

МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

research article
UDC: 327+911.1
DOI: 10.48612/RG/RGW.27.2.1

China's Participation in the International Arctic Research Organization

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Abstract. *China's attention to the Arctic has increased significantly in recent decades due to a number of factors: vast mineral reserves, new sea routes, and the launch of international research campaigns. The latter factor provides legitimacy to China's entrenchment in the Arctic as a major power. The Chinese government has increased funding for scientific research in the region on an annual basis, as well as incentivising an additional number of researchers working on the Arctic issue. The government pays special attention to China's active participation in international organizations aimed at studying the Arctic.*

Cooperation with international organisations was initiated in 1996, when China joined the International Arctic Scientific Committee, and in 2013 joined the Arctic Council as an observer. Over the years, IASC has become the leading scientific network institute in the Arctic. China takes an active part in the work of the Committee, being the leader in Arctic research among non-Arctic countries. In 2013, the Arctic Circle organization was established. Chinese scientists took an active part in the annual scientific events held by this organization. In 2013, the People's Republic of China received the permanent observer status in the Arctic Council. China is actively engaged in the work with the University of the Arctic. This is an international project that unites scientific institutes, research organizations, and universities. The China-Scandinavian Arctic Research Center was organized in Shanghai in 2013. The Arctic has become an important region for the realization of the geopolitical ambitions of the People's Republic of China. Research activities are an important area of this policy. The study shows the sustainability of China's strategic interest in Arctic exploring policy.

Keywords: Arctic; China's Arctic policy; International Arctic Scientific Committee; Arctic Council; international cooperation

For citation: Vologina, N.V., Pogodin, S.N. China's Participation in the International Arctic Research Organization. *Russia in the Global World*. Vol. 27. Iss. 2. P. 7–20. DOI: 10.48612/rg/RGW.27.2.1

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научная статья
УДК: 327+911.1
DOI: 10.48612/rg/RGW.27.2.1

Участие Китая в международных организациях по исследованию Арктики

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Аннотация. За последние десятилетия внимание Китая к Арктике значительно возросло, что объясняется рядом факторов: огромные запасы полезных ископаемых, новые морские пути, развертывание международных научно-исследовательских кампаний. Последний фактор обеспечивает легитимность закрепления Китая в Арктике как великой державы. Китайское правительство ежегодно увеличивает финансирование научных исследований в регионе, а также стимулирует увеличение научных работников, занимающихся Арктикой. Особое внимание уделяется активному участию Китая в международных организациях по изучению Арктики. Начало сотрудничеству с международными организациями началось в 1996 г., когда Китай вступил Международный Арктический Научный Комитет, а в 2013 г. вошел на правах наблюдателя в Арктический Совет. За прошедшие годы IASC стал ведущим научным сетевым институтом в Арктике, в котором Китай принимает самое активное участие, являясь лидером в арктических исследованиях среди неарктических стран. В 2013 г. была создана организация Arctic Circle («Полярный круг»), в работе которой китайские ученые принимали активное участие в ежегодных научных мероприятиях. В 2013 г. Китайская Народная Республика получила статус постоянного наблюдателя в Арктическом Совете. Китай активно работает с «Университетом Арктики», представляющий собой международный проект, объединяющий научные институты, научно-исследовательские организации, университеты. В Шанхае в 2013 г. был организован «Китайско-скандинавский центр арктических исследований». Арктика стала важным регионом для реализации геополитических амбиций Китайской Народной Республики, важным направлением этой политики является научно-исследовательская деятельность. Исследование показывает устойчивость стратегического интереса Китая к политике освоения Арктики.

Ключевые слова: Арктика; арктическая политика Китая; Международный арктический научный комитет; Арктический Совет; международное сотрудничество

Для цитирования: Вологина Н.В., Погодин С.Н. Участие Китая в международных организациях по исследованию Арктики // Россия в глобальном мире. Т. 27. Вып. 2 С. 7– 20. DOI: 10.48612/rg/RGW.27.2.1

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Научная специальность ВАК: 5.5.4. Международные отношения, глобальные и региональные исследования.

Introduction

Since the 21st century the People's Republic of China (PRC) have become more interested in the Arctic. This interest is determined by the geopolitical trends of China, abundant natural resources, chance to use the Northern Sea Route for rapid exports of Chinese goods to Europe, and also to do profound research into the region.

Obviously, the first two factors are priority lines in the PRC policy, which are aimed at the national economic development. The third factor contributes to legitimizing China in the Arctic, hereby setting China's ambitions as a superpower [1]. This factor is confirmed by annual subsidies of over \$60 million for polar research of China, which exceeds the ones of the USA [2]. China's government is planning to increase a number of researchers, involved in the Arctic studies [3, p. 53]. According to the international analysts, to date, PRC has made a great progress in the Arctic studies, by keeping ahead of the Arctic states in most aspects. In addition, among the non-Arctic States, China has a comprehensive research program to study the region [4, p. 57].

PRC has been a IASC¹ member since 1996, whereas in 2013 it gained the observer status in the Arctic Council. In January 2018, the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China published the White Paper titled "China's Arctic Policy" [5], where it was declared the clear positions of China to expand its cooperation with the international community primarily in the field of environmental affairs [6, c. 160].

The present paper provides the analysis and materials for studying PRC's activity as a member of the International Organizations of Arctic Studies. Several Russian and Chinese authors elaborate on this issue in their research papers: L.V. Filippova [1], V.N. Konyshov and A.A. Sergunin [7], K.G. Muratshina and A.E. Ivanova [8], V.R. Avkhadeev [9]. D.S. Tulupov [10], D.D. Baramidze [11], Wang

¹ International Arctic Science Committee: [сайт]. URL: <https://iasc.info> (дата обращения: 26.04.2022).

Juntao [12], Xu Guangmiao [13], Lei Shuang [14], Tao Pingo, Chen Yougang, Qin Qing [15], Long Tsui [вып. 1, 16], A.D. Inyakina, V.S. Kudryashev et al [17].

Materials and Research Results

PRC sets a paramount goal to participate actively in the international organizations which explore the Arctic. One of their main vectors is scientific research.

In 1996, PRC became a member of IASC. It was an international non-governmental organization, established in 1990, whose aim was versatile assistance to research cooperation on numerous issues in the Arctic between the countries, closely involved in the studies of this region. The members are represented by national research institutions working on Arctic issues [18]. The Committee includes 23 countries, which are non-Arctic States, with China being one of them. The Committee focuses mainly on the social, political, economic, and environmental matters, which require unique solutions and offer new challenges for the international cooperation [19]. The most active participation in the work of the Committee belongs to China. Chinese researchers form working groups studying marine environment, ecosystems, climate impact on ice.

Thus, IASC is the largest research institute in the Arctic, and the People's Republic of China is the leader in the Arctic research among non-Arctic States. In 2005, China hosted the IASC Summit titled "The Arctic Science Week". Chinese researchers are actively involved in IASC programs, targeted at the Arctic Climate Research.

The major IASC project has become the year-round expedition to the Arctic region, which was called MOSAIC² in 2019–2020. The project involved more than twenty countries, including China, represented by 80 research institutes. IASC also organized the research project "Pacific Arctic Group" aimed at studying the biochemical, geological, physical impact on permafrost. In the framework of this program China took part in the project of the "Polar Research Institute of China". Results of CHINARE³ 11 were published in March 2020 [20].

It is 2013 when the «Arctic Circle» international research organization was established. It united Chinese scientists, who participated in annual scientific

² MOSAIC – Multidisciplinary Drifting Observatory for the Study of the Arctic Climate.

³ CHINARE – Chinese National Arctic Research Expedition.

events held by the organization. The events included the Arctic Frontiers conferences, which contributed to relevant research networking. Chinese scientists are actively involved in the Arctic Circle events [21; 22]. By their initiative, Shanghai hosted the Arctic Circle China Forum in 2019 considered issues of PRC's role and status in the Arctic region; special attention was paid to paving the Polar Silk Road, and tasks of sustainable development [23].

PRC took part in the MOSAIC work targeted at studying the climate in the Arctic. Apart from China, the drifting observatory united German researchers on the "Polarstern" icebreaker. Additionally, China participated in the work of EISCAT⁴ Scientific Association [22; 24].

The People's Republic of China joined the Arctic Council as a permanent observer in 2013. The Arctic Council was initiated by the Government of Finland in 1989. The Arctic Council was founded by eight Arctic States, the organization was officially established after the governments of the Arctic States had signed the Ottawa Declaration on September 19, 1996 [25].

However, the Declaration cannot be regarded as an international treaty, as it has not been ratified by the member countries and has not been registered by the United Nations. The Declaration only outlines the scope of the Arctic Council activities. The important principle of decision making is based on consensus. Such a principle allows the member states to unite efforts in finding solutions to the common problems, without imposing their views on other participants. The Arctic Council does not deal with the issues of military security, its main goal is commitment to cooperation in the Arctic region in such fields as environmental protection and sustainable development [26; 27, с. 5–7].

Initially, in 2009, PRC applied to the Arctic Council for the Permanent Observer status. However, the request was denied by the initiative of Norway for the reason of the blatant manifestation of Chinese nationalism. It is worth highlighting the activity and variety of methods PRC used to join the Arctic Council. China participated in the conferences at the level of profile ministries, organized business trips to the Arctic Council for Chinese researchers who work in different scientific areas, i.e. international relations [28; 29]. High-ranking Chinese leaders, e.g. Premier of the State Council of PRC Wen Jiabao, during

⁴ EISCAT – European Incoherent Scatter Scientific Association.

the visit in 2012 to the Scandinavian countries actively promoted the issue of China's accession to the Arctic Council.

In 2013, PRC was admitted to the Arctic Council as a Permanent Observer. This was claimed at the Ministerial meeting in Sweden and approved by Kiruna Declaration [30]. The new status provided China with access to the information related to Arctic research coordination, gave China an opportunity to take part in the Arctic Council meetings, or in research initiative groups. The example of this participation became the Working Group on implementation of the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Program. This program aims to monitor the climate change in the Arctic.

In 2014, China was actively involved in the research project targeted at observations of temperature and salinity in the Arctic region. The goal of the project was to assess the climate effect in the Arctic, its impact on air and human health. In 2018, PRC signed the International Agreement to Prevent Unregulated Fishing in the High Seas of the Central Arctic Ocean. China contributed a lot to signing this document. In accordance with the Agreement, there are no industries in the region, which is a "preventive approach" to rational usage of Arctic resources [31].

China organized research on the migration patterns of Arctic migratory birds. This research was part of the project of the Working Group on Protection of Arctic Flora and Fauna". The project aimed to study habitat and migration patterns of birds. Based on the obtained results. China held the seminar in China, 2018. Chinese researchers were also involved in the project "Actions for Arctic Biodiversity". The problems raised by this project were limited to studying features of the Arctic Climate and assessing emerging environmental risks [32].

What is of particular interest is the attitude of the Arctic states to PRC. In terms of this, we provide the opinion of the Arctic expert D.S. Tulupov on China's membership in the Arctic Council: "First, there is a set of seven criteria that each new observer in the AC must comply with. Among them, the key criteria are the requirements to "recognize the Arctic states' sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the Arctic", and to "recognize that an extensive legal framework applies to the Arctic Ocean, notably, the Law of the Sea, and that this framework provides a solid foundation for responsible management of this ocean". Second, observers are invited to participate directly in the work of the Arctic Council at the level of its subsidiary bodies, but may

also be invited to special meetings when necessary, subject to consensus among the eight members of the Organization. At the AC meetings, observers may, at Chair's discretion, submit written or oral statements on issues under consideration, as well as participate in the discussion" [10].

Assumingly, China's activity in the Arctic Council is ambivalent. China has the right to participate in programs and projects without being an equal participant, but only ranked as a member of the observers' board. Recognition of the Arctic States' sovereignty encourages China to strengthen its status, which leads to the designation of China in their official documents not as a "non-Arctic state", but as a "near-Arctic state". In this regard, we can give the example of an incorrect statement published by Cheng Baozhi, a researcher of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies: "It is unimaginable that non-Arctic states will remain users of Arctic shipping routes and consumers of Arctic energy without playing a role in the decision-making process, and an end to the Arctic states' monopoly of Arctic affairs is now imperative" [10]. This statement can be considered as China's pursuit not to be on the sidelines in the Arctic.

Such a position of the People's Republic of China caused disapproval of the Arctic States, members of the Arctic Council. They provoked talks about the "Chinese threat to the Arctic region" [33]. The professor of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies Yang Jian responded that China "respects the sovereignty and sovereign rights of Arctic countries", "has no direct interest in the Arctic region and will not use its influence", but "as a large country, ...it has a contribution to make in advancing the causes of peace and security in the region" [10].

It is also worth analyzing the USA policy regarding the PRC presence in the Arctic Council as an observer. Initially, the USA had a positive attitude to China's activities in this international organization, considering Beijing as a reliable partner in this region. Barack Obama's Administration regarded the Arctic Council as a platform to attract China to the global issues of climate change [34]. However, Donald Trump's Government had a destructive impact on the cooperation between PRC and USA, which had a destabilizing effect on their relations in the Arctic [35].

China cooperates closely with the University of the Arctic (UArctic). This is an international project that unites research institutes, scientific organizations, universities. The aim of the project is to offer educational opportunities for students and researchers involved in the Arctic research programs. UArctic is an

educational institution. In 2011, the Association of Sino-Russian Technical Universities was established. The Association brought together 60 Chinese and Russian engineering universities, which work in the framework of the UArctic project [36].

By the Chinese initiative in 2013, the China-Nordic Research Center (CNARC)⁵ was founded in Shanghai. CNARC's purpose was to research the Arctic climate change, and also the Arctic economic development. The Center became a platform for international research cooperation of analytical institutions from Iceland, China, Norway, Finland, and Sweden. The China-Nordic Research Center regularly organizes scientific events, aimed at the analysis of sustainable development, China's Polar Silk Road. All the events allow China to become an active participant of Arctic exploration, along with the Arctic States [37; 38, c. 63].

Conclusion

The Arctic has become an important region to implement geopolitical ambitions of the People's Republic of China. The paramount trend of this policy is research activity. There are three periods in the international research activity of China. The first period – 1980–90s – is the beginning of active exploration of the Arctic by China. The second period – 2000–2018 – is characterized by China's active participation in International Organizations of Arctic Studies. China becomes the major player in the Arctic, since it gained the status of the permanent observer in the Arctic Council. PRC is actively involved in the events of the Arctic Circle, representing its interest in the Arctic at research conferences and summits. The third period marks China's publication of the White Paper (2018) and lasts to the present. The publication of this document is PRC's declaration of its leading position in the Arctic region. The White Paper outlines the main principles of international cooperation with Arctic organizations.

China's strategy in the Arctic research international organizations can be described as balanced and moderate. PRC is pursuing a flexible policy aimed at defending its interests in the Arctic region, hereby strengthening its positions in the Arctic.

⁵ CNARC – The China-Nordic Research Center.

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Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

*Статья поступила в редакцию 12.02.2024. Одобрена после рецензирования 03.04.2024. Принята 09.04.2024.
Received 12.02.2024. Approved after reviewing 03.04.2024. Accepted 09.04.2024.*