



KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY
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**EXPLAINING CHINESE CONDUCTS IN
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: MARITIME SILK
ROAD AND NORTHERN SEA ROUTE**

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APPROVAL

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In addition, I acknowledge that any claim of irregularity that may arise in relation to this work will result in a disciplinary action in accordance with the university legislation.

DERİN YÖNEL

16.06.2022

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EXPLAINING CHINESE CONDUCTS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:
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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this research is to evaluate China's goals for exploiting global governance provisions in the Arctic Ocean to reconfigure the rules-based international order in its favour. This study will also investigate China's global governance pretext to establish alternative global governance known as the Beijing Consensus through collaborative projects such as the Belt and Silk Road Initiative and its offshoots. The Beijing Consensus was established to continue China's struggle for hegemony against the rule-based international order led by the United States. China also uses the Maritime Silk Road Initiative to preserve its economic competitiveness in the Arctic Ocean through bilateral cooperation with the Russian Federation.

Keywords: Northern Sea Route, Belt and Road Initiative, Northwest Passage, Maritime Silk Road, Chinese Geopolitics

ÇİN'İN ULUSLARARASI İLİŞKİLER DAVRANIŞLARINI AÇIKLAMAK: DENİZ İPEK YOLU VE KUZEY DENİZ ROTASI

ÖZET

Bu araştırmanın temel amacı, Çin'in Arktik Okyanusu'ndaki küresel yönetim hükümlerinden yararlanarak kurallara dayalı uluslararası düzeni kendi çıkarları için yeniden şekillendirmesini hedeflerini değerlendirmektir. Bu çalışma aynı zamanda Çin'in Kuşak Yolu İnisiyatifi projesi aracılığıyla Pekin Mutabakatı olarak bilinen alternatif küresel yönetim biçimini kurmaktadır. Çin'in Pekin Mutabakatı'nı kurmasının gerekçesi Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin önderlik ettiği kural bazlı uluslararası düzene karşı bir hegemonya mücadelesini sürdürebilmektir. Çin'in ekonomik rekabetçiliğini sürdürebilir kılmak amacıyla Rusya Federasyonu ile Arktik Okyanusu üzerinden kurduğu ikili ilişkileri merkezinde ise Kuzey Deniz Rotası ve Kuzeybatı Geçidi yer almaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kuzey Denizi Rotası, Kuşak ve Yol İnisiyatifi, Kuzeybatı Geçidi, Deniz İpek Yolu, Çin Jeopolitiği

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A2/AD Anti-Access/Anti-Denial Air Defence

ALCOM Alaskan Command of the United States

ASEAN Association of Southeast Asian Nations

BRI Belt and Road Initiative

BRICS Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa Forum

CAATSA Countering the Enemies of the United States with Sanctions Act

CCP Communist Party of China

CNOOC China National Overseas Oil Corporation

CNPC China National Petroleum Corporation

CMT Chosenness Myth Trauma

EU European Union

FSB Federal Security Service of Russian Federation

GATT General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

GDP Gross Domestic Product

GIUK Greenland-Iceland-Great Britain Gap

IMO International Maritime Organization

INDOPACOM Indo-Pacific Command of the United States

LNG Liquefied Natural Gas

MSRI Maritime Silk Road Initiative

NATO North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NORTHCOM Northern Command of the United States

NSR Northern Sea Route

NWP Northwest Passage

PLA People's Liberation Army of China

PLAN Chinese People's Liberation Army Navy

RCN Royal Canadian Navy

SEZ Special Economic Zones

SLOC Sea Lines of Communications

SOE State-Owned Enterprises

SOLAS International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea

SSBN Submersible Ballistic Missile Defence

STCs Submarine Telecommunications Cabling

UNCLOS United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

UNSC United Nations Security Council

USARAK United States Army in Alaska

USD United States Dollars

WTO World Trade Organization

1. INTRODUCTION: CHINESE INTERNATIONAL CONDUCTS IN THE ARCTIC OCEAN

The main research question is: "Why China is attempting to project its geopolitical influence in the Arctic Ocean and is there a potentiality for China's military capabilities to be sufficient to secure its interests in the Arctic Ocean?" China's attempts are motivated by preserving its manufacturing advantages and offering an alternative way of global governance, which has been the core of the Belt and Road Initiative. The deliberation on sustaining economic competitiveness will allow us to examine China's historical context, the development of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Maritime Silk Road Initiative, and its itinerary projects of the Polar Silk Route, which elapse Northern Sea Route and Northwest Passage. The Chinese competitive edge is quintessential for the survival of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its economic reform system paired with governmental authoritarianism. The dissertation will focus on the historical context, beginning with Premier Deng Xiaoping's accession and economic liberalization and Xi Jinping's strategic shift towards geopolitical expansionism and historical revanchism and power maximization premises in search of hegemonic power transition between the United States and China and its potential consequences to the international relations.

1.1. Rise of China in International Relations

The prominence of China in international relations may be considered a manifestation of the power maximization against the United States and its allies. The power maximization is defined by John Mearsheimer as he described that states are inherently motivated to maximize their share of power relative to other states and these states do not care over other states power interests (Mearsheimer 2001). States are also driven by the other states external challenges driven by power competition, and this competition is assumed to be driven by "zero-sum" game. In the "zero-sum game", there is an underlying assumption of an invariable amount of total power split in this hegemonic struggle and independence between the sides of the conflict (Mearsheimer 2001). Other key assumptions in this game include the fact that in a "zero-sum game," there is no incentive

to make aggressive movements against other states due to imprecise and incomplete information (Mearsheimer 2001).

Moreover, Robert Gilpin (1981) and Paul Kennedy (1989) described the hegemonic transition in international relations as a cyclical action. Whenever the gap between the challenger and the reigning hegemon diminishes, hierarchical competition takes over the order derived from the hierarchy, and the competition ends when the hierarchy of the new hegemon emerges. This framework allows an understanding of systemic changes and hegemonic transformation in International Relations (Gilpin 1981; Kennedy 1989)

For his part, Charles Kupchan (2014) extended the basis of understanding systemic changes with four dimensions of hegemonic order: geopolitical, socioeconomic, cultural, and commercial logic. The competition over norms and rules, as well as position and status, characterise the hegemonic transitions. As a great power rises, it strives to impose a set of ordering rules specific to its own cultural, economic, and political orientations on its expanding sphere of influence (Kupchan 2014). Kupchan also focuses on the Ottoman Empire, Imperial China, the British Empire, and the United States as cases of hegemonic regimes, emphasising social and political normative changes within each example (Kupchan 2014). Focusing on the recent cases of China, India, Turkey, and Brazil, Kupchan claims that China would be the most significant challenger to the liberal international order (Kupchan 2014). Nonetheless, there is a significant difference in understanding the notions of hegemony for the Chinese state. The Chinese state wants to exercise a regional hegemony in line with the tributary system as Kupchan believed that China's material superiority is the basis for its economic, strategic, and cultural centrality. China's hegemony model would directly challenge the United States' effective control of the Asia-Pacific, and the United States would have to face a challenger directly (Kupchan 2014).

However, according to John Ikenberry (2018), the hegemonic transition over China would not necessarily change the rudimentary notions of rules-based international order, such as multilateralism (Ikenberry 2018). Ikenberry (2018) believes that the hegemony of powerful states can be limited and regularized with the rules-based international order, as this type of governance system should be appealing to weak and peripheral

governments (Ikenberry 2018). As growing states increase their wealth and status, they demand a rule-based framework to defend their gains.

Ian Clark (2011) described the transition of international order as a consensual process rather than a structural framework change. Clark believes that the Chinese hegemony can only be implicated if other states accept an alternative material power. This acceptance can be induced either by newer international organizations that can tackle the hegemon itself or by implementing an asymmetrical order to fulfil the roles to establish an alternative to the rules-based international order (Clark 2011). The newly established order would also have its ideational premises as both the elites and masses of the other great powers to appeal and transform the ideational space to fulfil the hegemonic transition to the Chinese understanding of international order (or Beijing Consensus). The interconnected nature of the ideology, identity and foreign policy are the main legitimization parts of an international hegemonic transition.

Consequently, the hegemonic transition necessitated a consensual ideational approach by the people and the elites. This ideational notion of hegemonic transition was stated by Srdjan Vucetic as follows: a legitimizing ideology is more likely to succeed in unifying and preserving an international order if it makes sense and is acknowledged by both elites and the public in other great-power states (Vucetic 2018). These transitions create inherent tensions between the challenger and the superpower. The process is never as smooth as anticipated.

Giovanni Arrighi (2007) interpreted the transition as a "hybrid of the Western system itself" (Arrighi 2007, 309-313). To Arrighi, China's transformation resulted in a hybrid political-economic formation that provided a particularly favourable environment for the East Asian economic renaissance and the subsequent world transformation beyond the capacity of theories based on the Western system (Arrighi 2007, 309-313). The response to these transformations by the United States has only intensified the extent of this transition through resource competition. China's economic linkages to acquire these resources have driven the competition into a dilemma with the United States (Beeson 2009). The economic interdependence between China and the United States means that without low cost manufactured goods from China, United States consumers would be

unsure about their consumption in the short and long term. Chinese manufacturers would be cut out from one of the significant consumption markets globally. Consequently, powerful economic and political actors in the United States have a vested interest in maintaining cordial relations with an open, outward-looking China, making simple calculations or depictions of national interests more complicated than anticipated (Beeson 2009).

The dilemma is based upon the international relations theory of John Mearsheimer's offensive realism. He believes that the states are always seeking to maximize their powers in international affairs, and balancing acts does not bind themselves with any normative principles as power maximization is the priority for the state officials. These principles are opposed to the benevolent liberal power image of the United States. In foreign policy decision-making, the United States public is convinced that moral compass is superior to power maximization. Mearsheimer (2002) believes that realpolitik decisions cannot be justified by the United States public (Mearsheimer 2002).

Consequently, the liberal notions cover realpolitik's objectionable and deplorable actions, both for the United States public and the international community. Mearsheimer has also broadened the states that extend their territories within the confines of expansionism rationality to maximize power. Mearsheimer considers that the over-expanders are irrational aggressors who pursue regional hegemony erratically, ultimately leading to their catastrophic demise; rational actors are smart aggressors who pursue limited expansion, and overexpanded are irrational aggressors who pursue regional hegemony erratically, ultimately leading to their catastrophic demise (Mearsheimer 2001). China's Confucianist aspect in foreign policy decision-making has been interpreted as a foundation for establishing a sense of rationality and prudence, which has been depicted in the "cultural realism" of Confucian-Mencian strategic thinking as "humane authority" became a perpetual consideration for Chinese foreign policy decision making (Johnston, 1995). Mearsheimer (2001) believes that Confucianist pacifism of China would not be a constant in international relations as he indicates that China has a long history of attempting to maximize its relative power through benevolent governance rather than hegemonic governance. Mearsheimer stated that under the pretext of benevolent governance and developing universal norms, China still has a motive to maximize its

relative power through offensive realism as the state's survival dictates power maximization (Mearsheimer 2001). He also added that there is no reason to believe that China will behave differently from the United Kingdom and the United States in its attempts at hegemony through relative power maximization in the future. Consequently, in this perspective, China's formation of alternative international institutions has been done under universalism, and genuine multilateralism is a pretext for China's hegemonic challenge against the rules-based international order (Mearsheimer 2002). In a similar capacity to the United States' liberal notions to cover actions of realpolitik, China is utilizing the same rhetorical discrepancy to justify its deplorable and objectionable actions. As a result, the question has shifted from whether China's transition to a multipolar world can be interpreted as genuine multilateralism under Chinese tutelage to whether China's attempt to distort the United States' unipolar hegemony for power maximization is interpreted as multilateralism under Chinese domination (Xinbo 2018). However, China shall not aspire to become a hegemon as it is considered "virtually impossible" by John Mearsheimer. Mearsheimer elaborates upon the potential limitations of becoming a hegemon, as he specifically stated that China could only aspire to become a regional hegemon citing historical examples of the United States, the Japanese Empire and Nazi Germany not achieving this status (Mearsheimer 2001).

1.2. Methodology and Research Design

The case study approach will be employed as the primary methodology in the study. The Northwest Passage and the Northern Sea Route will be researched as these routes emphasise China's Arctic White Paper as two possible Arctic Ocean possibilities for safeguarding freedom of navigation by the littoral states. The Northern Sea Route and Northwest Passage cases were selected as the commercial feasibility studies for Arctic navigation were concentrated on two routes by Frederic Lasserre (Lasserre 2014).

These cases will be developed by primary resources such as speeches delivered by each state's presidents and prime ministers, strategy and white papers issued by each state's ministries, and secondary resources such as journal articles, reputable news articles, and books vetted by reputable publishers and peer-reviewed by other scholars will be used to

develop the selected cases. As the theorization indicates, this study will be undertaken within the assumptions and perspective of John Mearsheimer and Kenneth Waltz's neorealism within international relations. This assumption would allow us to build China's view of international relations and perception of the Arctic Ocean at a practical capacity with the Russian and Canadian contexts.

1.3. Theoretical Discussions: Structural Realism versus Global Governance

In the context of *The Tragedy of Great Powers*, John Mearsheimer's (2001) defensive realism and offensive realism theorizations will be applied to comprehend the establishment and value of the Northern Sea Route and Northwest Passage for China. Five assumptions are primarily acknowledged by structural realist scholars in the anarchical character of international affairs (Waltz 1979; Mearsheimer 2001). Firstly, these assumptions exist in the anarchic order of international relations. Secondly, all states possess some military capabilities to inflict some harm to potential adversaries. Thirdly, the uncertainty of intentions between states as the discourse of the statespersons and policymakers cannot be entirely attributed to the real intentions. Fourthly, the main objective of the states in international relations is always survival, and finally, states are assumed as rational actors in every given situation to maximise their survival capabilities (Mearsheimer 2001).

John Mearsheimer defined offensive realism under the assumption that states are incentivised to seek increased power, therefore defying the existence of the power accumulation scheme (Mearsheimer 2001). John Mearsheimer's interpretation of realism dictates that states' inherent rationality, aside from movements of power preservation, should not attempt to over-extend their capabilities for the state's survival because there is no safety net in international relations (Mearsheimer 2001). Mearsheimer believed that the states who maximise their powers are not logically correlated to establish a balance of power among states attempting to become the hegemon within the self-help system (Mearsheimer 2001). Mearsheimer established a framework for the rising powers step-by-step since he believed that to achieve any hegemony, a state should start establishing its capabilities as a prerequisite to challenging great powers (Mearsheimer 2001). The aggressor states may confront a balancing act in this paradigm, although not directly from

the enemy, but from another great power aligned with the adversary. This indirect balancing activity is called “buck-passing”, defined as shouldering the responsibility of deterring and even fighting the aggressor while the buck-passer “sits on the side-lines” (Mearsheimer 2001). Therefore, the “buck-passer” is confronting the aggressor itself without exerting any capabilities and transferring the potential confrontation to the “buck-catcher”. The “buck-catcher” is a great power with the political and military capacity to confront the aggressor without the buck passers' help (Mearsheimer 2001). The notions of “buck-passing” and “buck-catching” are only reliable in unbalanced multipolar international relations where a great power that the aggressors have threatened may choose to transfer the threat to another state while it remains a spectator. In the bipolar or unipolar international system, Mearsheimer also suggests that there is no place for buck-passing and buck-catching (Mearsheimer 2001). However, in the case of a multipolar system with no predominant power, the system of buck-catching and buck-passing also allows a state to utilize its capabilities more effectively.

