Comparative analysis of China`s and Singapore`s policies in the Arctic

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Abstract. Nowadays the Arctic is an important region from the angle of geopolitics and because of its abundant resources, therefore, many countries consider it as a significant subject of the policy. In this paper policies in the Arctic of China and Singapore, which are not located near the Polar circle but show the great interest in the region, have been analyzed. Taking up the purposes, methods and results of each countries` policies authors has concluded that their strategies are very different. This is caused by the different goals of the states: China is seeking to consolidate its position in the Arctic and be entitled to use its resources, while Singapore is trying to derive benefit from the mutually advantageous partnership.

1. Introduction
The Arctic issues are becoming more and more relevant in recent years. Back in 1992, the Head of the Institute of the Arctic Research of Dartmouth College and the member of Polar Research Council of National Academy of Sciences Oran Young published the book ‘Arctic Politics: Conflict and Cooperation in the Circumpolar North’. In the book author stated that the Arctic would have become a place for developing of new forms of international partnership in 1990s [1]. Proving that he is right, nowadays in the Arctic are developing integration processes which are designed to facilitate the implementation of some complicated and labor-intensive tasks. To coordinate actions in the Arctic, the Arctic Council (AC) was created in 1996. The goals of the AC are to regulate economic development of the region, ensure environmental safety, preserve species diversity, protect the rights of indigenous peoples, organize rescue operations, elaborate Arctic international law, etc. The AC has become a leading organization in the field of Arctic policy and after a while non-Arctic states have begun to apply for membership.

2. Main part
As the economic power of Asian states` are strengthening, so do their foreign policy claims. Asian states` attention to the Artic shows their desire to prove the power as an actor of international relations and claim world leadership [2]. One of the common features of every great country is an ability to use the power anywhere in the world. It is especially noticeable in regional conflicts, during developing of some new territories, which were inaccessible before, during natural and technogenic disaster which demand active response in extremal conditions. Development of the Arctic, where severe weather conditions are usual, is in capability within only advanced countries which have enough experience, appropriate equipment and a lot of courage to solve complicated problems.
In 2009, China applied for observer status but got a rejection. It happened because of the opposition of Norway, after that relations between China and Norway started to get worse. During several years of the conflict in a move of China every official contract with Norway were broken, negotiations for Free Trade Agreement were also broken up, moreover, China refused to grant visas to Norwegian diplomats and journalists. Norway, in turn, prevented China to join the Arctic community [3]. Improvement of relations begun in 2012: at first ministers of trade held a meeting, where Norway emphasized the importance of the mutual partnership, then during the 9th ASEM summit Norwegian and Chinese prime ministers had negotiated and Norway promised to support China`s to join the Arctic Council. Next year at the Kiruna meeting the PRC has become an observer, Singapore has done the same [4]. It is important that according to criteria for admission of observers they have to recognize sovereign rights of the Arctic states in the region, therefore, activity of non-Arctic states is limited, and it cannot be against the permanent members` policy. Nevertheless, China strengthened its presence in the Arctic including construction of icebreakers for the research in the Arctic Ocean and investments in development of hydrocarbons fields (Yamal LPG) – there were China`s attempts to become eligible to develop the region on equal footsteps with the Arctic states.

In 2018, the PRC designed its own official Arctic policy (‘White paper’) declaring itself as the near-Arctic state [5] and demonstrated its firm decision to develop the region. Besides, China showed the interest in the live conditions of sizeable indigenous people living in the North (saami, inuit and so on) and it was pretty concerned about human migration in the Arctic states [31]. The feature of the White paper is the point which states that the PRC is not going only to conduct research but also to do business. Moreover, in the promulgated strategy the intention to create the Polar Silk Route has been declared, the creation of the Polar Silk Route is going to become the part of the famous `Belt and Road Initiative`.

It has to be mentioned that in 2017 China included transport routes of the Arctic Ocean, such as Northern Sea Route (NSR), in ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ (BRI). This initiative was introduced during visits of Chinese prime minister Xi Jinping to Central and South-East Asia in September and October 2013. The initiative involves construction of Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st-century Maritime Silk Road which imply active cooperation with other countries [32]. There are 5 main directions of Chinese Arctic policy: extension of research in the Arctic and development of the concept about the region; assurance of environmental safety and prevent the problems with the climate change (to be exact: environmental protection, ecosystems protection, response to the climate change); development of the Arctic resources with legal and rational methods (to be exact: Chinese participation in development of the Arctic sea routes, exploring and exploitation of oilfields, gas fields, mineral and other resources; preservation and use of fish and some other species; development of international tourism); active international cooperation and involvement in the Arctic administration; assistance to keeping peace and stability in the region [6].

China like other countries where industry is steadily developing has an acute energy demand. Currently most of them arrive from the Middle East, where the unstable socio-political situation sometimes causes difficulties with delivery. According to the international law, non-Arctic states are not eligible to develop the Arctic continental shelf [33], but China is pressing for being entitled to ensure its energy security. Due to this reason China tried to acquire a base in the Arctic territory where, according to estimate of geological surveys, lie about 13% of unexplored oil deposits and about 30% of unexplored gas deposits. To get access to it China is trying to establish good relations with countries that approve its desire and justify legally its right to be presented in the polar region, calling for its internationalization. In 2010, Chinese Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo called for that, the next year an assistant research fellow with Shanghai Institute for International Studies Cheng Baozhi did the same in his article ‘Arctic Aspirations’ [7]. Moreover, assistant of Minister of Foreign Affairs Hu Zhengyue called the circumpolar countries to give up their power in the region for the mankind`s sake [8]. Such public utterances had put the Arctic community on its guard. A little bit later, the diplomats succeeded to make the situation better.

Before the incident related to relations break off China cooperated with Norway: in 2004, research station Huang He was launched in Svalbard, the station has been serving by Norway and has been
exploring mineral resources; in 2009, the bilateral dialogue about the Arctic issues was organized [9]. However, after the incident with the Nobel Prize China shifted its focus to Denmark and Iceland, investing in them. Attention to the Arctic periphery was caused by the capacity of influencing it through economic levers. Nevertheless, China's interest in Norway has remained – the experience of deep-sea drilling is of particular importance.

Iceland is the very important Arctic crossroad and it attracts China, which has planned to use it as a base for its presence in the Arctic territory [31]. In 2013, Chinese millionaire Huang Nubo was going to buy a piece of land in the north of the island, where, according to one version, it was planned to build a port for Chinese ships, but the deal was off [10]. However, China still had invested in Iceland much money and had agreed to import its fish and cut a deal on geothermal energy researches. Moreover, China is interested in developing of monotonous (in Greenland, Svalbard and in Russia) which are in the good condition nowadays [34].

Denmark is much more sustainable in terms of economic, but Greenland, autonomous territory, which is difficult to provide with, with abundant resources, is its weak spot. In 2011, Denmark stated engage people who would to invest in the island to do that, and the PRC responded immediately. Nevertheless, later the USA, EU and Republic of Korea offered the island to transfer money in order to limit China's presence in the Arctic. Cooperation with China has turned out to be mutually beneficial for Denmark: in exchange for support China agreed to buy Greenland's minerals, Danish medicines, sign a contract with a Danish logistics company and invest in the development of Greenland's fields [11]. Nevertheless, Denmark refused to sell the inactive naval base on the island [12]. China is establishing relations with Finland and Russia in the field of Arctic tourism and recreation (journeys to the North Pole [35]), and with Sweden through investing in its economy [13]. China also pays much attention to cooperation with Russia and Canada in the mining and introduced programs about digital development of the Arctic [14]. Digital transformation of the Arctic is the base of its sustainable growth [36].

Besides energy resources, the development of the Northern Sea Route is greatly important for China: it's expected that it potentially will reduce the period of cargo transportation from Asia to Europe by about 5-10 days [37]. Due to the Arctic ice melting the capacity of the Route is increasing, so Chinese authorities are going to transfer up 15% of cargo transportation volume to the NSR, which may help the, to save about 120 billion dollars [15]. The decline of the logistics costs should compensate the increase of wages in the country. Development of sea routes really matters for China because most of the raw materials arrive using them. Moreover, the NSR is safer because it passes only through Russia and controlled only by it, by the way, it doesn't suffer from piracy. The Northern Sea Route, besides its economic significance, is also of strategic importance – it connects the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans. In addition, using of the North Sea Route may prevent pressure from India, competitive China in the region: it used to threaten to close the Strait of Malacca, which would deprive China of energy resources from the Middle East.

China's diplomatic model assumes establishing relations and active cooperation with every permanent member of the Arctic Council, but the key point is Russia because its territory has abundant recourses and its coastline in the Arctic Ocean is the longest what allow it to manage the NSR [16]. It has been already mentioned, that the PRC considers the NSR as the part of BRI. Despite the effectiveness of China's economic leverage all over the world Russia is not ready to assist China in 'the Arctic seizure'. Development of the NSR has been declared as one of the most important Russian goal in the Arctic, government will have spent more than 350 billion rubles by 2025 – it is obvious that the Russian Federation will not cede it to any country, in addition, security of the northern boarders is of particular importance.

Russia seeks to keep its forefront position in the region [17]. In Russian Arctic policy attempts of foreign states to revise ground of the international Arctic law are recognized as one of the main challenges. Russia is trying to keep its position in the region, the grounds of the international Arctic law is convenient for the Russian Federation and China's attempts to revise it are will only run into
opposition. Russia emphasizes that some activity of non-Arctic states in the polar region must be carried out within international cooperation.

Nevertheless, at the moment contracts between Russian and Chinese oil exploration and production companies are active. Russia is not going to share its power in the region with China – mentioning about cooperation within the international law proves it, but there are some field in which two countries cooperate effectively. Both countries are interested in economic development of the region – partnership between Russian experience and Chinese technologies may become mutually beneficial. Also, scientific interest may become the point of partnership – Russian territories and results of research can cooperate with Chinese finance capital and scientific facilities [18].

Nowadays the international community is focused on the problem of climate change and melting of the Arctic glaciers which results in rising of sea level affecting the whole world. In addition, the weather of the northern hemisphere forms in the polar region which also causes China’s concerns [19]. A center of the polar territories researches was established in China to monitor climate processes.

One of the main China’s activities in the Arctic are scientific researches such as oceanology, geological exploration and studying of Arctic environment. Huang He research station, which has been already mentioned, the only such a station it is engaged in the study of the auroras, ice monitoring, climate and meteorology observation.

China also is increasing its material resources in the region: it has an icebreaker Xuelong-1 which was constructed in Kherson and has been conducting research in the Arctic region [20]. In 2014, another icebreaker Xuenlong-2, built with the participation of a Finnish company, was launched. Recently the Chinese authorities have declared they are going to design an Arctic fleet for researches and exploration of fields what gave concerns of several countries including the USA. Intention to design the Arctic fleet proves China’s determination to develop the NSR and explore hydrocarbons.

Russia also considers strengthen of military force in the Arctic as a challenge. China persuades other states that is needs the Arctic fleet only for research but, obviously, it just increases its technical recourses there. China is very likely to use the NSR without the help of Russian icebreakers, it means that China will be independent and will not pay Russia for the assistance, so it will decline cargo transportation costs. In some experts’ opinion, geopolitical and military directions are the main in China’s policy in the Arctic. Tang Guoqian wrote about that in his articles for Chinese Institute for International Research – the scientific center of China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Arctic may dramatically change relations between China and the USA. The naval base in Sembawang (Singapore) which is used by the USA in case of the war can let them blockade the Strait of Malacca which is extremely important for the PRC because a lot of commodities and oil from the Middle East pass through it. In case of aggravation of bilateral relations or of the possibility of the conflict the NSR may reduce the losses cause by block-up of the Strait by the US Navy [21].

Unlike the other Asian countries Singapore much more flexible in its Arctic policy and it always states: ‘We are the state of technologies, but not of recourses’, so Singapore is always in processes which are changing it constantly. And Singapore takes the opportunity to cut deals on construction some equipment which can be used in severe climate conditions: Singapore has a good name, so, there will be no lack of investments [22]. Singapore has various foreign policy and so that there are its own interests even in the Arctic. These interests can be divided into economic, scientific and strategic. Singapore doesn’t have its own resources so the issue of providing with raw materials and energy resources is highly relevant for it. However, Singapore unlike China doesn’t claim independent economic development of the region. The state plans to benefit by the selling its technologies for shipbuilding, geological exploration and development of port infrastructure. It is also worth to be mentioned that oil-refining is an important sector of the country’s industry.

Singapore has great experience in the manufacturing of drilling and mining equipment. About 70% of the world quantity of jack-up rigs and 2/3 of offshore platforms for oil storage and shipment is produced in Singapore [23]. The state offers its assistance in preventing oil spills and eliminating their consequences. At the moment Singapore is engaged in developing technologies that allow extracting
hydrocarbons in severe climatic. Moreover, Arctic shelf exploitation is being actively conducted – The center of offshore oil production and engineering was established in 2004.

Besides the exploration, Singapore is one of the world’s largest ports and shipbuilding centers. Marine technologies occupy a tenth part of the country’s GDP – a well-thought Arctic policy can provide with an additional incentive for the economic development. Along with development of new sea routes existent ports will be renovated and some new will be constructed. There may be need in Singapore’s experience as the port-hub. Annual more than 130000 vessels pass through [24]. Such as trans-shipment point is a very complicated system of serving and controlling cargoes. High technologies help to observe the port, control the water area and provide security. Public-private partnership is widely developing in this field; the state is a stakeholder of some big companies – so the government is trying to promote in the Arctic both its interests and the interests of entrepreneurs. For example, Keppel Inc., 20% of the stocks of which belongs to state’s Temasek Inc., has built two icebreakers for the Russian company Lukoil and signed a contract with the American company ConocoPhillips to construct an innovative drilling platform [25]. Singapore’s technologies allow it to build icebreakers and sell them and one of the state’s sea terminals can serve them. In 2014, at the IV International meeting of representatives of the AC members Singapore declared itself as a strong ally for all states wishing to develop the Arctic and offered its help in the field of shipbuilding and ship service and in the navigation [26].

Also, exploitation of the Northern Sea Route attracts Singapore because it may allocate sea traffic and reduce the country’s income and frustrate of plans to turn Singapore into a global sea traffic hub by 2025 [38]. This is redoubled by Thai plans to build the Kra Canal bypassing the Strait of Malacca what may make Singapore less important too. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong admitted Singapore is pretty concerned about the opening of the North Sea Route. To compensate for possible losses Singapore seeks to participate in the development and serving of the Northern Sea Route. Now the state builds vessels adjusted severe conditions, designs navigation systems and improves port infrastructure trying to make the development of the Arctic as environmentally friendly as possible. It is proved by the fact that Singapore is one of the ‘green’ megalopolises. It does not discharge sewage waters in the rivers and sea [27]. Singapore strives to sell all its technologies in order to hedge against possible losses.

Singapore as a small island state is extremely concerned about the problem of global warming and rising sea level as it poses a threat of flood [28]. In 2010 the country established a National committee of climate change which is engaged in studying the ice melting in the polar region. Singaporean experts took part in a research trip to Svalbard. In 2019, the state put up 10 million Singapore dollars for projects studying the sea level rising. Singapore is studying the polar region’s environment and uses the data to develop new technologies – Singapore assumes Norway and Russia to be its main partners [39].

Singapore also seeks to contribute to the development of Arctic international law, focusing on the exploitation of natural resources and the development and operation of transport routes. The authorities of the country offer their assistance as experts in the law of the sea. The state pays much attention for protecting the indigenous people’s rights, preserving their culture and developing their social infrastructure. Singapore together with the organizations which are members of the AC offer a post-graduate scholarship program for representatives of indigenous peoples. The skills they are going to acquire should reduce the region’s dependence on foreign specialists. Moreover, Singapore has managed to encourage Malaysia and Indonesia to the Arctic projects.

Singapore also seeks to contribute to the elaboration of the international Arctic law, focusing on the regulating of development of natural resources and operation of transport routes. The authorities of the country offer their assistance as experts in the field of Maritime law. Singapore may become a partner for the Russian Federation in matters of the law.

The Constitution of the Russian Federation also contains provisions that guarantee preserving the unique nature of the North as a necessary element for the further living of various nationalities on the certain territories of Russia, this provision is related to the right of every citizen of our country to a favorable environment [29]. The protection of the North indigenous people’s right may be another point of contact. The state pays much attention for protecting the indigenous people’s rights, preserving their culture and developing their social infrastructure. Singapore together with the organizations which are
members of the AC offer a post-graduate scholarship program for representatives of indigenous peoples. The skills they are going to acquire should reduce the region’s dependence on foreign specialists. Moreover, Singapore has managed to encourage Malaysia and Indonesia to the Arctic projects.

3. Conclusion

It’s clear that the Arctic policies of Singapore and China are distinguished fundamentally in goals they have set. China seeks to be independent in the region, but its claims are limited by remote location what makes it to manipulate with members of the AC, which have advantages in developing the polar region, in order to achieve the purposes. China claims to the Arctic hydrocarbon supply, exploitation of the Northern Sea Route and possible economic benefits from scientific researches. However, China's firm intentions run into opposition from the members of the AC and these contradictions are exacerbated by regular statements by Chinese leaders about the necessity of more resolute development of the Arctic and of its internationalization. Russia and Canada take special stand: they persistently try to protect their national interests, but entrepreneurs of both countries actively cooperate with China and get its investments. China tries to release tensions, saying that the equal economic and environmental international partnership will be mutually advantageous. At the same time all members of the AC are aware of the benefits of China’s membership in the organization and try to gain it, encouraging China to projects that, however, it meets without enthusiasm because they are far from its interests and there is no chance to gain profit from such projects.

In comparison, Singapore does not try to be independent and supports active cooperation with all other members of the AC. The Arctic policy for Singapore is a way to realize its own potential and it’s also an opportunity to gain benefits through the sale of its technologies. Membership in the AC gives Singapore a chance to assert itself as an important actor in the international relations and to show the importance of its experience in the shipbuilding, port services, development of maritime law, navigation, exploration and science. Moreover, assistance in the development of the Arctic should compensate the state for possible losses concerned with the opening of the Northern Sea Route. Singapore's goals are facilitated by the fact that it doesn’t have contradictions with the members of the AC, and its call to effective cooperation and an offer of help with its experience and technologies are sustained by other members.

When one state is trying to manipulate with others to implement its plans and another is just looking for an opportunity of cooperation, there is a possibility of the exploitation the latter by the former. Can we consider that Singapore as a China’s tool in the Arctic? At first, we have to take into account that Singapore, like China, is only an observer in the AC and has a smaller range of powers than the members. Although it’s worth to be mentioned that Singapore’s position is stronger – its representatives are often invited to the committees work on an equal basics. Also, despite the size of its territory, Singapore is an important international actor with huge economic and scientific potential, which is appreciated greatly all over the world. Singapore has claims to be a global leader and have relations with other states based on mutually advantageous cooperation, and it has all the resources to implement these plans. Of course, China also has a desire to be a world leader and has all the resources to do that. Moreover, it also can push on Singapore: most Chinese vessels pass through the ports of the Strait of Malacca and it accounts for a great part of Singapore’s income. Launching of the North Sea Route may seriously allocate traffic due to its shortness and security. This fact can be used by China to win Singapore over to its side. But it’s hard to say that Singapore will be merged by China in the field of Arctic policy. For Singapore it’s even the goal to cooperate with actors who have claims to the territory and natural resources of the polar region. China has a strong will to obtain access to hydrocarbons supply but doesn’t have its own technologies for exploration in severe conditions, and Singapore is interested in selling its advanced technologies. China benefits from the opening and development of the Northern Sea Route and Singapore wants to share its experience in servicing sea routes. It turns out that despite the ambitions in the polar region China doesn’t have enough skills to implement them, but Singapore, in contrary, is qualified enough and wants to sell its equipment. Thus, mutually advantageous and equal cooperation is the best kind of partnership for these countries.
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