V.]^{4,5}. In March 2022, a round table “Russian-Chinese cooperation in the Arctic: opportunities and limitations” was held, at which experts from Russia and China tried to come up with a common approach to the development of the region. The results of this project will be presented at the International Arctic Forum in April 2023⁶. However, these and other centers also point out existing problems, including geopolitical tensions. For example, a report by the Carnegie Moscow Center noted that close cooperation between countries is the result of Russia’s geopolitical loneliness and relative technological backwardness, which China actively takes advantage of⁷. The main contradiction is the interests of both countries: for Russia, it is sole ownership of its part of the region, and in the interests of China, it is the internationalization of governance of the region. However, countries avoid conflict and focus specifically on areas of joint cooperation.

Expert and analytical centers face a number of tasks when analyzing and forming Russian-Chinese interaction in the Arctic. One of the biggest problems is access to information. The Arctic region is a remote and often inhospitable area, and obtaining accurate data can be difficult. In addition, geopolitical tensions between Russia and China can make it difficult to conduct research and produce reports that are considered objective and impartial. Another challenge is the need to balance economic development with environmental protection. The Arctic is a fragile ecosystem, and any activity in the region should be carefully controlled to minimize the impact on nature [4]. Think tanks should consider the potential economic benefits of increased cooperation in the Arctic, as well as address concerns about impacts on the environment and indigenous communities.

Analyzing the reports of expert and analytical communities, it can be concluded that the interests of the countries in the Arctic region affect different aspects of cooperation. For example, for Russia, as the largest gas exporter and one of the first oil exporters in the world, the most important aspect of the agreement is the extraction of resources, which, according to experts, account for 30% of the world’s undiscovered gas reserves and 13% of oil [5, Kalfaoglu R.]. However, many Russian think tanks have expressed concerns about cooperation in this area with China. On the one hand, Russia needs Chinese technical developments to search for and extract resources; on the other hand, Russian centers, such as Valdai, note that China has strict restrictions on gas

⁴ Kornev K. Rastushchee prisutstvie KNR v Arkticheskom regione: vozmozhnosti i ugrozy dlya sopredel'nykh stran [Growing presence of the PRC in the Arctic region: opportunities and threats for neighboring countries]. URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/blogs/kkornev/35821/?sphrase_id=93086898&ysclid=lq3vflmusg717144375 (accessed 29 March 2023).

⁵ Pryakhin V. Rossiya i KNR v Arktike. Primer konstruktivnogo sotrudnichestva [Russia and China in the Arctic. An example of constructive cooperation]. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/blogs/vpryahin/rossiya-i-knr-v-arktike-primer-konstruktivnogo-sotrudnichestva/?ysclid=lq3vfx923g460536576> (accessed 29 March 2023).

⁶ Rossiyskie i kitayskie eksperty obsudili razvitie dvustoronnegogo sotrudnichestva v Arktike [Russian and Chinese experts discussed the development of bilateral cooperation in the Arctic]. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/news/rossiyskie-i-kitayskie-eksperty-obsudili-razvitie-dvustoronnegogo-sotrudnichestva-v-arktike/> (accessed 29 March 2023).

⁷ Rossiya i Kitay v Arktike: sotrudnichestvo, sopernichestvo i posledstviya dlya evraziyskoy bezopasnosti [Russia and China in the Arctic: cooperation, rivalry and consequences for Eurasian security]. Carnegie endowment for international peace, 2020. URL: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/commentary/81384> (accessed 29 March 2023).

imports, which is why Russia, given the sanctions, has to look for other cheaper ways to sell resources.

In the reports of Chinese centers, the Northern Sea Route plays the most important role. China views it as a strategically important element of the “One Belt, One Road” Initiative. An important link in the interests of the two countries is control over the Arctic zone. Chinese think tanks advocate making the Arctic a “Global Commons” and not a zone of ownership of the Arctic states [6, Long Ch.]. At the geopolitical level, the political game between Arctic countries has an impact on the regional and international order, and the potential militarization of the Arctic could also have a profound impact on regional peace and security. At the geo-economic level, the development and use of the Arctic will gradually affect international shipping, biological and non-biological resources, tourism, etc. As an important emerging market and major trading country, China naturally does not want to allow this to happen and therefore often points out in its reports the importance of cooperation with the Arctic states and the Arctic Council in order to create pluralistic governance [7, Sun K., Wang C.].

Guo Peiqing, a professor at the School of International Affairs and Public Administration of Ocean University of China, noted that Sino-Russian cooperation in Arctic exploration is currently at an early stage, and Russia needs to introduce more specific policies to support investment, as well as create more “compelling business models and projects to boost the confidence” of private sector investors⁸.

Despite these challenges, think tanks have consistently had a significant impact on Russian-Chinese cooperation in the Arctic. Their research and analysis helped inform the public and shape policy decisions, and provided a forum for stakeholders to engage in constructive dialogue. Reports from think tanks identified potential for cooperation in the region and helped identify areas of mutual interest. The most important areas are the exploitation of the region’s natural resources, the development of the transport structure of the Russian Arctic and scientific and technical cooperation. China and Russia organically share the meaning, purpose and value of Arctic cooperation, and there is a high degree of complementarity in the requirements of the interests of Arctic cooperation.

Conclusion

In summary, expert and analytical centers play a crucial role in shaping Russian-Chinese cooperation in the Arctic. By providing policymakers with research and analysis, these organizations help inform the public and promote evidence-based policy decisions. It can be noted that the think tanks of both states point to the need for cooperation and search for compromises in the Arctic region and determine the special significance of the region not only for Russia and China, but also for the whole world. Despite the challenges they face, think tanks continue to have a sig-

⁸ There is a huge infrastructure gap in the development of the Arctic waterway. How can Chinese companies take the lead? NetEase. 2019. URL: <https://www.163.com/dy/article/EGBN8EI705490TJA.html> (accessed 29 March 2023).

nificant impact on society. It is important to support and promote the work of these organizations and recognize the important role they play in shaping the future of the Arctic region.

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