However, because of the nature of miscalculation and imperfect information about a state's and its prospective opponents' capabilities, this non-complacency of states, in which a state might overextend its capabilities without recognising its limits, is more of a grey area (Mearsheimer 2001). This grey area can lead to overestimation of one's capabilities and misreading of one's enemy, even though the adversary is inferior in its boundaries. Former hegemonic powers overextending would be the United States' invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2003, where the United States intentionally or unintentionally underprepared itself for urban and high-intensive war, likely resulting in an unsustainable war and the loss of economic and diplomatic leverage gained during the conflict. Having the most accurate information and a strategy is paramount to the path to regional and global hegemony. The path of global hegemony also necessitates developing a consensus platform for varying interests and needs. A revisionist state attempts to alter the status quo with newer projects and consensus-building capabilities with lucrative propositions to establish its way of conducting international relations, developing an alternative to global Governance in the first place (He and Feng 2019). Kenneth Waltz was the first to define defensive realism (Waltz 1979). Waltz thought that the anarchy of international relations further strengthened the self-help system, and

international-political institutions are established by cooperating self-interested units. International structures form because of states coexisting. No state aims to create a structure that will confine it and others. Individualist origins, spontaneous generation, and unintended consequences characterise international-political systems (Waltz 1979). Waltz (1979) also argues that the survival of a state may not be the essential goal in every instance of international relations since the structure that binds the coexistence of other nations also binds a state (Waltz 1979). According to Waltz, the essence of anarchy in international relations simply adds to the need to keep the power structure in place (Waltz 1979). As a result, overextending the frontier for marginal gains would destabilise the self-regarding units of the international structure. Waltz highlighted that the skewed balance of power after a confrontation would be restored since survival is a crucial part of international relations regardless of the outcome (Waltz 1979).

James Rosenau (1995) described Global Governance as the notion of global Governance of systems at all levels that aid in pursuing goals by exerting control in a transnational capacity (Rosenau 1995). This description is supplemented by the constitutive elements of Global Governance, such as rule systems, levels of human activity, goal pursuit, and international implications (Rosenau 1995; Dingwerth and Pattberg 2006). Rosenau also elaborates on the hierarchical structures within global governance as some actors attempt to modify and alter other states' behaviours to sustain their control over a given group through international and non-governmental organisations (Rosenau 1995). According to James Rosenau, global governance systems demand various procedures to control each global governance mechanism since a shared history connects them, culture, and structure. Global Governance principles would also protect the states' collective and individual interests from their shared history and culture (Rosenau 1995).

As a result, Global Governance gives equal weight to international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and transnational companies because similar states' concerns can be aggregated through international organizations to protect each other's interests (Rosenau 1995). In this view, this interpretation of Global Governance would allow China to establish Beijing Consensus. The "no-strings-attached" strategy of Chinese investment through the Belt and Road Initiative and complimentary efforts such as the Digital Silk Road, the Maritime Silk Road Initiative and the Polar Silk Road can be considered crucial

examples of conducting businesses across the Eurasian region (Öniş and Kutlay 2020). The most significant distinction between the rules-based international order and the Beijing Consensus is that the Beijing Consensus is focused on bilateral ties rather than monolithic multilateral commitments. The Beijing Consensus has also avoided the normative and internal affairs goals of the liberal international order, such as tolerable human rights records, multiparty elections, or pluralist democracy, to conduct business in international relations (Öniş and Kutlay 2020). AIIB, unlike the World Bank, has no prerequisite for human rights improvement and pluralist democracy. Despite its naming, AIIB is the primary funding source for African nations' infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative. China's manufacturing and shipping advantage heavily depend on the rules-based international order, such as WTO membership, which is quintessential in its strategic calculations (Kastner, Pearson, and Rector 2020; Hameiri and Jones 2018). Through BRI, China integrates trade liberalization and global financial centralization into its agenda to attract states away from the rules-based international order. China also attracts states by lifting normative prerequisites of rules-based international order, promoting diversification via China's dualistic approach. The duality would also make the recipient states more compatible and compliant with the Global Governance of both systems. This compliance would help China's bid to establish the alternative international order and its subsequent organizations while being an insider to the rules-based international order (Ly 2020).

In the Arctic case, China should continue complying with the rules-based international order premises, with economic benefits due to unextracted natural resources and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea III (UNCLOS III) continental shelf claims of Russia. As UNCLOS III Part V suggests, a coastal state has the right to exploit the natural resource within the 200 nautical miles of its coastline at its lowest tide (U.N 1982). In exchange for this assistance, Russia can give China the extracted natural gas and oil at a reduced price to protect Russian sovereignty in the Arctic.

Therefore, in Mearsheimer's perspective, the revisionist argument also establishes a framework for alternative global governance, leveraging liberal international order conceptions and institutions to perpetuate and promote its dominance over the rules-based international order. Rosenau's interpretation would also benefit global governance

empirical situations in the Arctic Council, such as India's ascension to the SCO with Russia's assistance to boost the message of inclusion in the Asia-Pacific (He 2008). In this perspective, there are two different paths to consider for interpretation. China's assertive policies have become more direct in the revisionist path, and it does not refrain from balancing against the United States in the Arctic Ocean with Russian cooperation. The disrupted unipolar hegemony through economic means via institutional balancing and supporting Russia's disruption of the Global Governance with tacit support would give a significant advantage to China at the expense of manufacturing consent amongst the international actors. In the status quo path, the United States, Canada, and United Kingdom go into a soft balancing act to keep the structure of the international system intact with economic sanctions and tariffs. The prohibition of selling Chinese originated technological infrastructure would be a significant example.

This soft balancing act can be extended to the buck catchers, sanctioning Russian businesspeople to avoid circumvention of the international banking systems and Chinese goods that have been manufactured in the prison camps of Xinjiang. In a case of complex balancing, the United States would deploy more naval assets to patrol around the installations over the South China Sea and the Arctic Ocean. This movement, however, does have the potential to antagonise both Russia and China simultaneously since it threatens both Russia's and China's sea lines of communication. In this case, China must resort to buck-passing after evaluating itself to be a regional hegemon over in the Asia-Pacific, with BRI-backed allies and Russian Federation, to avoid the risk of confrontation (Mearsheimer 2001). From a neo-realistic standpoint, China similarly strengthens its capabilities with Russian interests in mind, establishing an interchangeable "buck-passing" and "buck-catching" capability in opposition to the rules-based international order championed by the United States. China has already developed vulnerability reduction measures with redundancies within the Belt and Road Initiative in an economic capacity. In a military sense, China has secured its position with the Russians, as the Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and China on International Relations Entering a New Era and Global Sustainable Development solidified the alliance into a "common shared destiny" position, both politically and economically (Russia 2022).

The development of a “common shared destiny” and plans to accomplish imperial ambitions in the way of former hegemony, notably the United Kingdom and the United States. This ambitious idea has been in the works for more than four decades since the era of Deng Xiaoping. From the perspective of China's international relations, the planning evolved from a combination of power maximisation theory, historical revanchism, and irredentism.



2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO CHINESE INTERNATIONAL CONDUCTS IN THE ARCTIC OCEAN

Historically, the states who established a significant presence over commerce and protected that commerce shaped international relations and foreign policy decision-making strategies. China has been no exception to this pattern since Deng Xiaoping. Xiaoping took the premiership of China in 1978 in an environment of uncertainty from the experiences of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. He announced new planning for the economy called *Gaige Kaifeng* (Reform and Openness- gauge kaifan). Xiaoping determined four pillars of modernisation as agriculture, science, technology, industry, and defence for the premises of Reform. The plan instigated economic reforms at home and opened the world economy to attract investors (Dillon 2015). Xiaoping coined the term "24 Character Strategy" after combining this investing philosophy with low-key politics. The plan is described as observing calmly to safeguard China's position, dealing with matters calmly, hiding their genuine capabilities, and biding their time. Be skilled at keeping a low profile and never claim leadership in any world affairs (Holt and Geis 2009).

Xiaoping planned to open the Chinese economy to the industry world by establishing Special Economic Zones (SEZs). These zones enabled Chinese industrial enterprises to avoid state involvement by providing tax breaks, unhindered foreign direct investments, and exemptions from export taxes. Xiaoping's implementation of market socialism in an incremental fashion to continue the CCP's primacy unhindered and regression of state ownership via privatisation of assets is considered the building blocks of a developmental state for Chinese economics (The World Bank 2009). This economic modelling allowed him to consolidate party members over preserving the Chinese Communist Party's rule. Controlling the socioeconomic discourse should be prioritised as the "market socialism with Chinese characteristics" was emphasised in 1984 (Tisdell 2009). The developmental state has been defined as combining capitalist measures with state interventions to sustain economic growth (Bolesta 2007). Foreign investment necessitated state control over SEZs was the emphasis for the growth.

Hence restrictions upon freedom of expression were enforced as foreign direct investment had also brought politically contradictory connotations that CCP had feared that the regime's economic opening might bring its demise. Xiaoping had to reassure that the "market socialism with Chinese characteristics" would not invoke any political revolution that CCP members and the Politburo regarded as an existential issue (Kerns 2011). Xiaoping's and Politburo's political fears nearly materialised on June 4th, 1989, as university students protested for democratic reforms at Beijing's Tiananmen Square. According to Li Peng, student movements constitute an explicit declaration of war against the Party; Peng asserted that these students could not have arisen independently but rather through specific Western entities (Kerns 2011). Protesters demanded to speak with party officials to persuade them to deliver their petition to Premier Deng Xiaoping and Li Peng, which had backfired as the People's Liberation Army (hereafter PLA) intervened in the protests with tanks and soldiers on the same day. PLA soldiers counting around fifteen thousand ordered to "take Tiananmen at any costs" against three thousand unarmed protesters encircled Tiananmen Square. PLA opened fire with live ammunition. Thirty-six students and over 200 civilians died in the next shooting and stampede (Kerns 2011).

The tragedy sent a clear message to the CCP that sustaining economic upheaval and satisfaction would not necessarily divert attention from the lack of political freedoms. The Chinese government was publicly denounced by the United States and its allies and by conservative factions within the CCP who feared losing China's political control. Fears about CCP's survival prompted Xiaoping to resign in November 1989 (Dillon 2015). The successor of Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin, ascended to the premiership. Zemin criticised the persistence of control of the economics thoroughly by conservatives in CCP, and the left radicalism in CCP did not emphasise incremental measures of the market economy of Xiaoping. The conservatives within the CCP sought to retain Mao Zedong's thoughts and staunch adherence to self-sufficiency and total state control in its economic affairs. The moderates wanted to overhaul the economic liberalisation under the supervision of the CCP with the help of State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). Zemin was a concessionary candidate between the moderates and the conservatives within CCP. Therefore, his concessionary position necessitated swift action. Zemin devised the plan to reactivate *Gaige Kaifeng* (Reform and Openness- gauge kaifan). Deng Xiaoping went to the city of

Nanxun (Nanshan) in 1992, where he delivered a speech targeting radicalism in the CCP and the dangers of radicalism in the political environment (Ramadhani 2021). The concerns were once voiced again in the 14th Congress in 1992, where Zemin declared a socialist market economy as the official party program, and the aim of the CCP should be to focus on “building socialism with Chinese characteristics” embedded into the 6th Article the Chinese Constitution (Ramadhani 2021). Zemin created the socialist market economy by regressing state ownership from state-owned enterprises (SOEs) other than the backbone firms (such as electricity, water and heating elements, telecommunications, and transportation infrastructure) and intervening in the market to achieve good, sustainable growth and macroeconomic regulation. China would open itself toward limited liability and limited shareholder corporations for investments, and state-owned enterprises (SOEs) would reform themselves to allocate more capital by taking worker collectives out of the equation, which would be replaced with shareholders. SOEs were awarded contracts to appease conservatives to retain Chinese control (Brødsgaard 2017). Zemin's model had produced results in the world market for cheaper manufacturing. Consequently, foreign direct investment grew from 19.2 billion USD in 1992 to 58.5 billion USD in 1999.¹ China grew around 9.5 per cent on average between 1992 to 1999, which meant doubling its economic capacity in 8 years (Morrison 2019).

Economic competitiveness for market transformation has been implemented in Chinese markets, with Special Economic Zone (SEZ) becoming the epicentre for electronics manufacturing and research and design centres directed at Asia and the rest of the world. In the case of Shenzhen, a small fishing village near British Hong Kong in 1980, the declaration of SEZ caused Shenzhen to grow exponentially to 18 million residents in 2020, hosting headquarters and manufacturing plants for electronics and entrepreneurs who can take advantage of its low-cost manufacturing (Ng 2003). The opening of Gaige Kaifang was bolstered by China's ambition to integrate itself into international commerce through the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which evolved into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995. These negotiations required the adoption of a uniform system of trade rules across the country, the elimination of quantitative import

¹ Chinese Statistics Yearbook 2001, Retrieved from <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2020/indexeh.htm>

controls, the publication of trade regulations, an official pledge to transform the Chinese economy into a robust market economy, and the protection of other countries from sudden surges of Chinese imports through safeguards (Wang 2011). However, Xiaoping's implementation of these ideas demanded concessions and appeasement to the United States and its allies that China would never consider, as these discussions had consequences for transforming state-owned enterprises to make them more compatible with international competition. These compatibilities were beneficial since China's integration into international trade would be completed with its accession to the World Trade Organization, even if it required making short-term concessions over disputes over international waters in the South China Sea.

Jiang Zemin's state visit to Washington underlined his commitment to international trade integration by emphasising the prudent and reasonable pursuit of long-term objectives (Khan 2018). United States backed the Chinese accession to the WTO to reduce its trading partners' import costs and increase their competitiveness. Western nations believed that the CCP would not be able to withstand the information revolution once they joined the World Trade organisation, appealing to Jiang Zemin's holistic approach to a foreign policy on façade (Ianchovichina and Walmsley 2005). However, Jiang Zemin's conciliatory measures were stymied by the Taiwan problem. The critical distinction, for Taiwan, at the leadership level is that Zemin had laid out a schedule for unification with Taiwan in the form of an eight-point proposal that advised developing economic, cultural, sports, educational, technological, and other interactions with the people of Taiwan (Suisheng 2010).

Zemin and his successor, Hu Jintao, felt that the United States' hegemony might be challenged via the exact mechanisms that the United States used for its disruption, international institutions. As a way to counter the Islamic fractions of their separatist movements (Chung 2014). Beijing's founding of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was a case in point, formed with post-Soviet Central Asian republics in June 2001. The organisation's key objective is to fight terrorism, separatism, and extremism in its manifestations, drug trafficking and weapon trafficking, other sorts of transnational criminal activities, and illegal migration (SCO 2018).

Following 9/11, China's agenda in Central Asia for counterterrorism gained support, as Russia, China, and other SCO members cooperated to alleviate extremist separatism.

The Chinese and Russian authorities have evaluated this cooperation. China had also used the United Nations Security Council to further its international and domestic agenda, seizing on the United States' strategic mistakes in 9/11. China has also stated that it would cooperate with the obligations of United Nations Security Council resolutions, voting overwhelmingly in favour of counterterrorism measures, such as Resolutions 1368 and 1373, which mandated states to cooperate on counterterrorism (U.N.S.C 2001) (Koehler 2013).

In his international strategy, Hu Jintao was cautious and tolerant about consensual resolution in the face of disputes. Jintao's idealistic international relations approach of "building a harmonious world" reveals the potential of Chinese soft power, as the Chinese soft power strategy is separated into four categories. Firstly, the harmony is based on stabilising national development against international responsibilities (Ding 2008). Secondly, economic benefits must be prioritized in the face of political and security considerations (Ding 2008). Thirdly, harmonious relations with world powers against those with other nations have to be developed. Finally, Jintao insisted on Reform to keep the status quo of the world order (Ding 2008). The harmony has also been established in the economic frontier as well, as China grew 11% year-to-year on average between 2002 to 2008, thanks to its low-cost electronics manufacturing and low barriers for entrepreneurs and received a total of 143 billion USD via foreign direct investments in 2007 alone (Morrison 2012).

In this sense, the United States' hegemony made economic sense for China, where there was no confrontational political interference; but the international order status quo shattered on September 15th, 2008. As the global economy entered a depression, the threat of deflation lurked in China as consumer and investor confidence plunged. The crisis exposed China's most significant flaw: the creation of wealth in China is too dependent on export demand to international markets. In response to the economic crisis, China's stimulus package centred on infrastructure projects that expanded the

transportation network along internal corridors and enhanced resilience by improving governance between China regions and toughening the supply chains (Xinbo 2010).

Chinese commercial banks lost approximately \$20 billion in collateralised debt obligations and were on the brink of losing over \$400 billion in assets owing to bankruptcy in the subprime crisis (Xinbo 2010). The Chinese manufacturing dependence on Western spending has been exposed as it fuelled mistrust. China's mistrust of the United States was natural since more than half of the 2.5 trillion USD that China has accumulated over the last 30 years since the 2008 crisis was deposited in the United States Treasury, and the United States' recovery was weaker than anticipated (Nye 2010). In contrast to the United States' strategy of rescuing subprime mortgage companies at the expense of taxpayers, China had to weather the storm of the 2008 economic recession with stimulus packages bringing a total of around 4 trillion Chinese renminbi (560 billion USD) directed to the improvement of social safety nets, subsidising essential sectors of agriculture and infrastructure projects, and continuity of CCP rule via bridging urban-rural gaps (French, Leyshon, and Thrift 2009).

Chinese suspicion of Western governments turned into a significant driving factor in developing an alternative style of governance. As a response, China suggested a new level of Global Governance called the Beijing Consensus, which focuses on innovation-based development, sustainable and equitable development for a state, and, most importantly, globalisation. As a result, it opposed the Washington Consensus ideas such as deregulation, privatisation, and a solid adherence to property rights as the appeal of the Washington Consensus waned, prolonging the recession in both the United States and European crises (Ramo 2004). This doctrine emphasises the rejection of the Washington Consensus and the promotion of prudent financial liberalisation and a combination of market and central planning. China planned its economic strategy through a consortium of the CCP and SOEs, offering a private monopoly owned by SOEs; nonetheless, the Chinese stock market was allowed to function for non-strategic (defence and essential infrastructure) sectors. Beijing's capabilities expanded in conjunction with the model described by Western scholars as authoritarian capitalism, the exact antithesis of free enterprise capitalism (Williamson 2012).

The Beijing Consensus had also revealed China's geopolitical ambitions, and its' understanding of the economic pathway of state-owned enterprises and state intervention to alleviate their economic slump became a model to be implemented by other East Asian countries (Li, Brødsgaard, and Jacobsen 2010). The Beijing Consensus also highlighted China's geopolitical ambitions, concealed behind the Xiaoping doctrines it had founded. The economic path of state-owned enterprises and government intervention to alleviate their economic depression became a model for other East Asian countries to emulate. This consensus model allowed Hu Jintao's successor, Xi Jinping, to implement policies that prioritise the expansion of the Beijing Consensus over the rules-based international order.

Xi Jinping expressed personal hostility and scepticism against his Western colleagues as he rose to the presidency. Having first-hand experience with the Tiananmen Square in 1989 and the 2008 Economic Crisis and an internal statement obtained by journalist Gao Yu, named Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere or Document No.9, has highlighted the extent of his scepticism. This document specifically requested and recommended correcting mistaken views and directing the Party members to correct misconceptions regarding Western Constitutional Democracy, trying to promote 'universal values' to weaken the Party's theoretical foundations (ChinaFile 2013). Xi also extended its countermeasures against breaches of CCP's absolute political control via adding the provisions to the document, using Western ideals to conduct journalism to challenge the Party's control over the media, and questioning Gaige Kaifeng or the innate socialist nature within Socialism with China. The entire document was a call to campaign against the ideological battlefield against the Western with an unwavering commitment to the Party's principle and control of the media (ChinaFile 2013).

Since 2013, most political debate has focused chiefly on Xi Jinping's narrative of China having completed and constructed a rich and powerful, democratic, civilised, socialist-modernising state while ultimately emancipating it from Western hegemony. Jinping envisioned a unique form of national rejuvenation and credited China as a significant country that must serve credibility to neighbouring countries based on justice, fairness, and morality rather than economic interests (Ferdinand 2016; Xuotong 2014). Despite the de-emphasis on economic considerations, China's foreign policy thinking has been united

under the slogan of "China Dream, Asia Dream." The project is a two-tiered alliance system that Xi Jinping has defined as "an agenda to establish a community of shared destiny" by interweaving a network of international relations into Sino-centric global governance and incorporating economic credibility through Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank grants and loans (Callahan 2016). This agenda and "shared destiny" narrative unified into the Belt and Road Initiative, a global governance system based on economic and political areas to integrate Eurasian, South Pacific, and East African countries into the Beijing Consensus and establish an alternative world order to the Liberal International Order (Fallon 2015).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) includes 72 African, Asian, and European nations. The Initiative includes many transcontinental infrastructure projects to eradicate impediments to the Chinese market's land and sea trading channels. BRI contains corridors linked via overland and maritime routes (known as the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative): The first overland route from Xi'an across Central Asia to the Baltic Sea nations. The second overland route continues the same path but ends in the Persian Gulf instead of the Mediterranean Sea. The third overland route passes through the Himalayas to reach the Indian subcontinent (Huang 2016). Xi Jinping's official address at the 19th Congress of CCP Xi focused on China's intentions and a roadmap for the Belt and Road Initiative. In structural realist framework for its objectives in the premises of BRI permeates a clear message as the upsurge in China's international influence, motivation, and inspiration. China has made substantial new contributions to global peaceful coexistence. China would never undertake development at the expense of others' interests; however, China must not give up its legitimate rights and interests (Xinhua News Agency 2017). Xi understood that the ability to inspire and influence is ingrained in every Belt and Road Initiative element. Through BRI, China attempts to control the industries through infrastructure in some manufacturing areas where China cannot be competitive against its Southeast Asian counterparts (Dunford 2016). Consequently, China is establishing its own cheaper manufacturing line internationally by acquiring its significant capabilities to sustain its internal consumption and export advanced technologies (Carmody 2020).

The project's first goal is to recreate the historical pathways of the original overland Silk Road through Central Asia and the Middle East. On the other hand, the convergence of economics and security is evident in these areas as the Chinese government aspires to have no vulnerabilities in any project's frontier. One of these projects is the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway Project, which commences in Kashgar, Xinjiang and extends through Kyrgyzstan into Tashkent, Uzbekistan. On the other hand, total expenses of around USD 6 billion scheduled to be funded by the Chinese Export and Import Bank (Chinese Eximbank) run into financial difficulties. Terror threats have jeopardised Uzbek and Kyrgyz presidents' construction promises since the project's inauguration in 2013. China has the option of developing more accessible alternatives, such as the Kazakhstan-Chinese Railway, which offers more accessible and stable routes for trains and pipelines to build without the risk of terrorism and sabotage (Dave and Kobayashi 2018).

On the other hand, China's vulnerability cannot be reduced to a single point of failure, such as Kazakhstan; China is also looking for another feasible railway transit alternative (Dave and Kobayashi 2018). In 2020, Kyrgyz President Sooronbay Jeenbekov announced that Russia had expressed interest in finalising the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway Project in a "3+1 capacity" in order to develop Kyrgyzstan's rural areas holistically and to ensure the supply chain for the Kyrgyz people's essential goods (Jeenbekova 2020). Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Bishkek to discuss project funding and Russia's engagement in railway negotiations, citing the importance of bilateral strategic partnership as another option to maintain energy security and reduce both countries' vulnerabilities (Roberts 2019). China wanted to make substantial use of traditional maritime routes through the South China Sea, the Malacca Straits, the Indian Ocean, and the Suez Canal, terminating in Western European ports, as part of the Maritime Silk Road Initiative. The project includes extensive planning to alleviate chokepoints with adequate infrastructure in the areas of the geopolitically significant Indian Ocean and the Suez Canal (Blanchard and Flint 2017).

The Chinese government has portrayed the project as a "String of Pearls". It has a diplomacy component that encourages substantial integration of international maritime trade, unfettered trade routes, resources, and ideas as sea lines of communication (SLOCs) offshore energy developments in the Indian Ocean (Brady 2017). Critical

SLOCs across the Indian Ocean, such as Pakistan, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka, can illustrate China's geoeconomical objectives with the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (Pehrson 2008).

2.1. Maritime Silk Road Initiative: Chinese Sea Lines of Communications

In the case of Pakistan, the Gwadar Deep Seaport and its subsequent pipeline project, which China took over from the Singapore Port Authority in 2012, is a typical example of China's geoeconomical and geopolitical strategy as part of both the BRI and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) agreement. On the other hand, the CPEC's obligations entail the construction of nearly 2600 kilometres of highways and the renovation of existing highways to carry bulk and container trucks across some of the world's most treacherous terrains. For example, the Abbottabad-Gilgit route traverses the Hindukush Mountains at almost 4,000 meters to reach the Chinese border (Ahmad Khan 2013). If the Malacca Straits and the South China Sea become inaccessible for transporting oil and natural gas from the Middle East, Gwadar Port is designated to utilise as a possible frontier and a backup access point. Similarly, China designated these ports as transfer ports to China across Central Asia, as China may avoid both the South China Sea and the Malacca Straits entirely to acquire Middle Eastern natural resources (Garlick 2018).

On the other hand, there is a significant caveat to the Gwadar Deep Seaport establishment scheme investment. China Overseas Port Authority oversees the Gwadar port, and 95% of trade transmits through either Gwadar or Karachi, controlled by the China Harbour Engineering Company (CHEC) (Malik 2019). Thereby, claiming that China is obtaining control of Pakistan's maritime trade and undermining Pakistani sovereignty is not a far-fetched proposition (Malik 2019) The Malacca Strait bypass was considered long before the Myanmar example formed the BRI. On the other hand, the project was reutilised under the BRI. PetroChina struck a deal with the Burmese government in 2005 to construct a natural gas pipeline linking Kyaukphyu (Kau-Fuyu) Port to Kunming in Yunnan Province. Despite the pipeline's completion in 2013, due to anti-Chinese sentiments in Myanmar politics, it delivered its first batch of oil to Kunming in September 2017. This pipeline is connected to the Kyaukphyu Port and SEZ, constructed by CHEC and China National Petroleum Company (CNPC; PetroChina) (Malik 2018). On the other hand,

the pipeline's use was jeopardised by the dissolution of Myanmar's military junta, first in 2011 and 2021. The political stability of Myanmar is a concern for China to maintain the inflow of raw materials through the Sino-Burmese border (Hlaing 2012). The Military Junta of Myanmar's pro-United States sentiments meant that the Chinese government did not see this option as a viable and non-volatile way of acquiring goods (Hlaing 2012).

In the case of Sri Lanka, dependency and a breach of sovereignty are especially noticeable in the Hambantota Port project. By its geographical proximity, Sri Lanka allows China to bypass the Indian subcontinent entirely and act as a conduit for transfers to the Malacca Straits. The Sri Lankan government would appreciate the Chinese government's protection against India, and having a deep water port in Sri Lanka would significantly benefit the economy. On the other hand, Sri Lanka has also positioned itself at the mercy of the Chinese government, as the Hambantota Port costs around USD 1.3 billion to develop and operate, which accounts for 25% of Sri Lanka's annual GDP (Carrai 2019). This strategy is known as debt-trap diplomacy because it traps a receiving nation in an economic crisis resolved by debt-equity negotiations. In exchange for debt relief, the receiving nation, on the other side, must relinquish ownership of the allotted infrastructure to the equity buyers (Carmody 2020). In the case of Sri Lanka, the Sri Lanka Port Authority signed a concessionary debt-equity lease agreement for 973 million USD to China Merchants Port Holdings Company Limited for 99 years (Limited 2017). Sri Lanka's government was relieved from burdensome debts. Consequently, exports and imports via Sri Lanka have virtually been put under the control of Chinese authorities for the next 99 years (Singh 2020).

For China, maintaining economic competitiveness may be only half the story, as cross-border security risks, combined with the political stability of BRI-recipient countries, may be jeopardised by outstanding debt, resulting in political consequences that threaten Chinese interests in the region. As a result, the PLAN (PLA Navy) deployment has been the focal point for sustaining operations to protect these interests and secure the political realignment of BRI-recipient nations in the Indian Ocean. China was suspicious of India's influence. India could blockade the western entry/exit point Malacca Straits through the Andaman-Nicobar Islands. China would lose vital oil access in a blockade situation, particularly oil tankers using the Malacca Straits (Erickson 2008). Extended supply

routes would result in unmanageable delays. To minimise bottlenecks, all three examples of port dealings contain components to host the PLA Navy indefinitely under the premises of freedom of navigation, fulfilment of United Nations mandates for anti-piracy measures, and replenishment of serving PLA Navy members across the Indian Ocean (Upadhyaya 2017).

According to United Nations reports, the Gulf of Aden is one of the western chokepoints in the Indian Ocean to the rest of the world's seas, and it is the world's most significant hotspot for maritime piracy (Leymarie et al., 2013). In the case of Djibouti, China's interests were purely geopolitical and geoeconomical. Anti-piracy and anti-terrorism actions prioritise the continuation of maritime operations through the Gulf of Aden. The most visible indication of Chinese interests in the Gulf of Aden came in May 2015, when Djiboutian President Omer Guelleh announced the creation of the PLA Navy Support Base of Djibouti (Cabestan 2020). This establishment was confirmed in November 2015 by Ministry of Defence spokesperson Colonel Wu Qian as a frontier for maintaining regional peace and stability in the interests of all countries and the common aspiration of the people of China and Djibouti and the world at large. The Chinese navy escort ships encountered numerous challenges during escort operations, namely personnel recuperation, food, and replenishment. It is essential to have adequate and close-by logistical support (Cabestan 2020; Shuang 2017).

On the other hand, the base's proximity to United States Camp Lemonier and Japan's Self-Defence Forces Base in Djibouti City has become a significant concern for the Chinese government for its efforts to secure geoeconomical interests along the Indian Ocean whilst complying with United Nations anti-piracy mandates. Xi Jinping's national rejuvenation project, recognised as the Belt and Road Initiative and the Maritime Silk Road, is a strategy for securing economic competitiveness through debt-trap diplomacy. China gradually wants to secure its economic interests by fostering dependence through the BRI and MSRI projects in Africa and Southeast Asia. The Chinese government focuses on creating a competitive edge, even in sectors where the mainland wage necessitates relocation to lower waged countries; this gives China significant leverage in determining the market for cheaper production by controlling or funding the entire existing infrastructure in Southeast Asia. The Chinese Sea Lines of Communications

extended from the Indian Ocean, the Suez Canal, and the Malacca Straits (including Lombok, Bali, and Japan-controlled Miyako straits). Geopolitically, these chokepoints are governed by other states; even during peacetime, it was unacceptable to be utterly reliant on other states (Brady 2017).

As a result, China needs an alternative method of establishing its maritime lines of communication without being hindered by any nation's chokepoints. The Arctic Ocean's thawing ice has provided an alternative.



3. THE ARCTIC OCEAN AND CHINA'S INTERESTS

The Arctic Circle is broadly defined by the Arctic Ocean and its coastal regions at 66° 33' North, up to the North Pole. This circle includes eight Arctic-littoral countries: Sweden, Finland, Denmark (through Greenland dependency), Norway, Canada, the Russian Federation, and the United States (Nuttall and Dodds 2010). The Arctic Ocean is losing its ice caps at an accelerating rate, with 1.64 million square kilometres of ice coverage on average from 1979 to 2017. Per the estimates, ice-free summer seasons in the Arctic are not far distant. Summers without snow are projected as early as the mid-2030s (Smith and Stephenson 2013). Ice-free paths in the Arctic Ocean would allow for freedom of transportation and natural resource exploitation, attracting the attention of Asian countries such as South Korea, Japan, and, notably, China (Overland and Wang 2013; Nuttall and Dodds 2010)

China's interest in the Arctic Ocean stems from natural sciences studies, which is not new. In the 1920s, China signed the Spitsbergen (Svalbard) Treaty. The State Oceanic Administration of China's efforts to conduct natural science research on the Antarctic and Arctic frontiers in the 1970s reignited interest in the Arctic. China's ambitions to become a frontier for natural scientific analysis in the Antarctic environment intensified in the 1990s, and in 2005, it aspired to become a "polar great power" between 2015 and 2030 (Brady 2017). China's ascendance to observer status in the Arctic Council in 2007 and insistence on becoming a permanent member of the Arctic Council manifest Chinese interests in the Arctic Ocean (Lim 2018). China views the organization as a "great opportunity" to be used to sidestep all of these chokepoints through the Polar Silk Road, an offshoot of the Maritime Silk Road Initiative (Dodds 2010).

In 2011, China declared itself to be a near-Arctic state. China also declared universal rights to resources and freedom of transportation as it framed the Arctic as a "global commons" (Brady 2017). The phrase of "global commons" refers to the convergence of the domains of aerospace, maritime space, cyberspace, and outer space. In this scenario, the maritime domain of the global commons is significant for China because disruptions

to maritime commerce, such as piracy, would undermine China's economic competitiveness (Sperling 2015).

Therefore, understanding China's global commons rejects Arctic-littoral states' claims to natural resources and exclusive economic zone in the Arctic and Antarctica, as China claims that these regions are the common areas of humankind. China demonstrated its advanced interest in the Arctic Ocean in January 2018 with the release of the Arctic White Paper, emphasising the infrastructure projects for these corridors and the undertaking of commercial trial voyages following international law to lay the groundwork for their commercial and regularised operation (China 2018). China also emphasised navigation security across Arctic shipping routes. It has actively researched these routes and has consistently enhanced hydrographic surveys to strengthen the Arctic's navigation, security, and logistical capacity (China 2018). Polar Silk Road emphasised natural science, sea lines of communications, and freedom of navigation. The understanding of global commons was implemented into the sea line of communications, and the path of freedom of transportation over the Arctic diverged in three different ways: Northwest Passage who passes through the Canadian Archipelago to circumvent the Panama Canal; Transpolar Passage, who transmits over the North Pole and finally Northern Sea Route, which follows the internal waters of Russian Federation to terminate in Murmansk. The latter circumvents Malacca Straits, the Indian Ocean, Suez Canal, and Gibraltar Strait (Brady 2017). On the other hand, UNCLOS III and claimant states' positions for exclusivity could jeopardise the ideals of "hindrance-free sea lines of communication" that China strives for in the first place for vulnerability reduction (Buitrago 2020).

Pilot voyages and feasibility assessments by shipping companies demonstrate the maritime lines of communication; these examples are supported by real-world scenarios for the Northern Sea Route. The average bulk cargo vessel from Shekou to Porsgunn, Norway, carrying 40 thousand tons of mineralised fertiliser both in the Suez and NSR, burns not only half the fuel per day (15 tons/day compared to 31 tons/day) and reduces the distance by 2000 nautical miles (Schøyen and Bråthen 2011).

In conclusion, 40 thousand metric tons of fertiliser were transported across Asia to Norway for 42.60 USD per metric ton rather than 43.30 USD per metric ton, saving nearly 30 thousand USD per leg in this example (Schøyen and Bråthen 2011). However, there

are also pilot voyages between Narvik and Qingdao that can save upwards of 800 thousand USD per leg, which is an immense proposition for shipping companies. In both voyages, the most significant expenses in the NSR were not the fuel but Russia's insurance premium and NSR passage charges (Lasserre 2014). The ships were deemed profitable, assuming that the ships had no ice protection specialisation by design, making the route highly dependent on the season and availability of icebreakers between May and September (Verny and Grigentin 2009 ;Smith and Stephenson 2013). Despite the thawing ice, the year-to-year variations of the weather and ice coverage, absence of layover and replenishment ports, NSR passage costs, and specialised training that the vessel crews must receive still mount a significant challenge for the navigability of the Arctic Ocean. For the route, transport of exploited natural resources in the Arctic Ocean is sought by the Asian shipping companies (Lee and Kim 2015).

On the other hand, for China, the vision of a barrier-free Arctic Ocean may be compromised because utilising Arctic natural resources may not be practicable under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea III (UNCLOS III) (U.N 1982). According to Article 21 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea III, coastal governments may implement laws and regulations relating to innocent passage to preserve the coastal state's environment and prevent, reduce, and control pollution (U.N 1982). Articles 40 to 42, which prohibit innocent passage and transit passage and maritime operations in a coastal country's exclusive economic zone and territorial sea, are at the discretion of the coastal states, further outlining the scope and limitations of the articles (U.N 1982). As a result, in the Arctic, China's ambitions to exploit natural resources to benefit its continued economic competitiveness are susceptible to international treaties and coastal governments' discretion. The goals of the Chinese government are essentially hampered legally by their signatories. China must use bilateral and multilateral dealings to exploit natural resources in the Arctic, as harnessing these natural resources also implies that bilateral and multilateral collaboration with Arctic-littoral states is necessary.

3.1. Sino-Russian Relations in the Northern Sea Route

In the case of the Northern Sea Route, the Russian Federation controls more than half of the internal water routes and holds the keys to success for the Chinese state's Polar Silk Road because Russian foreign policy is hesitant to cooperate with the Chinese state both in Central Asia and in the Arctic Ocean due to sovereignty concerns (Gao and Erokhin 2020). Russia's Arctic development planning is settled with the Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone and the Ensurance of National Security.

The development strategy admitted a lack of expertise in searching, exploring, and developing offshore hydrocarbon deposits and depreciation of transportation, industrial, and energy infrastructure. The strategy also admitted the insufficient development of navigation, hydrographic and hydrometeorological support of navigation, and a lack of means of continuous integration in the Russian Arctic (Russian Government 2013). Russia established a strategy known as "Russia's Pivot to the East", prioritising improving the Arctic Ocean's transportation and resource extraction infrastructure. The prospective natural resources prompted the pivot. According to United States surveys, the Arctic Ocean and its surrounding waters hold 10% of undiscovered petroleum and natural gas in the world, majorly concentrated in Western Siberia and the Northern Sea Route (Stauffer 2009). The Russian government intends to revitalise and modernise the Soviet-era infrastructure of twenty-five distinct ports to aid navigation and freedom of transportation and port integration via railroad expansion to make use of these resources.

Despite increased hostility from Western liberal democracies and Western sanctions due to the Crimean Peninsula annexation, Russia's objectives coincided with China's vision of expanding the Arctic Ocean. Russia and China's desire for partnership eventually resulted in a shared understanding and convergence of interests (Peng and Wegge 2016). This convergence was strengthened in November 2014, when China successfully bade on a deep-water drilling rig in the Kara Sea with Gazprom. Sinopec acquired a 20% stake in the Yamal LNG/Arctic LNG 2 project in Sabetta and a 10% stake in Vankorneft, a subsidiary of Rosneft Gaz (Russian State Oil Company). As a result of this acquisition, the Chinese state control 1/3 of the Yamal LNG project through share swaps (Alexeeva

and Lasserre 2018). The drillings demonstrate knowledge of Chinese national oil corporations since the technical features of offshore drilling in low-temperature settings is an advanced extraction and drilling technology.

On the other hand, Rosneft's lack of technological know-how impedes its development in the Kara Sea, and it is heavily reliant on Chinese capabilities on Russian land to avoid Western sanctions (Hsiung 2016). After the invasion of Ukraine, Russia was subject to extensive Western sanctions over its natural gas and petroleum payments as the Gazprom Neft, Gazprom Bank, Sberbank, Rosneft and VTB Bank were added to the United Kingdom and European Union sanctions (Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation 2022; Drian 2022; U. S. Treasury 2022). These sanctions make it hard for Russia to leverage financial and political capital via Western states. In addition to European penalties, banks were barred from using the SWIFT financial messaging system under United States sanctions, isolating Russian banks from the worldwide banking system (SWIFT 2022). As a result, Russia sought alternative natural gas and oil clients to fund its economy and war efforts in Ukraine and develop and utilize other bank messaging systems and help circumvent European Union and the United States sanctions. The natural gas payments that sustain the Russian economy and war efforts have also dwindled. These concerns are compounded by Total Energies' decision to withdraw funding for the Yamal LNG and Arctic Energy 2 projects, and Italian banks have placed a hold on loans totalling roughly 500 million Euros (561 million USD) for the Yamal LNG and Arctic Energy 2 projects (Fonte 2022).

The convergence of interests with China has struck once more, as China wants to reduce its vulnerability to non-renewables and its extraction, and Russia wants to sustain its ailing economy through natural gas exports (Lukin 2021). On the other hand, with just three million tonnes of LNG produced yearly, the Yamal LNG project is insufficient for China to shut down coal operations and Russia to sustain its sanctioned economy. Since China's government-controlled natural gas prices made it extremely difficult to supply the market without massive losses, CNPC was hesitant to acquire natural gas at international market rates (Hsiung 2016). In 2007, Gazprom and Rosneft, for example, asked for \$300 for 1000 cubic meters, but CNPC could only offer \$180.

The "Power of Siberia" agreement constructed two pipelines in Siberia: west pipelines that go through Novosibirsk and reach Urumqi and east pipelines that run to Manchuria as shown in the Figure 1. The agreement resolved the pricing disparity between CNPC and Gazprom, and Russian SOEs have secured a recurrent bulk client for their natural gas at roughly 280 United States dollars per 1000 cubic meters at international market pricing (Liu and Xu 2021).



Figure 1 Russia-China gas pipeline network: Retrieved from (Liu and Xu 2021)

These pipes were built to deploy thirty billion cubic meters of natural gas per year. The Sino-Russian cooperation has also extended to the NSR's maritime security and extension in the Arctic Ocean. To address threats of terrorism, illegal immigration, poaching, smuggling, and environmental pollution, Russia's reinvigoration of military bases around the Severny and Kotelnny islands necessitates a more active Russian security apparatus that must operate in a vast territory to guarantee the freedom of transportation safely (Kobzeva 2020). Due to geopolitical considerations, Russia and China are reluctant to highlight the Arctic Ocean defence, so their grand plan has focused on joint military exercises under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Peace Missions framework since 2005. The joint operations of the PLA Navy and the Russian Navy expand with Joint Sea Naval exercises in the South China Sea and the Sea of Japan (Schwartz 2018).

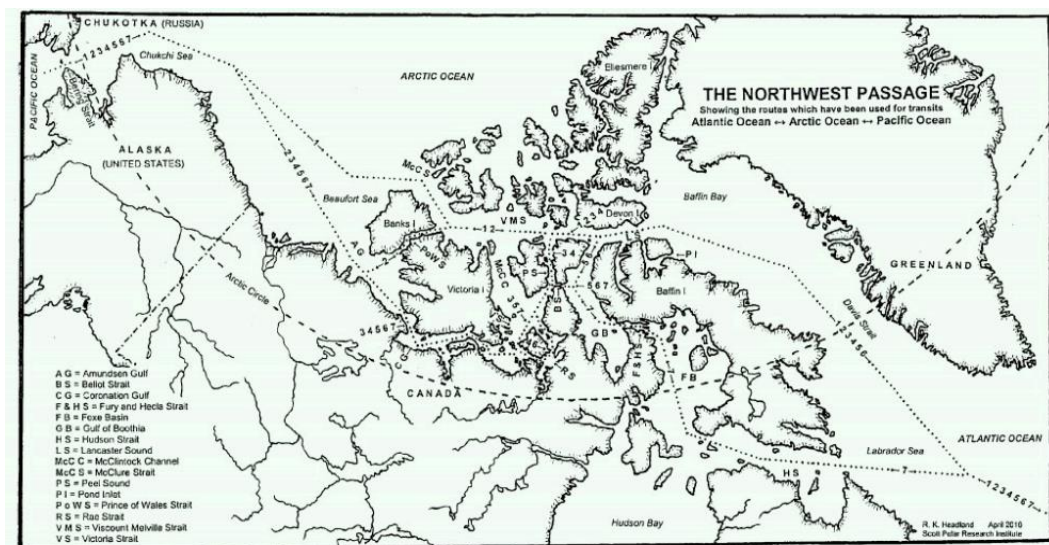
However, there is no icebreaker cooperation in the Arctic since Rosatom (Russian Atomic Energy Corporation) oversees the deployment of nuclear-powered icebreakers and orders diesel-electric icebreakers from German and Finnish shipyards. Russia intends to build up to 40 icebreakers for various purposes, including port ice-breaking and deep-water ice-breaking, for deployment in the 2020s and 2030s. Nuclear energy will power five of these icebreakers (Drewniak et al. 2018). The deployment costs of Russian icebreakers are estimated to be up to USD 1 billion altogether. Russian President Vladimir Putin's December 2017 decision to declare exclusivity in the operations of the Russian coastline for aiding navigation, ice-breaking, and carrying out sanitary, rescue, and environmental activities in the waters of the NSR; reinforces the significance of these icebreakers for Russian foreign policy (Moe and Brigham 2017). The declaration is a significant impediment to Chinese interests in the Northern Sea Route, as the declaration creates a security dilemma, much to the Chinese dismay. Russia does not want to be a bystander in its territorial waters in the NSR to expand the NSR route, but Russia does not rule out considerable engagement with China as part of a strategic partnership in the NSR. However, Russia explicitly rejects the possibility of a bipolar world system between China and the United States, in which it would have to appeal to China for its interests, and Chinese companies have always demanded a secure position in management for their interests in return for their investments, relegating Russian interests to a secondary position in their internal affairs, which is an absolutely unacceptable position for Russian foreign policy and internal affairs (Alexeeva and Lasserre 2018; Sørensen and Klimenko 2017)

China's attempt to control Russian internal affairs through the acquisition of Arctic-going companies may not help alleviate the challenges associated with the NSR. Chinese foreign policy should include concessions to the Russian state, akin to its vulnerability reduction envisioned in the development of the Northern Sea Route by becoming a circumvention point for the Russian energy export sanctions because of the ongoing (at the time of writing) Russian-Ukrainian War (Sun 2018). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has signalled its continued support for Russian energy businesses amidst the Russian-Ukrainian War as Spokesperson Zhao Lijian stated that China categorically opposes unilateral sanctions not based on international law (Lijian 2022). Sanctions, which Lijian

followed up with, will not bring peace or security to the region; instead, they will jeopardise the economy and livelihoods of the countries involved. Lijian has emphasized that China and Russia have a long history of excellent energy cooperation, and they will continue to do so in the spirit of mutual respect, equality, and mutual benefit (Lijian 2022). The benefits of utilising the Northern Sea Route for vulnerability reduction may be overshadowed by the prospect of future economic benefits in the Arctic for Russia and China. The increased connectivity may establish an alternative option to Asia's Middle East's geopolitical chokepoints and guarantee its sea lines of communications to European markets. However, in the case of the Northwest Passage, the Canadian government is reluctant to use its territorial waters to fulfil China's connectivity demands.

3.2. The Western Angle: The Case of Canadian Archipelago and Northwest Passage

The Northwest Passage (NWP), elapses over the Nunavut province of Canada and constitutes internal waters of the Canadian Archipelago, which is regulated and monitored by NORDREG (Arctic Canada Traffic System). As shown in the Figure 2, NWP has seven different variations to be used, between the western terminus of the Chukchi Sea and the eastern terminus of the Labrador Sea (Pharand 2007; Drewniak et al. 2021).



The seven routes which have been used for transits of the Northwest Passage are:
 1: Davis Strait, Lancaster Sound, Barrow Strait, Viscount Melville Sound, McClure Strait, Beaufort Sea, Chukchi Sea, Bering Strait
 2: Davis Strait, Lancaster Sound, Barrow Strait, Viscount Melville Sound, Prince of Wales Strait, Amundsen Gulf, Beaufort Sea, Chukchi Sea, Bering Strait
 3: Davis Strait, Lancaster Sound, Barrow Strait, Peel Sound, Franklin Strait, Victoria Strait, Coronation Gulf, Amundsen Gulf, Beaufort Sea, Chukchi Sea, Bering Strait.
 4: Davis Strait, Lancaster Sound, Barrow Strait, Peel Sound, Rae Strait, Simpson Strait, Coronation Gulf, Amundsen Gulf, Beaufort Sea, Chukchi Sea, Bering Strait.
 5: Davis Strait, Lancaster Sound, Prince Regent Inlet, Bellot Strait, Franklin Strait, Victoria Strait, Coronation Gulf, Amundsen Gulf, Beaufort Sea, Chukchi Sea, Bering Strait.
 6: Davis Strait, Lancaster Sound, Prince Regent Inlet, Bellot Strait, Rae Strait, Simpson Strait, Coronation Gulf, Amundsen Gulf, Beaufort Sea, Chukchi Sea, Bering Strait.
 7: Hudson Strait

Figure 2 Northwest Passage Paths; Retrieved from (Drewniak et al. 2021)

Despite all these routes, the Canadian government is satisfied that the sovereignty of the Canadian Archipelago belongs solely to Canada, although it has also retained the right to reject freedom of passage principles under UNCLOS III Articles 41, 42, and 234 (U.N 1982). These provisions grant the coastal state the authority to obstruct access to freedom of navigation in ice-covered areas within the exclusive economic zone where particularly severe climatic conditions and the presence of ice covering would create obstructions or exceptional hazards to navigation and pollution of the marine environment could cause significant or irreversible harm to the marine environment (Bartenstein 2011).

Canada utilised these provisions to reject the demands to navigate the Northern Passage. This decision led to an international crisis between Canada and United States in multiple instances. The United States sent icebreakers into Northwest Passage in 1969 and 1985 without authorisation from the Canadian government. The United States believed that the Passage was an international strait. The United States believed that the provisions of the Geneva Convention on the Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone of 1958 covered their rights of innocent passage; therefore, it did not necessitate notification to the coastal state about the Passage (Rothwell 1993). Canada's response was diplomatic, with Secretary of State for External Affairs Joe Clark declaring that Canada's sovereignty in the Arctic is indivisible and the government's policy is to preserve the territorial integrity of the Canadian Arctic Archipelago as well as Canada's undivided sovereignty over land, sea, and ice (Byers and Lodge 2019).

In 2010, Canadian NORDREG issued requirements to vessel captains, operators, and ship owners regulating the traversal of the Northwest Passage. If the vessel's gross weight exceeds 300 tons, it must send the ship's construction details for examination, and it must pay icebreaker fees up to the Beaufort Sea in conformity with 19 various regulations. Furthermore, the vessel's passage may be denied based on the daily ice report, and each vessel must pass a physical inspection by NORDREG (Pharand 2007).

Observing the High North, the International Maritime Organization has added to polar-bound boats' codification by amending SOLAS and the Polar Code. The International Maritime Organization (IMO) issued and amended the Polar Code of 2009 (known as Guidelines for Ships Operating in Polar Waters) and SOLAS (International Convention

for the Safety of Life at Sea—first mandated in 1974) in 2014, which regulated the minimum conditions and readiness of Arctic and Antarctic-bound vessels. The law requires that the design and construction of the vessels withstand the perils of the sea, that information on ice development in the sea be precise and that specific training for captains and crew to work in sub-zero temperatures (International Maritime Organization 2017)² Due to rising marine activity in the Arctic, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) issued more comprehensive safety requirements for non-polar and non-SOLAS-certified boats in 2019. The IMO also requested that member countries contribute to and adopt comparable measures (International Maritime Organization 2020). The number of bureaucratic steps to discourage the use of NWP is entirely in conformity with UNCLOS III and SOLAS. The lengthy processes to transit the Northwest Passage demonstrate the Canadian stance that sovereignty and territorial integrity are absolute, and vessels who desire to transit the Northwest Passage under "freedom of passage" are subject to strict regulations and checks. This uncompromising stand of Canada has been reflected in NWP commercial transits, which have only been operated six times under 2020 circumstances (Headland 2021).

In 2020, the Northern Sea Route, which has less rigorous regulations, carried 64 vessels. As a result of the plan for the complete United States and Canadian West Coast connectivity via the Northwest Passage for the Canadian North, staunch stance on regulations the Canadian government may hinder.³ According to the analyses, the lowest ice extent in the Canadian Archipelago may allow for present and future transportation routes using ice-reinforced and open water vessels (Haas and Howell 2015). The development of the Canadian Archipelago would bring enormous leverage to the Canadian government Archipelago, and the maritime chokepoints of Vancouver and Seattle would relieve with substantial port projects for the Canadian context. The

² Hazards of the sea are defined as operation in low air temperature operation in ice operation in high latitude and potential for abandonment onto ice or land (International Maritime Organization 2017)

³ Interesting and extensive database that has been compiled by the Centre for High North Logistics-Nord University Permalinks for contemporary results <https://arctic-lho.com/transit-voyages-on-the-nsr-in-2021-the-results-as-of-the-current-date/>
<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrIjoiNWMyZjg4ZmItYTVMMy00YjlmLWE3M2MtNjRlMGM5MlZmMmIyIiwidCI6ImNmZGM5ZTVjLTI2NzctNGZjNS1hYjIjLXNjY5MjE2OWVmYSIsImMiOiJh9>

economic argument also holds up in transit shipping over the Passage as an ice-class bulk carrier, transporting 15,000 tons of coal from Vancouver to Helsinki, may save up to 200,000 USD in shipping expenses instead of transiting through the Panama Canal and Magellan Strait (Lasserre and Faury 2019).

The rationale for Canada's reluctance to use the Northwest Passage as an international waterway stem from its domestic anthropological affairs: tribal grounds and the Treaty of Nunavut in 1999 (Coates and Holroyd 2019). Inuit and Yupik tribespeople living in the harsh circumstances of Canada's far north in Inuvialuit and Nunavut agreed to give up their sovereignty claims in exchange for royalties and oil and gas exploitation rights. In exchange, the tribesmen demanded protection for the heart of Inuit, Inuvialuit, and Yupik culture, hunting, fishing, whaling, and trapping (Coates and Holroyd 2019; Zellen 2019). Canada's declaration of the "Arctic and Northern Policy Framework" solidified Canadian policy on the Arctic (Government of Canada 2017). Canada has maintained its sovereignty throughout its long history in the north. Canada's Arctic sovereignty has been established for many years and is based on historical titles that are partially based on the presence of the Inuit and other indigenous peoples (Government of Canada 2017). As a result of Canada's historical claims and diplomatic efforts, the Arctic is steeped in Canadian history and culture; the Arctic also promises the immense potential for Canada's future; and asserts sovereignty over the Canadian Arctic (Government of Canada 2017).

Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic Archipelago is settled from the Canadian perspective. This framework also focused its sovereignty claims on the Yukon, Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Northern Quebec through Indigenous tribes with land claim agreements and compliance with internal treaties, which has been critical in developing a national image among Canadians. The framework also stressed marine life protection, bilateralism and multilateralism in Arctic security, and long-term development with Arctic and important non-Arctic governments and entities (Government of Canada 2019).

However, Canada's ageing icebreaker fleet exacerbates the country's navigational challenges and territorial integrity since the most current Canadian icebreakers were commissioned in 1991. These icebreakers are nearing their service life and necessitate a

replacement solution. In 2018, Canada began procuring six new icebreakers under Project Resolute. On the other hand, the fleet would be dangerously outmoded when the Canadian Coast Guard planned to commission in the 2030s (Drewniak et al. 2018). Consequently, the project's procurement process included purchasing four interim icebreakers for refitting to fill the gap, three of which came from Sweden. An icebreaker called Mangystau 2 was also acquired from Kazakhstan for refitting and conversion to integrate into the Canadian Coast Guard Service⁴ Canada's inclusion of non-governmental organisations in the framework has created opportunities for non-Arctic states such as Japan, Korea, and, once again, China.

3.3. China's Vision of Northwest Passage: Sino-Canadian Relations with an Impasse

China suggested exploiting the Arctic Ocean under freedom of passage provisions in its Arctic White Paper published in 2018 (China 2018). Chinese academics argue that the Arctic Council needs effective administration and an inclusive platform to internationalise participation. The persistence of Chinese researchers and foreign ministry officials' concept of "shared international community interests" in the Arctic Ocean is a source of concern for Canada. The Chinese government's primary goal in the Northwest Passage is to lower its maritime commerce risks rather than to engage in a sovereignty dispute with Canada over who controls the passage. The posture of neutrality stems from China's annual Arctic reports and the PLA. From the Navy's perspective, the North Pole and surrounding region do not belong to any state; it is part of humanity's shared history (Brady 2017). Therefore, China does not want to be bound by territorial claims dispute resolution in this shared history and space, and freedom of navigation "should be ensured" (China 2018). According to Adam Lajeunesse, China's implied support for territorial waters claims is not a threat to Canadian sovereignty but rather an implicit acceptance of Ottawa's long-stated view that the Northwest Passage is an internal sea over which Canada has full jurisdiction over (Byers and Lodge, 2019). Canada's position suggests

⁴ Canadian Coast Guard announces an addition to the southern icebreaking fleet with the purchase of light icebreaker from Atlantic Towing Limited November 10th 2021 <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-coast-guard/news/2021/11/canadian-coast-guard-announces-an-addition-to-the-southern-icebreaking-fleet-with-the-purchase-of-light-icebreaker-from-atlantic-towing-limited.html>

that Canada is reluctant to adhere to the Arctic Ocean's internationality, but it also defends the exclusivity of the Arctic Ocean's governance to the coastal states (Lackenbauer et al. 2018).

As an exemplary case, in September 2017, *M/V Xue Long* sought to transit the Northwest Passage in a westbound path to conduct marine exploration and research in the Northwest Passage. The *M/V Xue Long (Snow Dragon)* and *M/V Xue Long II* were tasked with conducting research or aiding other ships in the Arctic and Antarctic. These icebreakers are not equipped or designed for coastal defence or law enforcement (Brigham 2018). Because the *M/V Xue Long* is a "sovereign vessel" of China, Canada has exempted it from the Northwest Passage regulatory rules. China appreciated Canada's exemption decision, recruited Canadian pilotage, and invited Canadian scientists aboard (Byers and Lodge 2019). The passage expedition was a fortunate occurrence for China, as they gathered insightful information on ships sailing through the Northwest Passage and collected data for the future of commercial shipping. *M/V Xue Long* not only collected critical marine information regarding navigability in the early fall of the Northwest Passage, but it also provided implicit support to Canada's internal waters argument by hiring Canadian pilotage and inviting Canadian scientists aboard. This invitation might be understood as respect for the internal affairs of other states and their subsequent claims, not meddling with their internal affairs in return (Lackenbauer et al. 2018).

The trip of *M/V Xue Long* also offered credence for the argument that the Northwest Passage may be used for transit and freedom of navigation while under Canadian authority (Byers and Lodge 2019). Compared to the Suez Canal, a practical example use-case scenario for the Northwest Passage would be a container transit from Rotterdam to Shanghai carrying 21,000 TEU (twenty-foot container). The Northwest Passage route is 3,200 kilometres shorter than the Suez route; despite the Northwest Passage's slower speed of 16 knots/hour compared to the Suez Canal's speed of 20 knots/hour, both eastbound and westbound routes take 22 days (Lasserre 2014). Because of the shorter voyage, the vessel in the Northwest Passage used around 500 tons less fuel than the Suez. IFO 380 (standardized fuel-oil for most oceangoing vessels) costs 600 USD per ton (Lasserre 2014). In addition to the fuel savings, the vessel also saves from the Suez Canal passage charges of around USD 180 thousand for the passage of an average Panamax-class vessel

(Lasserre 2014). An average of USD 210 thousand saving for each leg of the Rotterdam-Shanghai journey is a more than lucrative proposal for shipping companies.

In addition to the proposal of using the Northwest Passage for commercial transit and freedom of navigation to cost-cutting measures for shipping and logistics companies, the Chinese state and state-owned businesses are evaluating the possibilities of natural resource exploitation along the route of the Northwest Passage. The acquisition and merger of local Canadian enterprises are part of the natural resource development strategy. Sinopec and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) have spent over 119 billion United States dollars in the Canadian energy sector since 2007 (Peng and Wegge 2016).

Since Libyan and Sudanese oil resources were essentially inaccessible after 2011, investments surged significantly in response to an expected long-term vulnerability due to political instability in Arab Spring countries. As a result, Sinopec and CNOOC have bought Nexen Inc. for 15,1 billion Canadian dollars (11,8 billion USD) and Opti Canada for 4.2 billion Canadian dollars, serving as notable examples of Canadian energy acquisitions (3,3 Billion USD) (Daly 2014). These firms provide traditional oil and natural gas excavation and drilling capabilities and technical expertise for future shale gas excavation on the Chinese mainland and marine excavation in the South China Sea.⁵ Canada maintains its claims in the Northwest Passage. In 2019, Canada formally filed its demarcations of continental shelf claims in the Arctic Ocean to the United Nations 2019, which designates 350 nautical miles off the coast with 877 coordination points, up to the intersecting UNCLOS III claims of Greenland (Denmark) and the United States' Alaska (Government of Canada, 2019b). However, the demarcation of these lines may not be sufficient to protect Canada's jurisdiction claims, as China's ever-increasing presence on Canadian soil is a concern of national security (Pharand 2007).

The Canadian public would see the internationalisation of the Northwest Passage as a severe infringement of their sovereignty, invoking indigenous treaties as Chinese

⁵ The article suggests that 50 billion cubic meters of shale gas could be potentially extracted solely from Sichuan Basin annually by the year of 2030 Retrieved from (Zou, Dong, and Wang 2016)

acquisitions of mining businesses and exploitation rights on Canadian soil have alarmed Canadian academics (Wright 2013). Chinese corporations successfully dominating natural resources in Canada's Arctic would imply that the Canadian economy would be at the mercy of Chinese firms (Wright 2013).

Despite China's soft diplomacy efforts through *M/V Xue Long*, acquiring significant holdings in Northwest Passage exploitation may not divert Canada's attention away from its primary concern with China: national security. Canada must avoid further Chinese SOE investments on Canadian soil, strategic industries, and critical infrastructure. The critical infrastructure is critical infrastructure for the systems, assets, buildings, and networks that provide essential services for their respective countries' internal security, economic stability, prosperity, and health and safety (Treasury 2014).

These national security concerns over critical infrastructure solidified with the case of the fifth generation of telecommunications, colloquially known as 5G. 5G is depicted as the "future of connectivity" since the technology offers unrestricted access across all digital environments and will serve as the foundation for digitalising governmental activities such as defence and national security (Pohlmann and Buggenhagen 2021). Chinese state-owned enterprises (SOEs) Huawei and ZTE own around 22% of the world's 5G infrastructure backbone intellectual property rights and standardised parts (Pohlmann and Buggenhagen 2021). The infrastructure backbone of modern gadgets is heavily reliant on raw materials and rare-earth minerals. The reliance on raw resources only encourages the extraction of zinc, copper, gold, silver, lithium, cobalt, coltan (tantalite), and the acquisition of companies that extract these raw materials. As a result, all of China's acquisitions may become a national security concern for the Canadian government. For instance, in October 2017, China Communication Construction Corporation International (CCCC) wanted to acquire Aecon Group.⁶ After a significant security investigation, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau suppressed this move on 28th May 2018 (Chin 2018). The activity was halted on national security grounds under the

⁶ Aecon Group is one of the contractors in the North United States market for construction which was attempted to be bought out by CCCI which is a Chinese state-owned enterprise which has a net worth of 82.3 billion USD compared to Aecon's sale price of 1.5 billion Canadian Dollars CCCI has been blacklisted by World Bank for rigging bid processes of the infrastructure projects in Philippines Retrieved from (Chin 2018)

"Guidelines on the National Security Review of Investments" (known as the Investment Canada Act), and Innovation Minister Navdeep Bains declared that they are open to international investments to develop prosperity and jobs. Bains, on the other hand, stated that wealth should not come at the expense of their national security premises and guidelines (Chin 2018).

In another instance of scepticism toward Chinese SOEs, Huawei and ZTE were at the centre of cyber-espionage probes in the United States and Australia in 2018. These investigations centred on the theft of intellectual property from telecom companies in the United States and the unauthorised transfer of trade secrets to mainland China in the case of Australia (Kaska, Beckvard, and Minárik 2019).

As a result, Australia and the United States barred Huawei and ZTE from deploying 5G infrastructure in their respective telecommunications networks. Mike Burgess, the chief of the Australian Signal Directorate, identified Huawei and ZTE as high-risk vendors, stating that a potential attack anywhere in the network is a threat to the rest of the network (Shoebridge 2018).

Scholars of international relations think that, in addition to valid national security concerns, the restrictions on high-risk vendors, including Huawei and ZTE, are a matter of strategic mistrust (Mascitelli and Chung 2019). The United States and Canada are attempting to counter the "Asian pivot" of the international economies' epicentre to Southeastern Asia. These countermeasures would also invoke trade wars between the United States, Canada, and China by curbing the general economic competitiveness by barring competitiveness in Chinese SOEs' telecommunications sector (Mascitelli and Chung 2019). Canada has joined the United States in opposing Chinese SOE encroachment in government procurement and sensitive applications. Meng Wanzhou, Huawei's Chief Financial Officer, was arrested on December 1st in Vancouver, Canada (Galbraith 2019). Canada did follow the extradition process in the United States. Wanzhou allegedly committed bank fraud by wilfully misrepresenting Huawei's Iranian ties to HSBC through a Skycom subsidiary to conceal Huawei's dealings in the Iranian economy, breaching United States sanctions against Iran (Galbraith 2019). Following the 1974 Canada-United States extradition treaty, Canada scheduled an extradition hearing

for Wanzhou in May 2019. Wanzhou reached an agreement with United States judges in August 2021, as she admitted to a scheme to bypass Iranian sanctions. The Department of Justice granted her a deferred sentence, and the case was dismissed in September 2021 (Coletta 2021). Meanwhile, China has released former diplomat Michael Kovrig and NGO founder Michael Spavor, who were detained in reprisal for Wanzhou's detention. Kovrig and Spavor were sentenced to 11 years in jail for espionage and awaiting deportation to Canada. Following the dismissal of Wanzhou's case, Spavor and Kovrig were released on the same day due to unrelated medical exemptions (MacCharles 2021).

The hostage diplomacy may have foreshadowed Canadian and United States ties with China (Kuo 2021). These hostages for diplomacy may undergo a profound change from actual human beings to more technological, defensive, and geopolitical elements. China has found a means to influence Canadian domestic affairs by acquiring extraction firms and exploiting the Northwest Passage as an alternate route to the Panama Canal to sustain its competitiveness both in economic and geopolitical capacity with Canada and the United States (Kuo 2021). Being at an impasse with the Chinese government due to China's meddling in its Indigenous affairs through the Northwest Passage, Canada should decide against the Chinese government's ever-increasing encroachment on Canadian soil. Canada also has to decide whether to interfere with China's direct involvement in First Nation settlements along the Northwest Passage since the disruption to the Canadian sovereignty can also be done through Chinese SOEs acquisitions (Montsion 2015). Canada should have a clear decision on whether to embargo the deployment of Chinese 5G equipment in a commercial and government capacity, following NATO's Cybersecurity and the Five Eyes Law Enforcement Group (Kaska, Beckvard, and Minárik 2019; Renaud et al. 2020)

From both Russian and Canadian examples, China pragmatically transformed its diplomatic relations from keeping a low profile to being assertive (Xuetong 2014). This transformation is attributable to the convergence of interests between Chinese SOEs and the CCP. The convergent nature of Chinese development allowed investments to become a political tool in international relations acquisitions of national companies under the projects of BRI investments. Through these investments, China not only aspires to transform partnerships through investments explicitly indicated in BRI exemplary cases.

The evaluation of the Chinese BRI strategy would be done following the discourse of global commons that has been ever-present in the Arctic White Paper, providing us with a remarkable insight into Chinese international relations conceptualisation (China 2018).

Beijing Consensus borrows the framework of the Rules-Based International Order similarly, as the change is comparable to the United States building and fostering widespread acceptance of its international order in the early twentieth century. However, China does not build linkages between its international affairs over other countries' internal concerns, such as promoting free, fair, and multi-party elections and avoiding human rights violations, labour laws, and environmental regulations. This linkage-free business approach is a lucrative proposal for countries that do not want to follow normative notions of the World Trade Organization, leading to extensive cooperation with China. The cooperation has been the emphasis for Russia's militaristic revitalization in the Arctic as it would ensure the continuation of natural gas and oil revenues. For China, a militarized Arctic favouring its position satisfies the doctrine of "hindrance-free sea lines of communications" and "genuine multilateralism" (Russia 2022).

4. THE CHALLENGER CASE: RUSSIAN-CHINESE MILITARISTIC COOPERATION IN THE ARCTIC

Russian Federation has been in economic cooperation with China over the Russian Arctic with the Yamal LNG, the Power of Siberia, and Russia's revitalization of Soviet-era infrastructure. The militaristic cooperation between China and Russia was only limited to the Sea of Japan (East Sea) for contingency drills in 2017 and minesweeping drills in 2021. Despite the limited scope of these manoeuvres, scholars were quick to interpret and theorize about Arctic security configuration. Competition over grey areas such as intentional or accidental disruption of global position systems (GPS) and submarine telecommunications cabling (STCs) were present in the NATO drills at the Barents Sea. As pointed out, miscommunication combined with STCs disputes could escalate tensions and lead to a casus belli in the Arctic (Sacks et al., 2021)

The "Russian Strategy of the Development of the Arctic Zone and the Provision of National Security through 2020" incorporates Russia's renewal of Arctic military installations (Boulegue 2019). This strategy included redevelopment and modernization from Arkhangelsk's airbases to naval search rescue capabilities in East Asia, which were essential for improving cooperation and competition in the Arctic, as shown in Figure 3.

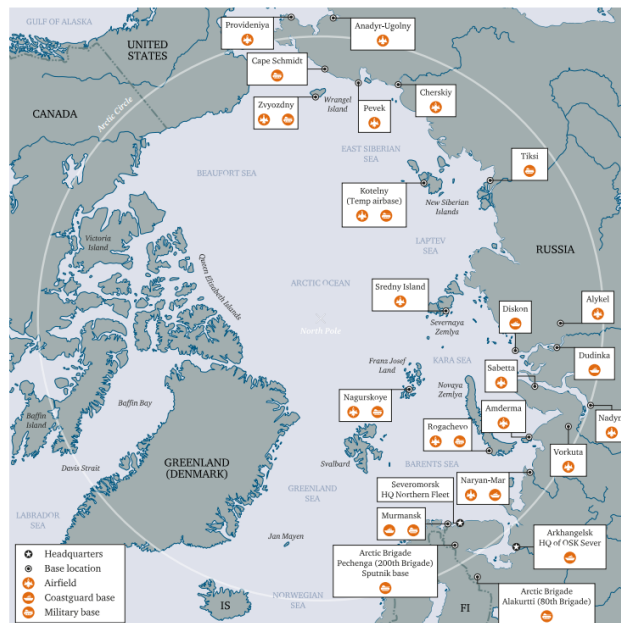


Figure 3 Revitalized Military Assets in Arctic Zone of Russian Federation; Retrieved from (Boulegue 2019)

Russia also utilizes FSB (Federal Security Service) assets for reassigning border protection and Coast Guard systems in the Arctic Ocean, as dual-use facilities are developing, one in the Murmansk and one in the Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky region (Boulegue 2019). With the cooperation of the FSB, Col. Gen. Alexander Postnikov formed the Arctic Brigade, which sent Air Assault/Airborne Divisions to the Kotelny and Severny islands for intense Arctic training to highlight Russia's military presence in the increasingly contested Arctic region (Conley and Rohloff 2015). Russia's Northern Fleet, centred around the Kola Peninsula, shows prowess such as *Kirov-class* missile cruisers, *Gorskho-class* frigates, and diesel-electric and nuclear icebreakers as part of their two-prong strategy of deterrence and engagement in the naval aspect. Russia's air defences are made up of A2/AD (anti-access/anti-denial air defence) armament aboard S400s and S300s and submersible ballistic missile defence deployment (SSBN) on the Kola Peninsula (Hersman, Brewer, and Simon 2021).

In the High North, Arctic Brigade came up with innovative solutions for border control and enforcement, such as Arctic-adapted armoured personnel carriers, snowmobiles with cargo holds, underwater drones and smaller satellites to garrison the Siberian perimeter and border control (Boulegue 2019). Since conquering the Arctic and Siberia, Russian public opinion has overwhelmingly supported the discourse of controlling and developing Siberia and the Arctic Circle. These efforts are deemed valiant and engrained into the Russian public with the former Soviet Union's "technological utopianism" and propaganda films that depict "man is the master of this Arctic wasteland" (Hansen-Magnusson 2019). As NATO threatened Russia's command of the Arctic, the concept of Arctic mastery became a staple in Russian military theories. The possibility of a direct Arctic confrontation seems unlikely. However, the case of armed conflict in the Arctic has been considered a spillover of other armed conflicts rather than a standalone conflict; the stability of the Arctic is immensely dependent upon Russia's general security stability (Zysk 2011).

Therefore, contemporary Russia firmly believes that they are not securitizing the Arctic Ocean as they are seeking to "push the hostilities away from the Arctic" (Boulegue 2019).

Russia furthered its defensive stance in 2020 with the declaration of “Arctic Strategy 2035”. The strategy has assumed that the NSR would become a “strategic resource base” for the Asia Pacific region as it would expand its natural resource throughput to 130 million tonnes of goods in 2035 (Mehdiyeva 2021). China’s envisioning of the Arctic Circle might hinder Russia’s intention to push hostilities away from the Arctic. China specifically widened its strategy, using its military forces in peacetime, like deterrence, crisis management and strategic planning prioritized in their military doctrine. China also emphasized the five frontiers of war and conflict as characterized by contests for supremacy in the ground, sea, air, space, and information domains, with the characteristics of these domains and the interconnections among them carrying significant implications for force structure as command and control (Fravel 2016).

Chinese experts have also observed that "common shared destiny" is embedded into the PLA Navy's training program over the Arctic Ocean. According to Guo Peiqing of China's Ocean University, controlling the Arctic region would allow China to get the 'three continents and two oceans' geographical advantage and control the key nations in the Northern Hemisphere. According to Naval Military Research Group Researcher Yang Zhirong, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) must fully leverage the advantages of strategic international service to bravely assume the historical mission of Arctic pioneering (Doshi, Dale-huang, and Zhang 2021). China’s interest and investment are also dependent upon the stability and performance of Russia’s capability to protect the Northern Sea Route. China’s ambiguity and simultaneous narratives over the notions of “strategic space” suggest having effective control against the countering hegemons’ effort to contain and control China and, in a simultaneous capacity, promotes the gain the strategic control without war (Fravel 2016).

Countering the hegemons' endeavour against a foreign enemy's military intervention, namely Taiwan's secession, is being encouraged as the term "counter interventionism" is exclusively used in the textbooks by Chinese scholars as our forms of campaign actions. These books depict China's operational capabilities as the doctrine describes intervention and counter-intervention strategies such as blocking, counterattacking, containing, and ensuring China's strategic stability (Fravel and Twomey 2014).

These conceptions of intervention are part of the indoctrination that PLA cadres get, and this provides us with a clear picture of the PLA's overall war activities. China's thought process correlates with sustaining a competitive economy as vulnerability reduction is vital and preserving sea lines of communication (SLOCs) is ideal for controlling global governance pretext in the Arctic Ocean. The concept of global governance that the establishment of sea lines of communication, and global governance is quite similar to the United States' 19th Century strategy of "string of bases" in the Pacific Ocean, where the United States acquired the Philippines as reparation for the Spanish-United States War, islands and islets of Polynesia and Melanesia for guano fertilizer extraction, the Alaskan Purchase from the Russian Empire in 1867 and the annexation of the Kingdom of the Philippines (Jones 2021). China's "string of bases" does not follow the same imperialistic connotations as the United States since it attempts to create this string of bases via Chinese state-owned enterprises that obtained these bases through debt-equity swaps or direct acquisitions.

Despite the shortcomings of the Russian economy, China cannot feasibly envision controlling the Russian assets as the Russian decision-makers would perceive it as a compromise of full sovereignty in the Northern Sea Route. Therefore, the ambition of not being constrained or dependent on maritime commercial protection schemes seemingly does not become feasible for China. However, China can utilize the Russian strategic thinking that has been depicted in the context of Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea to implement the same framework for the Taiwan dispute. China's diplomatic presence in the Arctic is not limited to extensive Russian cooperation; it has also developed relations with the Nordic countries, notably Denmark, where it wields considerable global influence over Arctic governance as a significant supporter of the Arctic Council Nordic Council, and Nordic Council of Ministers. China's strategy went into disarray as the Crimean Crisis had created a rift within the "triangle dialogue" between Russia, China and Nordic countries (Biedermann 2021).

China is seemingly attempting to influence the Arctic Council as an observer member; through its shared scientific contributions, the Chinese State Oceanic Administration has put out surveys in the 1980s and 1990s'. Through its relevance to Arctic marine science,

China seeks to change the Arctic Council from an exclusive institutional balancing system to an inclusive soft balancing system (He 2018).

Overall, in John Mearsheimer's conceptualization, China's Arctic strategic cooperation with Russian Federation can be considered an act of "buck-passing". China's buck-passing risks confrontation with the United States and Canada. Therefore, China passes the buck to Russia. As a "buck catcher," Russia provides the maritime protection scheme over the Northern Sea Route via the revitalization of Arctic Zones of the Russian Federation under its "Pivot to the East". The planning is based on the Russian military presence to become ever more present in the Arctic and allowing PLA Navy and China to become a potential guaranteed position for its military ambitions in the Arctic. When Russia develops its underdeveloped Siberian frontier and Arctic, China can reduce its vulnerability concerns in the Northern Sea Route. The mutual military and economic leverages outweigh the regional balance of power, and Russian scholars have voiced economic independence concerns (Sørensen and Klimenko, 2017). China utilizes the stagnation of the Russian economy to exploit the undiscovered natural resources with the acquisitions of stakes over the Russian mining and oil companies. In return, Russian business executives can be attracted to Chinese banking firms to circumvent the sanctions, allowing the Russian economy to find credibility for its sanctioned economy (Welt and Archick 2022).

The "Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and China on International Relations Entering a New Era and Global Sustainable Development," issued in February 2022, strengthened the Sino-Russian partnership. The joint statement was the first time Russia and China publicly expressed their concern about the United States and its allies' increasing assertiveness in the South China Sea and Central and Eastern Europe, focusing on Ukraine and Taiwan disputes (Russia 2022). Both sides are united in their opposition to external forces attempting to undermine security and stability in their common neighbouring regions. They intend to counter outside interference in sovereign countries' internal affairs under any pretext, oppose colour revolutions, and increase cooperation in the areas mentioned above. Russia and China have explicitly warned the United States and its allies against intentionally antagonizing and undermining the security configuration through unfair competition practices, which exacerbate geopolitical rivalry,

and seriously undermine the international security order and global strategic stability (Russia 2022).

The statement explicitly opposed the expansion of NATO, requesting respect for other countries sovereignty and the security configuration of that sovereign state. Russia called upon NATO to abandon its ideologized cold war military strategies and respect other nations' sovereignty, security, and interests, emphasizing a fair and objective attitude toward the peaceful development of non-NATO states. This statement also implies that the responsibilities of buck catching and passing could be swapped for long-term solutions whenever the two countries see fit, as both sides have identified the significance of the Chinese project to build a community of common destiny for humankind to ensure greater international solidarity and consolidation of efforts in responding to shared challenges. The Chinese side recognized the significance of Russia's efforts to construct a just multipolar system of international relations (Russia 2022).

Therefore, Mearsheimer's neo-realist argument can be implemented between China and Russia. China assists Russia in circumventing the sanctions and restrictions, catching the buck for potential secondary sanctions. China can shield itself from the United States sanctions with a loss of consumption in the United States market due to the interdependence of Chinese manufacturing. Consequently, the United States cannot feasibly sanction Chinese manufactured goods, giving a significant advantage to the act of China's buck-catching. In return, China gains significant leverage over the Russian natural resource exploitation and secures its linkage to European markets in the Arctic.

However, as Graham Allison (2017) has interpreted, Sino-Russian cooperation may have similar components for threat perception (Allison 2017). Sino-Russian power struggle against the rules-based international order might eventually lead to a widely anticipated conflict as the status quo would rely on its most valuable asset to maintain its position to deter this cooperation: NATO's military capabilities.

5. THE STATUS QUO CASE: NATO'S RESPONSE TO CHINA

The Sino-Russian cooperation and its perceived threat to the rules-based international order prioritized cooperation among the NATO allies, primarily the United States, Canada, and United Kingdom.

NATO's 2030 doctrine has politically centred itself upon "deterrence and dialogue" against Russian threats and emphasizing the "systemic rivalry" over the Chinese competition. The doctrine emphasizes that political turbulence has been voiced over the United States withdrawing itself from the Alliance in the Trump era's rhetoric. Russia actively challenged the military integrity of NATO with S400 air defence missile systems sold to NATO member-states and close non-NATO allies. Russia is threatening NATO's security configuration with future cyberattacks, leaving NATO with a significant air defence capabilities gap at the mercy of a potential adversary (Arduino and Shuja 2021). The defiance was an unacceptable strategic mishap by the NATO states, which could alter the strategic initiative to the Russian Chinese favour. As a result, NATO recommended establishing a "new strategic concept" centred on the three core tasks of "collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security" (NATO 2030 Expert Group and NATO 2020). The strategy also included strengthening deterrence and defence, including nuclear deterrence, in the Alliance's overall posture, projecting stability and resilience across all domains in the face of changes to the geostrategic environment, including both Russia's main challenge and China's emerging challenge (NATO 2030 Expert Group and NATO 2020). NATO also evaluated the Chinese military-civil fusion as a "centre of the systemic challenge with its approach to human rights and international law, challenges the fundamental premise of a rules-based international order" (NATO 2030 Expert Group and NATO 2020).

5.1. United States: An Admittance of "Strategic Atrophy"

NATO's most significant contributor, the United States' counterstrategy against the ever-increasing threat of Russia and China and its implications on the Arctic Ocean, solidified in 2018 after the Secretary of Defence James N. Mattis' declassified guidance of

“National Defence Strategy”. Mattis claimed that they are experiencing "strategic atrophy," which means their competitive military advantage is deteriorating. Mattis characterized this descent as “a decline in the long-standing rules-based international order—creating a more complex and volatile security environment than any we have experienced in recent memory”, making the Inter-state strategic competition the primary concern in United States national security (United States Government 2018). The declassified guidance of “National Defence Strategy”, “A Strategic Blueprint for the Arctic”, and “Regaining Arctic Dominance” in 2021 serves us a framework regarding the United States' reinvigoration of the Arctic strategy in a more assertive capacity (McCarthy and McConville 2021). The priority of the United States has switched to "interstate strategic competition," as Mattis said, in order to deal with the developing strategic rivalry between China and the United States, which has the potential to spill over into the Arctic (Depledge 2021).

The United States has also redeveloped USARAK (United States Army in Alaska) in a land-based capacity to project power from, within, and into the Arctic to conduct and sustain extended operations in competition, crisis, and conflict from a position of advantage. USARAK also employs calibrated force posture and multi-domain formations to defend the homeland, pose dilemmas for great power competitors, and generate Arctic-capable forces ready to command the Arctic (McCarthy and McConville 2021). USARAK (United States Army in Alaska) has also been redesigned as a land-based force capable of projecting strength from, into, and into the Arctic in order to conduct and maintain long-term operations from a position of advantage. In addition, USARAK employs calibrated force posture and multi-domain formations to secure the homeland and build Arctic-ready troops capable of controlling the Arctic (McCarthy and McConville, 2021).

In response to China's Arctic White Paper, the United States Coast Guard Command published its Arctic Strategic Outlook in 2018. The emphasis of this outlook on goals is relatively like that of the previous edition. The United States Coast Guard is concerned about China's historical revanchist activity in the Indo-Pacific region and its disrespect for international law as its commercial and scientific presence in the Arctic grows. China's plans to increase its influence in the Arctic may hinder the United States' access and

freedom of passage, much as similar measures have hampered the United States' access to the South China Sea. In addition, the Strategic Outlook stressed the importance of "rules-based maritime order" to enforce IMO safety requirements adopted in the Arctic (Schultz 2018).

On the other hand, the Strategic Outlook lacks a defined approach in terms of equipment and strategy due to the fallacy of the missing action plan. The United States lacks coast guard capabilities over the High Arctic because the most recent polar cutter will enter service in 2024. To improve interoperability throughout the Indo-Pacific, the United States has chosen to refrain from basing itself north of the Arctic Circle, at the risk of underdeveloped infrastructure compromising the Arctic frontier (Tingstad et al. 2018).

Given the lack of equipment and a lack of counter-strategy initiative toward Sino-Russian cooperation, the United States has self-proclaimed itself upholding and complying with the rules-based order in the Arctic may be considered overstressing capabilities. If the United States' strategy focuses on implementing the rules-based system, the plan may not come to fruition as anticipated. The United States Navy's presence over the eastern Arctic Ocean can be seen as a buck-passing strategy in a naval sense.

The strategy has been used in a joint capacity by the 2nd and 6th Fleets under the umbrella of European Command (EUCOM), which operates in the European High North and East Atlantic. The priorities of the United States' 2nd Fleet in the Arctic focused on deterring aggression and malign behaviour; maintaining strategic access and freedom of the seas; strengthening existing and emerging alliances and partnerships; and protecting the United States (United States 6th Fleet Public Affairs, 2020).

The 2nd Fleet is commanding over the East Atlantic and Northwest Passage in a collective capacity to increase the combat readiness of Iceland, Canada, Greenland, and Norway and project their joint naval capabilities under the premises of NATO training. Following the annexation of Crimea, the scope of the 2nd Fleet's activity extended dramatically, with the fleet participating in NATO joint drills in the Barents Sea with the United Kingdom in 2020. This manoeuvre was fortified by its messages, as Admiral James Foggo had stated, demonstrating the importance of logistics, the sixth domain of war, primarily when

operating during a pandemic, in the seventh domain. Foggo stated the importance of naval presence and capabilities with America's allies, and presence means that they are "open for business" (United States 6th Fleet Public Affairs, 2020). The naval strategy's emphasis centred on maintaining an enhanced presence in the Arctic, regionally posturing our forces, conducting exercises and operations, and integrating Navy-Marine Corps-Coast Guard capabilities (Matthews and Gilday 2021). Consequently, we can claim that the United States is partially transferring the strategic will on the Arctic policy to collective action within the framework of NATO and other multilateral security alliances (MacDonald 2021).

In a case of direct political confrontation with China, the United States retains the technical and coercive physical capabilities in a sub-Arctic conflict, such as a standoff between South China Sea countries or Ukraine. With the current strategic configuration in the Arctic, the United States must adapt and catch up with its infrastructure to compete with Sino-Russian cooperation. According to Mearsheimer (2019), the efforts of rules-based order enforcement will be supported by their international economic impact. He also believes that international military alliances will be critical to the future world order, resembling a new Cold War (Mearsheimer 2019). From a structural realism perspective, it is the first time the United States has not attempted to achieve apparent and overwhelming naval capability in a frontier where their direct interests are aligned to keep the status quo since the establishment of the Great White Fleet of Theodore Roosevelt.

The United States proposes an extensive naval equipment deficiency in the Arctic Circle as a definitive compromise.

Western scholars propose that the United States take a capability-based, portfolio-based strategy and support infrastructure, domain awareness, and communications across various domains in the region required by the United States (Tingstad and Savitz 2022). Scholars also emphasize the importance of alliances and expansion, with NATO and non-NATO joint training in the Arctic necessitating direct investment to establish a solid competence to operate in the Arctic and overcome the overarching Russian and Chinese competition. Scholars and government agencies urged the government to award government contracts to construct icebreakers and polar security cutters, as the United

States only has two icebreakers in operation, compared to Russia's 34 and China's four (Tingstad et al. 2020). These icebreakers must fulfil various Coast Guard missions such as environmental protection, domestic and international fishery enforcement, counter-smuggling, search and rescue, and contributing to the Department of Defence operations (Tingstad and Savitz 2022; Tingstad et al. 2020). However, the proclaimed mission still lacks doctrinal substance in the United States naval capabilities.

The strategy depicted in "A Strategic Blueprint for the Arctic" and "Regaining Arctic Dominance" provides a framework for prospects of flexibility within the US Navy and its self-proclaimed objective of maintaining rules-based international order (Matthews and Gilday 2021; McCarthy and McConville 2021).

5.2. The Canadian Position in NATO

This proclaimed position has also permeated NATO mandates and trilateral relations between Canada and the United Kingdom. This thesis has already mentioned Canada's interests in the Arctic and the prevalence of the Northwest Passage. The lack of icebreakers has already compromised Canada's naval capabilities, where it had to lease Russian-made icebreakers from Kazakhstan and Finnish-made icebreakers from Sweden. Another concern for the Canadian Coast Guard is that the operational efficiency of the existing icebreakers has been a challenge since the retrofitting may not be enough to cover for a stop-gap solution (Drewniak et al. 2021). Royal Canadian Navy (hereafter RCN) has been concentrating on justifying its expansion during Harper and Trudeau governments. RCN believed that Canada, involved in global security, cannot afford to spend much time deciding what to do in the medium term. The outlook is bleak, and there are few signs that things will improve anytime soon (Penaranda 2019). Consequently, the sense of urgency was elevated by Chinese incursions through *M/V Xue Long's* voyages in the Northwest Passage and China-United States trade disputes. Royal Canadian Navy has developed "Leadmark 2050: Canada in a New Maritime World" as Vice-Admiral Mark A.G. Norman assessed that Canada needs a blue-water navy, which can conduct sustained operations in the High Arctic to be deployed on an ongoing basis to regions of Canadian strategic interests is the navy that Canada needs (Norman 2017).

The policy plan also advises creating replenishment facilities and naval bases along the Canadian three oceans, emphasizing the Arctic's underdeveloped state. The RCN typically takes on the "constabulary function" of protecting Canada's Arctic frontier. This function includes contributing to ocean science and improving Canada's understanding of fragile but changing Arctic ecosystems, assisting its federal partners in managing and protecting Canada's Arctic resources, and supporting the Canadian Coast Guard's annual replenishment of isolated coastal communities. As a result, to meet these responsibilities, the RCN planned to establish a naval operations base and replenishment station at the Nanisivik Naval Replenishment Station in Nunavut to maintain the "forward-deployed posture" that has mentioned in the strategy. Canada has also stated its determination to maintain and safeguard the rules-based international order and its following maritime rules-based order, which is vital for Canadian UNCLOS III claims in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon (Norman 2017).

5.3. United Kingdom's Position in the Arctic through NATO

The Arctic Ocean has aroused the United Kingdom's interest. The fascination originates from its '400-year' nautical history, stemming from whaling and coal mining operations in Svalbard and scientific knowledge of the Arctic Ocean (Depledge 2018). The United Kingdom has declared itself an Arctic ocean-going power, and its Cold War status permitted it to cooperate with the United States joint gatekeeper to block Soviet presence. In contrast, British industry became aware of the Arctic's business potential with Russia as part of a larger national prosperity strategy and pricing stability in international markets. In 2011, British Petroleum (BP) secured a deal worth around 10 billion GBP with Russian Rosneft to assist British enterprises' access to overseas markets and its interest in searching for new oil and gas reserves to help diversify the global market supply. David Cameron bolstered the commercial diversification with the UK–Nordic–Baltic Summit in London to build an alliance of similar interests' and become a forerunner in European economic growth (Depledge 2018). As a result, the Royal Navy has significantly reduced its naval capabilities as it repurposed its submarine craft for power projection. Budget cuts resulted in some naval vessels being decommissioned earlier than

expected in the early 2010s, limiting capabilities to fulfil NATO roles and exercises in the Arctic (Depledge and Dodds 2011).

The United Kingdom published a policy paper titled "Arctic Policy Framework: Adapting to Change" in 2013, which envisioned three core principles: respect, cooperation, and appropriate leadership. On the other hand, the coverage of the principles and the paper's discussion of topics can be regarded as framework development and a vague acknowledgement of its goals (HM Government 2013). Her Majesty's Government issued "Beyond the Ice: UK Policy towards the Arctic" in 2018 when economic interests intersected with international conjuncture to reemphasize international stability and solutions through multilateral international organizations and can be considered a more defined approach. These commercial interests based their assertions on Smith and Stephenson's article, which predicts an ice-free Arctic in the summer of 2050 and emphasizes reducing commercial shipping times (Smith and Stephenson 2013). David Cameron bolstered the commercial diversification with the UK–Nordic–Baltic Summit in London to form an alliance of common interests and become a forerunner in European economic growth (Polar Regions Department. Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2018; Smith and Stephenson 2013).

Nonetheless, the UK's commercial interests in the Arctic Ocean have been hampered by Russia's geopolitical ambitions, such as the annexation of Crimea and the United States' wave of CAATSA sanctions against the Russian Federation in 2014, which prevented further development of Russian gas and oil platforms and infrastructure (Depledge 2018).

Another issue for the British economic expansion and freedom of navigation would be hampered by operational risk factors such as geographical remoteness, lack of British and Norwegian search-and-rescue capabilities, magnetic interference blocking positioning systems, and high-frequency radios. Higher premiums also drive the operational difficulties for shipping insurance, and unreliable weather stations are among the significant challenges for the British operations in the Arctic (Emmerson and Lahn 2012).

In the aftermath of Brexit, the United Kingdom's military posture has strengthened. British Prime Ministers have adjusted the United Kingdom's security configuration to

focus on defining the future international order, improving security and defence at home and abroad, and strengthening resilience at home and abroad (Jouan et al. 2022). The doctrine is known as the "Fusion Doctrine" because it fuses and aligns foreign policy decision-making with promoting cross-governmental collaboration to safeguard the United Kingdom's economic, influential, and security interests (HM Government 2021). Concerning that doctrine, the emphasis of Arctic policy for the British has shifted from climate security and transportation sustainability to defence strategy over the Arctic. This doctrine proposed establishing a more direct line of communication between Arctic stakeholders and focusing on maritime surveillance and antisubmarine, fitting the UK's role in the North Atlantic and NATO collaboration to share intelligence and resources in the Arctic (Jouan et al. 2022). United Kingdom's strategic re-engagement in the North Atlantic and the Arctic might assist boost ties with non-EU nations, including Norway, Iceland, the United States, and Canada. The United Kingdom's rebuilding of ties with the EU following Brexit drives the security concerns and coherence issues between NATO missions and non-EU states (Depledge, Dodds, and Kennedy-Pipe 2019). The British government are influenced by Russia's doctrine of 'bastion defence' via submarine manoeuvres, which threatens NATO sea lines of communication in the North Sea, High North, and the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) Gap, as Russia aspires to control vessel passages and disregards the premises of freedom of navigation in the Northern Sea Route. Despite fully honouring UNCLOS III, Russia seeks exclusive access to the Arctic. As a result, the United Kingdom wants to guarantee the implementation of international rules and principles of freedom of navigation and UNCLOS III provisions, with a credible deterrent posture and a mix of inducements to promote responsible behaviour in the face of Russia's and China's increasing contempt for the rules-based international order (Jouan et al. 2022).

The United Kingdom is not an outlier in rebuilding its security premises in the Arctic Ocean through multilateral cooperation. Sweden and Norway have been seriously concerned over Russia's little to no-notice snap war trials and simulations over the Barents Sea since 2011 (Depledge 2020). The limited posture of NATO in the High North security exposed as NATO wanted to address their shortcomings on the field. NATO launched the Dynamic Mongoose (DYMON) exercise to address those issues, which

concentrated on antisubmarine activities in the North Atlantic and the High North to offer submarine war capabilities and the Cold Response (EXCR) drill, which focused on collective defence response in the Arctic. These military drills provided a valuable opportunity to practice interoperability and test personnel and capabilities under extreme conditions while also demonstrating their commitment to their northern security configuration (Depledge 2020). The United Kingdom has selected the icebreaker and patrol vessel *HMS Protector*, the amphibious vessel *HMS Albion*, and the aircraft carrier *HMS Prince of Wales* to participate in Trident Juncture military manoeuvres in 2018. These military drills are focused on interoperability and were designed primarily to demonstrate NATO's skill and commitment to defending a member state against external attacks. The Juncture has also been depicted as a response to Russia's assault on Ukraine and Crimea (Landriault and Macdonald 2019). NATO countries have prioritized North Sea defence because the GUIK (Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom) Gap is viewed as a strategic corridor for economic and geostrategic competition. The Arctic is viewed as a possible pathway for extended great power rivalry and aggression, crossing two significant zones of dispute in the Indo-Pacific and Europe (Pincus 2020).

5.4. NATO's Response to Russian Challenge in Ukraine

The great power rivalry came to a boiling point on 24th February 2022. In the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the potential Anglo-Russian cooperation broke down instantly as BP announced to sell its 19.75% stake at Rosneft in the wake of the Russian sanctions over the invasion of Ukraine (Looney and Dudley 2022). The sanctions also barred payments to energy-related financial services and funds and energy-related technology and blocked Russian bank transactions, including Russian Central Bank assets (HM Government 2022). NATO countries replied by shutting their airspace and ports to any Russian-registered, owned, operated, or leased aircraft or vessels (HM Government 2022). Consequently, the NATO members' response is stern and fortifies the message that it would protect its commercial and political interests against ever-growing Chinese and Russian political and economic expansion. As a result of the Western response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, these sanctions grew in severity. A NATO Summit was convened on March 24th, 2022, to discuss and address the Russian aggression on Ukraine,

calling out for the de-escalation of the conflict and condemning destabilizing activities of Russia. The communiqué also included clauses urging China to maintain international order values such as territorial integrity and sovereignty embodied in the UN Charter (NATO 2022a; NATO 2022d).

Meanwhile, NATO held a Cold Response 2022 exercise in Norway, which coincided with Russian action against Ukraine. NATO has consistently asserted that "Cold Response 2022 is a long-planned and routine exercise, which Norway organizes biannually," as the drill took place in Norway in March-April 2022. NATO insisted upon the timing as it "has nothing to do with Russia's unprovoked and unlawful invasion of Ukraine, to which NATO has responded with preventative, appropriate, and non-escalation actions." This year's NATO Cold Response 2022 workout planning began more than eight months ago (NATO 2022c; 2022b). NATO has been adamant about continuing these military drills, stating that it wants to help its members and partners train for any emergency. Suppose China aspires to the potential prestige implied by its vision of National Rejuvenation and Historical Revanchism in the face of a rules-based international order. In such circumstances, sanction mechanisms allow China to build a framework for counterreaction, countermeasures, and anticipating the political and economic consequences of its actions against the rules-based international order. The ideological foundations of ancient and modern Chinese understandings of statehood and international relations would also serve as a driving force for the creation of this framework.

6. AVENGING THE “CENTURY OF HUMILIATION”: MODERN-AGE CONCESSIONS TO CHINA

In this thesis, China's construction of the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as its offshoots of the Maritime Silk Road Initiative, is viewed as a strategy to reduce China's supply chain vulnerabilities and sustain its economic competitiveness by bolstering infrastructure on the route to markets has been the primary emphasis. Since Xiaoping's 24 Character Strategy era, China's national rejuvenation understanding became ambiguous. The strategy was characterized by its low-profile approach because its emphasis was on being moderate and cautious, undertaking no leadership, raising no banner, pursuing no expansion and hegemony, and being consistent with the idea of peaceful development (Xuetong 2014).

The ascendance of Xi Jinping and his emphasis on “national rejuvenation” is a striking contrast from his predecessors and divergence from Xiaoping's subtle approach. Xi Jinping's address to the Chinese Communist Party's centennial (100th) anniversary solidified the argument. Xi stated that following the Opium War of 1840, China was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial semi-feudal society, suffering greater devastation. To Jinping, the country was humiliated severely, and Chinese civilisation entered into darkness (Jinping 2021). Since then, “national rejuvenation” has been the Chinese people's and nation's greatest aspiration (Jinping 2021). Xi Jinping defined national rejuvenation as China breaking free from the shackles of disjointed, semi-feudal, semi-colonial society and "unequal treaties" imposed on China by imperialist powers. By creating the new-democratic revolution, Jinping claims that China has relinquished its past selves and developed a state that bears “Socialism with Chinese characteristics” and finally achieved “national rejuvenation” (Jinping 2021). China's trajectory can be considered a resistance against imperialism at its face value. The rejuvenation doctrine heavily depends on developing and remaking the existing international system by implementing measures that have been reminiscent of peaceful co-existence. This co-existence is named the “New Security Concept”, characterized by “dialogue, cooperation, mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination” (Kaufman 2010). This security concept allowed China to develop an international relations alternative to compete with

and challenge the United States hegemony. This concept permeates China's understanding and efforts to transform the international system into a potential multipolar world order (Flanagan and Finkelstein 2003).Jinping's attitude towards historical revanchism is evident since he sincerely believed that China's state had been in decline since the First Opium War. Xi's emphasis on "intense humiliation" is reminiscent of the ancient Chinese theology book of *Liji* (The Book of Rites) (Callahan 2015). The book stressed the path of overcoming humiliation and returning to the path of rehabilitation and rejuvenation, whether undertaken by an individual or a state.⁷ Consequently, the explanation for Chinese leaders' attitude and distrust for Western nations and moral understandings reflects an ideology known as *Tianxia* (roughly translatable to Chinese universalism- all under heaven) (Callahan 2015).

6.1. Tianxia: Chinese Universalism Adapted Into Contemporary Context

Tianxia centres China (*Zhongguo- middle kingdom*) to its framework under the assumption of the practice of rejecting exclusionary interests in *Tianxia*. First theorized in the 10th Century BCE, Chinese philosophers believed that the planet is a "collective resource from the start for all people to achieve their common interests" (Zhao 2021). Therefore, it is unnecessary to accept "any incompatible exclusionary conceptions" in a political and societal capacity. "Only when a political order realized among all the political levels without contradiction can it be recognized as universally effective and trustworthy" (Zhao 2021). There are no outsiders or excluded ones in *Tianxia*; its international relations competence is holistic and comprehensive, promoting harmony as "reciprocal dependency" and "a world of shared properties and common interests" becomes an essential component of this approach (Zhao 2021). *Tianxia* also opposes nationalism, and egalitarian states, claiming that cultural superiority is more relevant to power struggles amongst civilizations.

Tianxia believes that China was the sole real civilization with unrivalled cultural superiority and would be the real civilization in perpetuity, thus defying Western global governance and Westphalian understanding of nation-statehood (Acharya 2019). Despite

⁷ The full quote can be interpreted as "The humiliation of a thing is sufficient to stimulate it; the humiliation of a country is sufficient to rejuvenate it." Retrieved from (Callahan, 2015)

its claims of inclusivity, *Tianxia* still adheres to the cultural hierarchy, believing that the hierarchy with centre-periphery interactions over barbarians still exists. The only way to climb the ladders of hierarchy by “barbarians” is through staunch adherence to learning the Chinese language and the teachings of *Tianxia* (Callahan 2008). Adherence does not elevate a "barbarian" to the level of "civilised humans" since there is always a barrier that cannot be bridged between a barbarian and a cultured one. (Callahan 2008)

The understanding of *Tianxia* and foreign humiliation events have also permeated Jinping's thinking, as indicated by Chinese historians who have criticized Qing China's "medieval system" and argued that their position led to an "unavoidable consequence," thereby becoming a victim of Western imperialism (Jinping 2021). The “medieval system” claims were used to explain the losses in the foreign invasions and “unequal treaties” that affected China’s interests (Jinping 2021). These wars with “unequal treaties” are as follows: First Opium War (1839–1842), the Second Opium War (1856–1860), the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), Allied Eight Invasion and concessions (1900), the Japanese invasion of Manchuria (1931), and finally Second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945). The historical revanchism and humiliation converge with the Chinese mythological discourse to be embedded into their understanding of foreign policy, as the trauma of humiliation and its’ vengeance has been the emphasis of the “national rejuvenation” as the disdain for “outsiders” is evident, even in the modern times (Wang 2014; 2012).⁸

6.2. Cases for “Century of Humiliation”: Qingdao, Tianjin, Hong Kong

As a result, the rhetoric of "common shared destiny" is also a path to avenge the "century of humiliation" signified by unequal treaties beginning with the Treaty of Nanking in

⁸ Vamik Volkan and Johan Galtung conducted a psychological and narrative examination of Chinese Communist Party members' CMT complexes (Chosenness–Myths–Trauma), which they aptly named collective megalomania syndrome. This syndrome holds that for nations to acquire a collective identity, they must choose a trauma (a previous event that throws shadows on the future) and a "chosen glory" (myths of a glorious future, often seen as a re-enactment of a glorious past). More reading available via Vamik D. Volkan, “Large Group Identity and Chosen Trauma,” *Psychoanalysis* 6 (2005): six. Galtung, Johan. 2001. *The Construction of National Identities for Cosmic Drama: Chosenness-Myths-Trauma (CMT) Syndromes and Cultural Pathologies*. In *Handcuffed to history*, ed. P. Udayakumar. Westpoint: Praeger

1842 by creating its own "unequal treaties" via the Belt and Road Initiative (Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova 2018). These unequal treaties are similar in ownership terms, giving access to the land exploitation around the built railways and ports, colloquially known as "railway concessions" (Elleman and Paine 2009). One of the exemplary cases would be the Treaty of Shimonoseki, signed after the First Sino-Japanese War of 1894, which allowed Imperial Japan to take control over the Liaodong Peninsula with the help of the Russian and German Empires (Elleman and Paine 2009).

In 1900, Russian Empire had signed a railway concession treaty with Qing China to construct 1600 kilometres of railways connecting Chita, Harbin, and Vladivostok to Port Arthur (Dalian) to reach the warm waters of the Yellow Sea. Russia also took advantage of the internal turmoil of the Boxer Rebellion to receive tax exemption for exported goods from Manchuria (Elleman and Paine 2009). Historical concessions at Tientsin (Tianjin), Qingdao, and Hong Kong provide additional examples. Tianjin was divided into British, Russian, Austro-Hungarian, French, Japanese, German, Belgian, and Italian sectors, providing direct access to the Qing Dynasty's Beijing-Mukden Railway with East Station (Marinelli 2009). These sites ensured access and connectivity to Manchurian coal mining, timber, and livestock resources. Consequently, resource development in Manchuria was utilized by foreign powers, which was unacceptable for Chinese inhabitants (Suleski 1978). The concession of Tianjin ended in 1937 when Imperial Japan invaded China and pillaged Tianjin, Nanking, and Shanghai. Kuomintang (China's former nationalist party) and CCP had to resist the Japanese occupation via urban guerrilla war, such as destroying railways and participating in factory mutinies in Japanese operated industries to challenge the occupation and avoid humiliation (Wang 2012; