



THE PROSPECTS OF SINO-RUSSIAN ECONOMIC COOPERATION IN THE ARCTIC REGION

Hira Khan, Department of International Relations, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore, Pakistan, E.mail: h.khan1409@yahoo.com

Prof. (R) Dr. Muhammad Iqbal Chawla, Former Dean Arts & Humanities, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: chawla_iqbal@yahoo.com

Dr. Maj @ Nazir Hussain Shah, Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore, Pakistan, E.mail: nazirhussain@y7mail.com

Dr. Mumtaz Zia Saleem, Faculty Member-RVF, NUST Institute of Peace & Conflict Studies (NIPCONS), National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad, Pakistan, E.mail: mumtaz734@gmail.com

Dr. Majid-ul-Ghafar, Assistant Professor, Department of Communication and Media Studies, Hazara University, Mansehra, Pakistan. E.mail: drmajidghafar@hu.edu.pk

Hasrat Zaman Khan, Department of Mass Communication, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore, E.mail: khan.kabir999@yahoo.co.uk

ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze whether Sino-Russian economic interests align in the Arctic to identify the prospects of economic cooperation between China and Russia in the Arctic region. Relationality-oriented Chinese school of thought namely the “Relational Theory of World Politics” provides the theoretical framework for this study. In this qualitative study, a descriptive method of data analysis was used to analyze and interpret the data collected by primary and secondary sources to gather results. The nature of this study is prospective which is based on an analytical overview of past and concurrent developments between Sino-Russian economic relations generally and (also) specifically in the Arctic region. The scope of this study is only limited to the economic interests of China and Russia in the Arctic. This research work concludes that, deepened relational intimacy, mutual trust, convergent Arctic policy goals and alignment of economic interests can prospectively lead both the states into bilateral economic cooperation in the Arctic region to achieve their respective goals and counterweight American dominance in other resource-rich regions. This study is significant because it analyzes the potential of harmonious interaction between great powers through the lens of relationality rather than realism, rationality and anarchism. Leisure readers, information seekers, students and scholars of International Relations, Sino-Russian Foreign Policy, Nordic Studies and Arctic Developmental Studies can benefit from the in-depth analytical study regarding the Sino-Russian economic alignment in the Arctic.

Keywords: China, Russia, Yaqin Qin, Arctic Developmental Studies, Economic Cooperation, Arctic Region, Relationality, Relational Theory of World Politics, Analytical Study.

I. INTRODUCTION

The beginning of the current millennium witnessed the treaty of “Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation” between the two great powers of the Eastern world; Russia and China. Since then, both the giants gradually shifted the uni-polar world towards multi-polarity by collaborating on a multitude of issues and areas. The Belt and Road Initiative, Central Asian development, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, BRICS, etc are some of the examples of Sino-Russian cooperation on matters of regional connectivity and governance; eradication of terrorism; resource exploitation, and economic solutions, respectively.

The Arctic region is the latest attractive dimension for these great powers to strengthen their existing framework of cooperative friendliness. This study is an effort to assess the key prospective areas of Sino-Russian economic cooperation in the Arctic region by analyzing the potential dimensions and economic interests reflected in their Arctic policies, respectively.

The ice-covered Arctic region is abundant with untapped natural resources and offers a shorter route for transit traffic in the wake of opening waterways by the changing climatic conditions. These rich waterways attract global actors to the under-explored but resourceful Arctic region. Russia predominantly stands as the largest Arctic state with more than half of the Arctic territory under its control, but due to Western sanctions, lack of financial capacity and, insufficient infrastructural capability, Russia has been unable to meet its strategic goals in the Arctic region. China, on the other hand, is geographically an extra-regional actor in the Arctic region. Its Arctic Policy defines its motives in the Arctic which revolve around

understanding, exploring, exploiting and governing the Arctic. To exercise the move to achieve the policy goals, China plans to engage in a cooperative relationship with regional and extra-regional actors in the Arctic.

China borders Russia, both have Anti-Western relational context and both enjoy existing relational intimacy. Hence, the relational intimacy and convergent relational context provide a pretext for both the states to prospectively indulge in a cooperative relationship in the Arctic region. This study has probed into the prospects of only the economic cooperation between Russia and China in the Arctic region.

1.1 Problem Statement

The melting polar ice is creating avenues for the greater inclusion of international actors into the Arctic development and exploitation of resources. Russia is facing US sanctions and a consequent economic crunch. The Arctic region is strategically significant for Russia as expressed in its strategy paper released in 2013 but due to lack of ample economic resources the Arctic dream could not be realized to its fullest, yet. A miscalculated interpretation of the growing interest of non-Arctic states especially China could lead to a new cold war in the Arctic. The carefully structured Arctic policy released in 2018 by China gives a clear insight into the strategic goals it intends to achieve in the Arctic. This study aims to analyze the economic interests of the non-Arctic economic power China and the largest Arctic state -Russia- to find out the prospects of economic cooperation between them in the Arctic region.

1.2 Research Questions

The research questions of this study are as follows;

- a. What are the Sino-Russian economic interests in the Arctic region?
- b. What are the Chinese and Russian Arctic policies?
- c. What are the prospects of Sino-Russian economic cooperation in the Arctic region?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are as follows;

- a. To analyze whether Sino-Russian economic interests align in the Arctic region or not.
- b. To identify the prospects of economic cooperation between China and Russia in the Arctic region.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

“Relational Theory of World Politics” by Yaqin Qin provides the theoretical framework for this study. The thesis of the relational theory is that relations among actors and the relational context in which the actors perform, select the course of action between social actors. The motivations, interests, and preferred aims behind action of the actor are not static, they can potentially change according to changes in the relations of actors. In international relations, according to this theory states are considered as relational actors rather than mere rational actors, and the states act, react, cooperate with others or, isolate themselves with respect to their relations with other actors in the global system.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method was used to undertake this study. This qualitative research has been conducted through descriptive analysis of data, which was collected from both primary and secondary sources.

Primary sources of data collection for this study include the relevant treaties; policy and strategy papers; interviews and, press conferences conducted by State officials who were officially released by the Government of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China.

Secondary sources of data collection used to undertake this study include; relevant policy analysis documents by Nordic countries, books related to the Arctic dimension in Sino-Russian relations and other relevant segments of the study and, research articles from scholarly journals have also been consulted.

Moreover, relevant internet sources were consulted to gather recent statistics, images and area-specific concurrent development details to support the study.

The nature of this study is prospective which is based on an analytical overview of past and concurrent developments between Sino-Russian economic relations generally and (also) specifically in the Arctic region.

IV. DESCRIPTIVE DATA ANALYSIS: THEORETICAL JUSTIFICATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Arctic: Significance of the Region and the Council

The Arctic region is located in the northernmost area of the world. It includes the North Pole, the Arctic Ocean, and the land area. Including Russia, seven other states have parts of their sovereign territories in the Arctic region. These states are called the Arctic states; each having its contiguous zone, continental shelf and exclusive economic zone in the seas near its territorial waters (Pezard, Tingstad and Hall, 2018).

Encompassing only six percent of the world's total surface area, the Arctic Circle unfolds as the new resources' hot spot for the regional and extra-regional states. Exploration and exploitation of untapped natural resources can be undertaken in the coming years due to melting polar ice (Khudzhatov, 2019).

Among other Arctic states having their continental shelves in the Arctic Ocean, the Russian continental shelf is spread on the widest and largest area, hence, more than half of the total volume of Arctic undiscovered oil and gas reserves are anticipated to be Russian, geographically (Pasko, Staurskaya, Gryaznov & Zakharchenko, 2019).

The Arctic is also home to precious mineral reserves other than the energy-related resources, however, the type and quantity of mineral reserves vary across the whole region (Konyukhovskiy et al., 2019).

More than ninety percent, notably the largest share of Arctic forests is geographically under Russian sovereignty (Solli, Rowe & Lindgren, 2013). Marine species are also one of the key natural resources of the Arctic region. Wild fish; shrimps; snow crab and also farm-bred salmon, trout are exported to the world from the Arctic Circle and satisfy more than 10% of the total global demand of marine species.

The Arctic regional governance is conducted by the Arctic Council since September 19, 1996. This regional governing body legitimately devises a code of conduct for the participants and members (Arctic Council Rules of Procedure, 2013). The rules to act in the Arctic are adhered to maintain harmony and prevent conflicts in the sensitive polar region. Permanent members of the Arctic Council are only the Arctic states.

As the prime governance body of the Arctic, the Council offers an appropriate venue for global actors and the Arctic states to increase their coordination and connectivity in the Arctic affairs under a code of conduct that is acceptable to all and applicable to all, collectively (Osterud & Honneland, 2014).

4.2 China's Economic Interests and the Arctic Policy

With a vision to become the world-class innovator by 2050, President Xi Jinping's 'Chinese Dream' is under its initial stages of realization by developing the states' capabilities in the field of research and development. Despite the soaring figures spent by China on research and development, the Arctic dream is fueled by spending on expeditions and infrastructure building, mainly. Scientific research receives less monetary attention, yet. In the 2nd Arctic Ministerial Meeting, China revealed that it spends around US\$ 2.7 million per year on conducting research projects in the Arctic.

China has bagged varying levels of bilateral success by cooperating on areas of mutual interest with the Arctic states namely; Iceland, Norway, United States, Finland, Denmark and Russia. China's academic exchanges and research collaboration with Iceland, Norway and Finland have grown to notable levels in the past decade. The United States and China engaged in scientific and technological cooperation until 2011- Congress prohibited further joint scientific activity (Zhuravel, 2016). Now, limited cooperation is practiced at a bilateral level among U.S and China on aeronautics, earth science and Arctic sciences. U.S scientists joined the 9th 'CHINARE' voyage of the Xue Long icebreaker into the Arctic.

Despite following the status-quo appropriately in the Arctic, Chinese inclusion and investment is frowned upon and is anticipated as revisionist by the Arctic states and political analysts across the globe.

4.2.1 Economic Security: Environmental pollutants affect the sensitive environmental fabric of the Arctic by creating a greenhouse effect and consequent rapid rise of temperature. Mostly a whopping 12% to 66% of the total harmful pollutants reaching the Arctic such as mercury, brominated flame retardants, hexachlorobenzene, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, and lindane are sourced from East Asia. China seeks to address the environmental issues at priority. It aims to alter its coal-dominated energy mix for running its industries and regulate the usage of renewable energy sources so that the carbon footprint is minimized to an optimal level (Nezhnikova, Papelniuk & Gorokhova, 2018). In 2016, the Chinese National Development and Reform Commission and the Chinese National Energy Administration have released a plan to replace 15% of total energy consumption sources with natural gas by 2030 (Lim, 2018). It is estimated that China would require an annual increase of more than 3% in its natural gas demand until 2013 to reach its set target.

4.2.2 Transportation Route: Under its Belt and Road Initiative, China intends to enjoy connective access to all the continents through creating a network of sea lanes of communication, calling it the oceanic cooperation of blue economic passages. A cost-efficient, secure and reliable transportation route is a necessity for the Chinese to ensure a smooth flow of imports and exports across the globe. China also wants to utilize a shipping passage that is free from the influence of the United States Navy in the preface of the ongoing trade war between them.

Currently, the Suez Canal in the Middle East and Malacca Strait in Southeast Asia provide shipping routes to the passing vessels. These shipping routes are key choke points that cater to huge traffic flows but the threat of piracy haunts the passing vessels.

4.2.3 China's Needs Gratification through Arctic Policy: China has left behind its isolationism in the 20th century and opened up gradually to the world in the current millennium. Diplomatically, acting as smart power, China ensures harmonious relations until its legitimate interests remain unchallenged. The release of the Arctic White Paper emphasizes the region's worth for China's policymakers (Gong, 2018).

The Arctic Policy clearly identifies China's willingness to collectively ensure sustainable development of the Arctic by maintaining harmonious collaboration with other global players in the Arctic. (China's Arctic Policy, 2018, State Council PRC, 2018).

China has always tried to avoid indulgence in geopolitical security dilemmas rather it adopts the relational approach to enjoy the perks of geo-economics in a harmonious world. In this regard; despite being actively engaged in the Arctic for two decades, China always tried to adopt a middle ground in its Arctic activities (Pezard, 2018).

To pursue the policy goals, the White Paper elaborates a set of key principles which are similar to the 'Five Principles of Chinese Foreign Policy'. Observing 'respect' and 'mutual cooperation' are the guiding principles along with the intention to seek 'win-win result' and 'sustainable' growth from its participation in the Arctic affairs and activities. Beijing denotes the first two principles as reciprocal in nature, hence, earning respect by respecting your counterpart is the essence of Chinese guiding principles in the Arctic participation.

In its commitment to preserve the environment and lessen its carbon footprint, China has released documented guidelines in 2017 to make the globe-encompassing Belt and Road Initiative 'green' (Liu, 2018). Recently in 2019, the 'International Coalition for Green Development on Belt and Road' has been launched which expresses China's seriousness towards its sustainable drive for global development.

China leads the world in supplying rare earth mineral resources. The Arctic endeavour can satisfy China's need for dominance in the mineral resource market because the Arctic states are rich in rare earth minerals and the released policy paper can successfully culminate the fears of Arctic states by clarifying China's goals around the North Pole (Sorensen, 2018).

In short, through the implementation of its Arctic policy, China can systematically exploit the opportunities from the Arctic. From a broader perspective, China will be able to provide hundreds and thousands of offshore employment opportunities to its nationals; attain a new resource bank for energy

security; gain access to abundant natural resources and safer sea lanes of communication for logistic support and will be able to efficiently speed up national development by gaining profit through dominance in global market (Lim, 2018).

Technically innovative equipment is required for observation of atmospheric and oceanic conditions, energy and mineral exploitation, monitoring of ice zones and, construction of advanced ice-breakers. The White Paper encourages and emphasizes innovating technical equipment to understand, utilize and protect the Arctic to ensure sustainable development of the Arctic (Liu, 2018).

4.3 Russia: Arctic Strategy, Role, and Economic Interests as the Largest Arctic State

The scarcity of population; geographical remoteness; lack of development; fragile ecology; ice-covered fierce Arctic seas; polar land environment and, the abundance of untapped resources in the Arctic area under Russia's sovereignty (Kefferputz, 2010) call for a state policy to address the issues of the Russian Arctic.

In 2013, Russia revised its Arctic strategy and officially released it in a documented form. It states that Russia has key national interests to secure in its Arctic Zone. Such as Russia can boost economic growth by utilization of its Arctic resource bank; the Arctic can act as a hub of cooperation and peaceful interaction with regional and extra-regional actors; Russia considers the preservation of Arctic fragile ecology vital for global well-being; also, Russia aims to defend, uplift, recognize and utilize the northern sea route (NSR) as the national route for transportation across the seas and oceans.

The Russian strategy for the Arctic -if implemented- will enable it to rise as a leading power among the Arctic states by ensuring peace, stability, and cooperation in the Arctic as well as actively gaining competitive advantage from the Arctic wealth (route and resources) (Ananyeva, 2018).

Theoretically, Russia in the Arctic mainly seems to adopt a politically cooperative, strategically balanced, institutionally liberal, militarily defensive, and geographically law-oriented approach rather than its commonly followed realist rhetoric of power in terms of international interaction. Both the left and right political wings internally in Russia collaborate on the Arctic approach adopted in the strategy paper and agree upon the desired goals and national interests in the said region (Litigation Release, John Hopkins University: USA).

Being the largest state on the Arctic coastline, Russia considers itself as the vital component of regional diplomacy and a key player in Arctic governance (Ananyeva, 2018).

Despite huge financial inclusion and extensive approach to development, Russian intervention largely remains inefficient to uplift the economic status of the population and, develop the region. Digitally unequal standard of life overshadows the north of Russia. As yet, Russia lacks the implementation of a strong state-crafted policy aimed at the redressal of inefficient governmental policies (Kuleshov & Seliverstov, 2017).

Geographically, Russia anticipates the Arctic as a bouquet of multidimensional opportunities both in terms of resources and routes but the future will reveal whether the Arctic meets the expectations or turns out to be a Pandora box replete with territorial conflicts, resources competition, and environmental chaos.

4.4 Sino-Russian Economic Relations: Historical Account and Contemporary Practices

In 2001, both China and Russia signed a strategic agreement that was targeted at bilateral cooperation on a multitude of convergent issues. The closeness and harmonious relationship between both the great powers was formalized by the 'Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation'.

After holding power in the spring of 2013, Xi Jinping strengthened bilateral engagement with Russia's Putin therefore a sharp rise in cooperative frameworks have been witnessed by scholarship across the globe. Sino-Russian trade spiked during the last couple of years, moreover both the states pledged to increase bilateral trade to US\$ 200 billion by 2020.

Economic cooperation in the Xi-Putin era has advanced to high-technology and capital-intensive areas. Technology development to explore, innovate and upgrade the space, air, and naval defense systems are underway. China and Russia have also devised mutually benefiting financial mechanisms. Such as usage of

domestic currencies by abandoning the United States Dollar for mutual trade has been adopted since 2008 (Brian, 2018).

China imports hydrocarbons predominantly from Russia. The export value of energy resources reached its record height in 2014 with a whopping US\$ 27.75 billion, however, with the fluctuating prices of oil and raw materials, the trade value fluctuates accordingly. Likewise, oil imports to China from Russia have also marked a notable two-fold increase since 2007 (Kaczmarek, 2015). Russia currently remains the largest oil exporter to China.

Russia began to develop its energy-related fields and transportation network to continue a smooth business with China and the rest of Asia since the 2000s. Russia -in 2009- completed the first phase of the Sino-Russian oil pipeline section named as East-Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) pipeline. Since 2009, Chinese stakeholders from the energy sector have greatly focused on the Russian oil and gas projects (Li, Li, Kolosov, Ren & Chen, 2018). CNPC from China collaborated with Rosneft and Transneft of Russia for an unbridled supply of Russian oil to China for twenty years in return for US\$25 billion from Chinese banks.

Moreover, recently, China and Russia have also been actively cooperating in the field of nuclear power engineering and generation (Blakkisrud & Rowe, 2018).

China has extended its economic cooperation with Russia in the field of technology-related supplies (high-voltage cables, IT hardware, engines, etc) that were banned to Russia in the context of Western sanctions. The agreements to import Western-banned critical technologies from China (Brian, 2018) were not mere economic agreements rather they represent the symbolic value of their strategic partnership to counterbalance the influence of the United States in the global arena. Both the great powers and Asian neighbors cooperate extensively to curtail American dominance, regionally.

From the global political perspective, sanctions to punish Russia and trade war to sideline China by the United States have created a politically integrative context for Sino-Russian economic cooperation in their regional backyard in the short term (Rotnem & Minkova, 2018) and, sparked a desire for cross-regional cooperation in the future to counterweight American global influence and economic dominance.

4.5 Prospects of Economic Cooperation among China and Russia in the Arctic

4.5.1 Cooperation in a Relational World: Founded by Yaquin Qin, the relational theory (Qin, 2018) is the Chinese version of social theory that helps to understand the logic behind actions of social actors in society (Qin, 2012). The eminent author of this theory has developed the theory in the context of International Relations (to understand the logic of interaction among states and non-state actors) (Qin, 2016).

The thesis of the relational theory is that relations among actors and the relational context in which the actors perform, select the course of action between social actors. The motivations, interests, and preferred aims behind action of the actor are not static, they can potentially change according to changes in the relations of actors (Qin, 2018).

Qin has elaborated the Chinese thoughts, compared mainstream IR theories to his relational theory, and linked contemporary international relations in his book, *"A Relational Theory of World Politics"* to explain the logic of relationality because this logical reasoning has been recently introduced to the IR scholarship. However, some concepts are crucial to comprehend relationality and its logic.

International relations are to be undertaken in intricate but excessively complex relational contexts by any state. The superpowers or great powers have more responsibility (Scholvin & Wigell, 2017) to bear, thus, they face a lot of relational complexity due to extravagant influencing power entailed in their global status. However, intimacy is the key parameter that helps to sort out possibilities, take an action or, make a decision in complex relational contexts.

The relational theory highlights that sentimentality (sacrifice your self-interests for strengthening mutual ties) in relations breeds 'express ties'. If a relator aims at building or empowering a relationship (Guanxi) regardless of self-interests or material gains then it is called "express tie(s)". Such a nature of relatedness is rarely practiced in international relations because states commonly cooperate or intensify existing relations when they have convergent interests (Qin, 2018).

Relational theory suggests and stresses that to maintain a good relationship in the society or at a global level, the relators must adopt the morality to 'respect' each other. In case of differences of opinion or conflicting situations, recognition of diversity and individuality can smoothly lead an actor to respect others' right to differ. Such an attitudinal openness and clarity of thought can enable an actor to bag a load of relations to expand its relational circles so that they can be considered for help in need.

The relational theory denotes that following any particular relational context; a relator can only seek (and get) cooperation (or assistance) in the societal or international system from the most intimately related actors belonging to its relational circles. When a relator works to strengthen its relations, it is increasing intimacy with already intimate members of the closest core circle which is an easy task as compared to revitalizing an important but less intimate relationship to the intimate stage.

Beijing's policy in the Arctic rests upon three pillars to formally initiate and advance interaction with other actors in the Arctic region that is namely; respect mutual rights, cooperate for Arctic development, and seek win-win results for the involved parties. The Arctic policy of China uses a softer linguistic tone, focuses on harmonious interactions, and emphasizes building strong relationships with the Arctic states (Hsiung & Roseth, 2019).

Therefore, an attitude to initiate mutually beneficial practices (Kazi, 2007) on China's end can breed the expectation to garner symbiotically positive outcomes on the end of international partners regardless of their regional or extra-regional status. Both countries enjoy evident political will to cooperate and domestic stability hence, Sino-Russian existing economic relations can probably upgrade into a mutually beneficial strategic partnership (Brækhus et al., 2007). China can offer monetary and physical investment along with a wide range of markets for the Arctic states in return for inclusion into, and utilization of, the Arctic developmental endeavor.

4.5.2 Sino-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic: The Arctic is a strategically significant and resourcefully critical region for Russia and China. Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic can benefit and serve the interests of both states. Before 2014, Russia predominantly avoided cooperation with China on the Arctic front but the Western sanctions post-Ukraine Crisis strategically emphasized Moscow to lend a hand from Beijing for the continuation of its Arctic endeavor. China also requires access to the northern sea route because it is the shortest route to Europe and the only sea route free of extravagant American presence and influence. The development of this route is a convergent point of interest for both the great powers (Pezard, 2018).

Usually, the negotiations for bilateral projects between China and Russia are prolonged and planning processes remain stalled before practical manifestation because the consensus regarding mutual compromises is hard for both the great powers. Russia is known to be focused on intricate details regarding ownership of projects, funding mechanism, and employment opportunities for Russians before entering into a consensus for a joint project with international partners (especially China). Moscow prescribes its power and security of national interests as (comparatively more) prestigious elements -than peaceful cooperation and global harmony- to cater in its international relations (Pezard et al., 2018).

In the dimension of energy development, Sino-Russian cooperation has been materialized so far through the project of liquefied natural gas (LNG) production at the Yamal peninsula in the Russian Arctic (Li et al., 2018). Since 2013, after indulging in the project worth US\$ 27 billion, China has become the second-largest investor by owning around thirty percent shares of the Yamal LNG Company by Novatek (Russia's gas producer). The natural gas produced through this project was to be delivered to China through a rail network.

From its first voyage undertaken in 2013 until May 2019; the Chinese Oceanic Shipping Company (COSCO) has completed twenty-two shipment rounds through the northern sea route of the Russian Arctic. This route saves around ten shipping days on each round from east to west and a considerable amount of fuel due to less distance. These trans-Arctic voyages are conducted by COSCO in an effort to validate the significance and practicality of spending on the development of this route. These voyages are aimed at helping Russia and China to make careful cost and benefit analyses for their future endeavors regarding Arctic development.

A thirty-year-long natural gas trade agreement was signed between Gazprom and CNPC which are companies of Russian and Chinese origin, respectively. This agreement signed in 2014 was worth US\$400

billion and committed Russia to ship regular supplies of natural gas to China, this trade agreement was made soon after the financing of the 2013 Yamal LNG project by China's Silk Road Fund and the CNPC.

Russian independent natural gas producer -Novatek- have signed agreements in 2017 with the China Development Bank and CNPC to attract finances for the construction of the energy project named Arctic Liquefied Natural Gas 2. The foundation for the construction of this project is due to be laid in 2019, with a commitment to export the LNG produced by this plant to China via the northeastern Arctic shipping route (NSR). Export to China is prospectively due by 2023, after the completion and operationalization of the project.

Participating as a co-investor and logistic partner with Russia for the MOSAic (which stands for The International Multidisciplinary drifting Observatory for the study of the Arctic Climate), China has also offered logistic and fuel-related support to the R/V Polarstern during its year-long first exploratory voyage in the Central Arctic Ocean. Planned to be undertaken in September 2019 this stands out as the first of its kind and also the largest project ever funded cooperatively in the Arctic.

Beyond the energy and trade dimension, the Russian Nor Nickel Company has proposed the need for Chinese investment for the exploitation and extraction-related projects in the Taimyr Peninsula, Kola Peninsula and, Sakha Republic of Sakha. These regions have abundant reserves of rare-earth metals such as wolframite, vanadium, and molybdenum.

4.5.3 Potential for Sino-Russian Economic Cooperation in the Arctic: Any resourceful region on the face of Earth has the potential to benefit life. The Arctic is resourcefully rich but Arctic states do not have sufficient funding and infrastructure building expertise.

The integration process between two states primarily initiates from a convergence of interests and progresses towards strengthening the cooperative bilateral relationship between them (Qin, 2018), these diplomacy-led relations can be economy-oriented and (or) military-oriented, etc. After strengthened bilateral relations, confidence and mutual trust between the parties allow the harmonious integration to spread regionally, and ultimately, global integration can be achieved, if pursued in a systematic mechanism.

The states with an approach to proceed forward in the integration mechanism offer their distinguished qualities which are of significant value to the other party such as on the matter of integration in the Arctic, China can offer its experience to innovate, uplift, develop and liberalize the Arctic economy as it did on its own territory. The world has witnessed the growth of the Chinese economy, therefore, they can benefit from its expertise for stable development in the Arctic (Stronski & Ng, 2018).

Since the wake of the current millennium, the world's focus has been shifted to the resource-rich Arctic region. Possibilities and challenges of developing the Arctic for utilization as a resource hub for the Arctic states and the rest of the world have become a hot topic for international scholarship to ponder, criticize and ink their analysis.

The marine route through the Arctic is the shortest route to reach Asia-Pacific from the Atlantic Ocean and vice-versa. Out of the three routes (NSR, NWP, and the central passage) prescribed in China's Arctic policy, the Northern Sea Route currently stands out as the most economically and environmentally viable route (Song, 2018). Starting from the Bering strait, this route runs alongside the Russian Arctic coast and is closely proximal to European ports in the northern region of the Atlantic Ocean by the Western end and Asian ports of the Pacific Ocean in the Eastern extreme (American Bureau of Shipping, 2014).

Attracting the international transit traffic to the Northern Sea Route will boost the Russian economy along with the revenue generated from resources export. The most commonly used route among the Arctic routes -for trans-Arctic voyages- is the Northern Sea Route (NSR) however, Sino-Russian economic cooperation on the route-related projects have been scarce (Sun, 2019) but great benefit (i.e., time-saving route, less fuel required, less shipping cost, low carbon emissions) lies in the development of this route for both states (Sorensen, 2018) therefore, the potential to cooperate is supposedly positive and practical.

The major drawback of the Arctic shipping routes is the unavailability of appropriate seaports, a Chinese investigation reveals that the northern sea route along the Russian Arctic has only four ports that are connected to the Russian transport system. In total there are twenty ports on the NSR but about half of

them are dysfunctional and lack appropriate dock to host ships or huge cargo vessels (Stronski et al., 2018).

Due to lack of functional deep seaports, the Northern Sea Route neither has sufficient fueling services at the ports nor ample availability of ice-class oil tankers (which are considered as an alternative solution to refuel navigating vessels but require hefty investment) (Tianming, 2019). Chinese experts express their dissatisfaction regarding the outdated ports facilitation mechanism in the Arctic (Sun, 2019). Therefore, the dimension of port facilitation and development has the potential to be targeted as a key area of economic cooperation between Sino-Russian partners, in this field; a share of finances, infrastructural guidance, expertise, and experience can be gained from China while Russia can overlook the development, contribute in the funding, provide logistic support, the share of finances and can link its national transportation system to more ports than the existing four.

The Arctic region as a whole and specifically the Russian Arctic lacks sound maritime security and safety mechanism (Song, 2018). The Northern Sea Route's eastern side is secured by a single base at Vladivostok which is geographically too far from the rest of the NSR to provide rapid relief and rescue missions in situations of emergency and unfortunate disaster. Lack of appropriate rescue and safety mechanism is a potential dimension in which at initial stages, China can cooperate with Russia economically to design a web of bases with basic facilities for rapid providence of rescue and relief assistance. Chinese experts have also highlighted that a communication system lacks in this region because of the geology of the earth in the Arctic circle as the curvature of the earth above 70°00'N-75°00'N does not facilitate the functionality of geostationary satellite in this region (Wright, 2011 & Wright, 2018).

Russia has an energy export market that marks it as one of the largest in the world, with China as the largest on the purchasing end. These puzzle blocks fit perfectly together in the pretext of Western sanctions and trade war. Regardless, of other opportunities and avenues of cooperation in the Arctic, 'energy' stands out as the most promising and prospective sector for Sino-Russian economic cooperation. To date, with an annual yield capacity of 16.5 million tonnes, the Yamal natural gas plant -between China and Russia in the Russian Arctic- has been materialized with three working production lines and another in the planning process (Hsiung et al., 2019).

China is predominantly interested in the liquefied natural gas and oil fields of the Arctic and openly indulges in signing agreements or making pledges to provide economic support for the projects related to the energy sector. In this regard, a noteworthy pledge made by China to Russia is to economically cooperate in the natural gas project at the Russian Gydan Peninsula. Following the LNG projects, construction of Sabetta port and the oil terminal at Kotelny Cape in the Yamal region of the Russian Arctic have also been initiated to provide logistic support and the needed infrastructure for shipment of LNG to China and ports in the Asia-Pacific (Li et al., 2018).

The natural gas field of Leningradskoye, Murmansk has an estimated 1.9 trillion cubic meters of gas reserves, China Oilfield Services Limited and Gazprom have partnered to calculate the possibilities of extraction from this field in the Russian Arctic. In 2018, they have embarked on the endeavor to discover the details to begin drilling of the hydrocarbon reserves in the field (Gao & Liang, 2018).

Hence, it is evident that following China's Arctic policy release, China will more enthusiastically pursue inclusion into the potential energy sector of the Arctic. At present, China, in the energy sector is actively engaged in cooperation with Russia, economically, therefore in other parts of the Arctic both the great powers can expand their integration with other states and benefit them from their mutually gained expertise.

China's energy mix has been coal-dominated. China, now enthusiastically searches for sustainable energy sources, Arctic resources are the new hot cake for China to import, in this respect. Despite the difficulty of operation and access; as compared to the other energy-rich regions, the Arctic is most suitable for Chinese energy dependence because it is a politically stable and piracy-free region. Whereas, other resource-rich regions such as the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa, the conventional maritime routes and choke points are replete with incidents of piracy and political instability and are not ideal for Chinese energy dependence. In this regard, both Russia and China can potentially indulge in 'Resource Diplomacy' by integrating bilaterally in the Russian Arctic and then expanding their reach to other parts of the Arctic by cooperating economically (Herbert, 1996).

Arctic reserves mostly lie on the continental shelf of coastal states but the economic feasibility of extraction depends upon a positive benefit ratio as compared to excessive costs to operate in the far-flung and deserted Arctic region. Availability of extractive technology, infrastructure, and abundance of finances can help to utilize the potential resources in the wake of rising demand for resources and depleting non-renewable resources from the face of the earth. The non-renewable resources from the Arctic bed will be required the most when the existing renewable energy sources become insufficient for global usage. Moreover, the current wave of green energy utilization is also making the non-renewable resources worthy in all parts of the world (Niquet, 2007) and the Arctic is no exception.

A systematic and proactive approach will lead to area-specific innovations for extraction-related purposes because, difficulties aside, without a doubt the sky-rocketing prices of energy resources and repeated geological estimations reveal that Arctic resources carry huge economic potential.

The interests of Russia and China converge in the dimension of natural resources exploitation (Hsiung, et al., 2019). Russia generates revenue by exporting its resources and China needs minerals and sustainable energy to fuel its industrial economy. Hence, both the great powers can satisfy their respective needs related to the dimension of Arctic resource exploitation by indulging in mutually beneficial economic cooperation.

4.5.4 Future Prospects of Sino-Russian Economic Cooperation in the Arctic: China and Russia's focus has tilted towards economic cooperation in the Arctic past 2014 -Ukrainian Crisis. Before the imposition of Western sanctions, China had repeatedly shown interest to invest and explore the Russian Arctic but it was not welcomed by the Arctic giant. Harsh statements and unfriendly political attitudes were the tools used by Russia to protect its northern backyard from Chinese inclusion; therefore, China could not pursue its ambitious endeavour in the Arctic Circle. The need for economic support forced Russia not only to welcome China in its Arctic jurisdiction but even proposed projects to Beijing to attract investment and cooperation (Pezard et al., 2018).

Similarly, the Russian Arctic for China is the most geographically feasible and resourcefully suitable area to invest, explore and develop in the short and long run, respectively. If both the states deepen the intimacy of the existing cooperation then it can upgrade to intimate partnership and such a relationality can satisfy the immediate and future needs of both in a sustainable manner. States are in constant need of partnerships, alliances, and cooperation with other members of the international society because every state is not wholly and solely self-sufficient in all respects. The integrated nature of the global system and rising demands of the relational society call for external assistance (by other societal members) in terms of either manpower, academics, technology, or financial incentives to sustain and develop life, optimally.

Keeping insight the pre-2014 trust deficit and cold attitude by Russia towards Chinese inclusion into the Arctic, the prospects were meager for their bilateral cooperation in the Arctic. But, in the context of Xi-Putin cordial engagement and sidelining of these Eastern powers by the West, there are ample prospects of bilateral cooperation between Sino-Russian counterparts on a multitude of strategic relations such as economy and military (Rotnem et al., 2018). This research work solely highlights the prospects of economic cooperation between China and Russia in the Arctic, whereas, prospects of cooperation in the military sector are not addressed under the scope of this study.

4.5.4.1 Collaboration on Building Polar Class Vessels and Technology: Russia's advancement in polar vessels is noteworthy; it owns a number of the world's most powerful polar vessels such as ice-breakers and shipping vessels that sail around the Arctic Ocean. Russia has been actively voyaging in the Arctic seas since the 19th Century therefore, its expertise in polar maneuver is exceptionally better than other actors in the Arctic. However, Russia has somehow failed to benefit from its valuable Arctic expertise and potential due to lack of finances and technological backwardness in its Far East region. Russia has developed nuclear-powered ice-breakers along with the conventionally used diesel and steam-powered. The Arktika class ice-breaking vessels have the potential to operate on the whole of the Northern Sea Route whereas; other categories of vessels have operational limitations. Russian ice-breakers generate revenue by escorting cargo vessels through the NSR (Sun, 2019).

China has included the Arctic Circle into its Belt and Road Initiative, and as mentioned previously the Northern Sea Route is currently the most viable passage to be used as a transportation link between the East and West. China needs to develop its polar logistic capability to utilize the potential of the feasible route, for this purpose, China needs to get assistance from experts that have Arctic maneuver experience,

Russia is a notable name in this respect. Russia's shipbuilding industry is dedicated to designing sophisticated polar class vessels but primarily they focus on ice-breaking vessels. China has the polar capability but because it is a new actor in the Arctic, therefore, it aims to evolve its maneuver capacity (Song, 2018) by including nuclear-powered ice-breakers in its Arctic fleet. Assistance in this regard is highly required by Beijing and only Russians have the expertise to design nuclear icebreakers, all other potential actors are still planning to design such a polar vessel.

In the wake of economic cooperation in the energy sector in the Arctic, Sino-Russian leadership can accelerate indulgence into technological cooperation on the construction of polar vessels, so that Chinese transit traffic can be increased and the viability of the NSR can be proven to attract the global actors. China is willing to pursue its Arctic dream defined in the Arctic policy -despite the estimated eight folds more expense of research and exploration in the High North- because the Arctic is a wide and deep ocean of opportunities for China.

Academic exchanges, research collaboration, and innovative inventions regarding polar vessels and polar technology can prospectively lead both the states to strengthen their newly-found intimacy in the Arctic endeavor. In the future, both the relational states can increase their intimacy by expanding their outreach in the Arctic international waters to maximize the utility of Arctic potential and emerge as notable Arctic players to undermine Western dominance in other resource-rich regions.

4.5.4.2 Exploration and Exploitation of Natural Resources: Arctic reserves can serve global energy demand for coming years therefore, cooperation in this region by China can allow it to secure a resourceful region to meet its future energy needs.

Russia wants to make use of the Arctic resources but mere exploratory activities in this area require a hefty investment, which Russia lacks in the current global scenario. The Russian economy is resource-based and the vast resourceful landscape of the Arctic is the key to the uplift Russian economy in the future but, developmental activities now will enable the utilization of resources in the future. The Chinese economy is based on industrialization and the industries are energy thirsty, primarily. Secondly, China needs raw material imports to manufacture goods for its export business. This sort of trade and industrial economy requires ample energy and raw material resources along with the availability of safe maritime passages that ensure global connectivity so that 'Made in China' can reach other continents, to generate revenue and run the state internally.

Shortage of non-renewable energy resources, American dominance and political instability in other resource-rich regions and, the growing thirst for energy security provides the context to China for prospective indulgence into the exploration and extraction of Arctic resources, and symbiotically Russia is the most suitable Arctic partner for China in this respect.

4.5.4.3 Functional Northeastern Route (NSR): Optimal functionality of the Northeastern Arctic shipping route can speed up the development of the Russian Arctic by generating revenue through transit shipping opportunities. The development of the Russian Arctic will enable huge economic benefits for the Federation by attracting global actors. Increased interest and activity of foreign explorers, foreign markets, transit traffic, and collaborative infrastructural projects will uplift the under-utilized region to the highest extent in the future which will enable Russia to fulfill its strategic goal and rise as an uncrowned but vital leader of Arctic affairs.

Russian President, Vladimir Putin plans to enhance the utility of NSR by attracting tenfold more cargo traffic by 2025, China is willing to help out Russia in achieving its goals with respect to the Northern Sea Route so that it can successfully become a competitive sea route in addition to the conventional routes -to boost up dwindling Russian economy (Song, 2018).

Since 2017, after announcing the expansion of the Belt and Road Initiative to the North Pole, China has been actively calculating the prospects of economic cooperation with the Arctic states to expand the net of market connectivity to and from the Arctic region (Sorensen, 2018). Chinese academics and media actively voice their optimism regarding the hidden potential of the Northern Sea Route, especially while the other two routes (Central passage and NWP are not currently viable). Hence, Russia in this regard has emerged as the most viable option for China to cooperate economically in the Arctic but certain challenges halt the integration process in the realm of route development (Sun, 2019). The rigidity of business terms, the urge of administrative dominance, and excessive requirement of finances with little control cause China to

lose interest in negotiations with Russia. The Chinese want sincere dealing and flexible concessions with Russian counterparts to engage in a long-term business in the Arctic because it requires careful calculations, openness, and hefty investment before formal indulgence so that the investment bears fruit symbiotically for both partners.

Post Western sanctions, Russia was unable to follow the prescribed timeline of its strategic goals in the Arctic, therefore it is somehow practicing a welcoming attitude ever since towards Chinese indulgence in the Russian Arctic. The Federation is allowing ownership rights, job opportunities to Chinese and business concessions in terms of financial, logistic, and infrastructural support to aid mega-projects, so that Russia gains the trust of its Chinese counterparts and enhances its inclusion for the development of NSR. The opening up of Russian business for China, increasing bilateral trust, and strengthening relational intimacy, will potentially solidify economic cooperation between the two great powers in the Arctic route development.

4.5.4.4 Arctic Blue Economic Corridor: In 2017, after repeated mentions of initiating a polar silk road in the North, finally China revealed its plan to invest in the formation of the Arctic Blue Economic Corridor as an offshoot of its Belt and Road Initiative (Erokhin, 2019). Segments of Chinese interest in the Arctic were energy trade and transit routes primarily but the release of the Arctic White Paper by China in 2018 highlighted other dimensions, too. Russia in this regard (controls the largest area in the Arctic and) strategically offers the most viable partnership to China for inclusion, participation, and engagement in Arctic exploration and development (Tianming, 2019).

Building of the Arctic Blue Economic Corridor (ABEC) will potentially begin from the Russian Arctic because this area of the region is accessible for around three months in a year whereas other parts of the Ocean are ice-covered and inaccessible for more than eleven months. Sino-Russian relational intimacy has significantly deepened during the Xi-Putin era due to their mutual cordiality, hence potentially, both the states have the prospects to cooperate economically in the Russian Arctic in the short term and expand their reach to the rest of the region in the long run.

In the context of sidelining by the West, increased intimacy can be anticipated between the Eastern powers in a move to progress symbiotically and decrease reliance on the West so that the Western dominance in other parts of the world can be balanced out in the resource-rich Arctic. According to Yaqin Qin (2018) strengthened intimacy between relational actors can encourage them to cooperate; therefore the increase in Sino-Russian existing relational intimacy can encourage them to cooperate economically in the Arctic region predominantly in the worsened relational context of the Western world.

V. CONCLUSION

This research study was targeted at investigating the prospective areas of economic cooperation between two great powers of Asia namely; Russia and China in the resource hot spot of the Arctic. Usually the interactive behavior of states -by scholarship in the discipline of International Relations- is analyzed on the theoretical basis of mainstream Western thoughts (such as realism, liberalism, or critical schools of thought) in the anarchic context. Anarchy in international relations breeds uncertainty and distrust among the players in the international arena because states are anticipated to lack morality since the very inception of this subject matter. Scholarship of IR suggests that states cannot indulge in relationships (friendliness or enmity) without interests, hence cooperation in any dimension is based on certain national interests. Therefore, the comprehensively Western school of thought suggests that 'rationality is the basis and 'interest' is a prerequisite to the formation of 'relations' among actors in the anarchic international arena.

Western culture is individualistic in nature, Russian culture lies somewhat in-between individualism and collectivism whereas Chinese culture is predominantly collectivist. Cultural background garners deep imprints on the thinking patterns of individuals. As state affairs are administered by individuals therefore to better understand the Chinese course of action in the Arctic dimension with Russia, this study is based on the Chinese school of thought to analyze the state behavior. Hence the theoretical foundation of this study is based on the "Relational Theory of World Politics" by Yaqin Qin. This theory suggests that 'relationality' is the basis and nature of 'relations' between the 'relators (states)' and the 'relational context' in which they act, determines their 'interactive behavior' with each other.

Comprehensively, existing relational intimacy (which is modifiable) between actors determines the nature of their future interactive behavior (cooperation or enmity).

The common anarchic notion is that great powers in international relations scramble for resources in a resourcefully rich region. In the case of the Arctic region, this study has analyzed the economic interests of both China and Russia in the Arctic and gathered evidence that Russia being the regional key player has strategic goals regarding the development and exploitation of its Arctic Zone whereas, China is an extra-regional actor but actively interested in the transit passages and resources of the Arctic. China and Russia have clearly defined their objectives, motives, and goals in their Arctic policy and strategy paper, respectively.

The governance system (Arctic Council) in the Arctic allows the extra-regional actors to seek cooperation from the Arctic states to voice their concerns (introducing new projects, investments, etc.) in the Council platform. China in this respect can seek cooperation from Russia in the Arctic Council and regional development.

Both the states already enjoy revived relational intimacy since 2001, but Russia was reluctant to offer interactive openness to China in its Arctic Zone until 2014. The relational context of worsened Western economic relations and the 'Look East policy by Putin, allowed Russia to open up the Arctic Zone for Chinese inclusion. China released its Arctic policy in 2018, which is a clearly defined document that describes its motives in the Arctic and extends respect for internationally devised laws and sovereign rights of the Arctic states. This document provides clarity of interaction and has encouraged the Arctic counterparts to cooperate with China without bothering about Chinese expansionist aims in the Arctic (due to uncertainty of policy goals).

This study concludes that the idiosyncratic Xi-Putin cordiality has strengthened the relational intimacy between both states. Therefore, deepened relational intimacy, trust between political counterparts, (clearly defined) convergent Arctic policy goals, and alignment of economic interests can prospectively lead both the states into bilateral economic cooperation in the Arctic region to achieve their respective goals and counterweight American dominance in other resource-rich regions.

Potentially, the development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), extractive sector, energy, and trade sector can provide avenues of economic cooperation to China in the Russian Arctic in the short term perspective. Moreover, in the long run, the prospective dimensions of bilateral economic cooperation can extend from the Russian Arctic to other parts of the Arctic region. Bilateral economic cooperation can be initiated and strengthened in the realms of; polar technology and vessel building industry, exploitation and extraction of natural resources, optimal Northern Sea Route development, and functionality of Arctic Blue Economic Corridor. The integrative relational web can be expanded from bilateral cooperation to multilateralism in the Arctic if bilateral success is achieved instead of scramble and conflict for Arctic resources by both the indulgent great powers.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

By following the listed general and area-specific recommendations, the respective great powers can deepen their relational intimacy and increase prospects of cooperation than conflict such as;

Citizen or public diplomacy can increase cordiality and strengthen relational intimacy among relators (states) in the international arena. Official counterparts of relators (states) should understand and respect each other's cultural sensitivity to undertake symbiotically acceptable and comprehensive negotiations. Russian Arctic shipping passage lacks sound safety mechanism, Sino-Russia joint safety and relief mechanism in the Arctic can increase bilateral linkage, optimism, and trust among both states which will likely progress project-related economic cooperation into a comprehensive strategic partnership. Sovereign states can deepen mutual trust by following transparency and openness in bilateral dealing because distrust and uncertainty are inversely related to relational intimacy. Relators in the Arctic should focus on eco-friendly/sustainable development to preserve the ecological design of the Arctic, right from the start. Academic exchanges between states can be practiced and encouraged to mobilize the drive of area-specific innovations for the Arctic. Academically and technologically various disciplinary dimensions of research and development can be synthesized to address the unique challenges of the Arctic by the actors.

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