Chapter 17
Regional Aspects of the Arctic Ice Silk Road: Case of Heilongjiang Province, China

Zhang Xiuhua
Harbin Engineering University, China

ABSTRACT
A recently released white paper on the Arctic policy emphasized the principal lines of China’s activities in the Arctic, particularly development of resources, fishing and tourism, Arctic shipping routes, infrastructure, navigation security, scientific research, and environmental protection. Such priorities are in the best interest of China’s strategy of the unified regional development and new architectonics of the extensive exploration of the potential of China’s Northern provinces. Being the northernmost region of the country, Heilongjiang province has an opportunity to become China’s outpost for the implementation of the national Arctic policy. This chapter assesses the challenges and perspectives of turning Heilongjiang province into a transport and logistics hub between Northeast Asia, Europe, and North America by China’s participation in the development of the Arctic Blue Economic Corridor. The author elaborates an idea of the establishment of the Arctic Research and Industrial Cluster based on the scientific, technological, and industrial facilities of Heilongjiang province.

INTRODUCTION
In recent years, the Arctic has become an integral part of complex political and economic relations both within the region and beyond. There are many reasons for the Arctic and non-Arctic countries to increasingly pursue their interests in the region: rich mineral and biological resources, a gradual shift in the global extraction of hydrocarbons to the North, and bright commercial perspectives of the deicing transport corridors in the polar waters. The natural conditions of the Arctic and their changes have a direct impact on the climate system and the ecological environment worldwide, and, in turn, on the economic interests of non-Arctic countries in agriculture, forestry, fishery, marine industry, and other sectors. Being a non-Arctic country, China though is closely involved in the trans-regional and global

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issues in the Arctic, especially in such areas as climate change, environment, scientific research, utilization of shipping routes, resource exploration and exploitation, security, and global governance.

Concrete steps within the new vision of the policy include joint efforts of China and partner Nordic countries to develop a blue economic passage linking China and Europe via the Arctic Ocean and establish a global infrastructure network. China has recently formalized its involvement in the development of the Arctic Blue Economic Corridor (ABEC) as one of the three blue maritime passages with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Erokhin, 2018b). The BRI is a development initiative which focuses on the improvement of connectivity and collaboration among the countries of Eurasia through the increase of China’s role in global affairs (Erokhin, 2017a). The pursuit of strategic interests in the Arctic exactly conforms China’s multifaceted, multilevel, and multidimensional diplomatic concept of development. The whitepaper on China’s Arctic Policy released in January 2018, prioritizes scientific research, underscores the importance of environmental protection, rational utilization, law-based governance and international cooperation, and commits itself to maintaining a peaceful, secure and stable Arctic order (State Council of the People’s Republic of China [State Council], 2018).

The utilization of sea routes and exploration and development of the resources in the Arctic have been recognized as the principal issues for China, which may have a huge impact on the energy strategy and economic development of the country. These are the initial starting points for understanding China’s attitude towards the Arctic and participation of development of transport and economic corridors in the High North. In the sphere of Arctic shipping, China maintains that the management of the Arctic shipping routes should be conducted in accordance with treaties including the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS) and general international law and that the freedom of navigation enjoyed by all countries in accordance with the law and their rights to use the Arctic shipping routes should be ensured (State Council, 2018).

The recent initiative of the extension of the BRI to the Arctic and participation of China in the development of the ABEC means that China is open to working with both Arctic and non-Arctic countries to build a Polar Silk Road through developing the Arctic shipping routes. Within the ABEC initiative, China expects its involvement in the infrastructure construction for the ABEC routes in the Arctic territories of Nordic countries, primarily, Russia, and conduction of commercial trial voyages in the polar waters, primarily, the Northern Sea Route (NSR) to pave the way for Chinese commercial, exploration, transport, and logistics operations in the Arctic. China also attaches great importance to navigation security along the prospect routes of the ABEC, particularly, in the seas of the Arctic Ocean controlled by Russia. It has actively conducted studies on these routes and continuously strengthened hydrographic surveys with the aim of improving the navigation, security and logistical capacities in the Arctic.

In general, China’s approach to the development and exploration of the Arctic centers around the stronger international cooperation on infrastructure construction and operation of the Arctic routes and advancement of the Arctic-related collaboration under the BRI. However, successful development of China’s economic, investment and transport initiatives in the Arctic is hardly possible without intensive cross-regional collaboration between the countries involved. Economic corridors are viable only in the case of development of satellite trade, production, and research opportunities along their routes. In the Arctic, such opportunities exist but are limited due to the underdeveloped infrastructure, lack of reliable technologies, and severe climate conditions (Bai & Voronenko, 2016). Therefore, a critical point in the increase of economic activities and transport connectivity of polar regions is the development of the economic potential of particular territories along the prospective blue economic corridors, both in China and in partner countries involved in the implementation of the BRI and the ABEC initiatives.
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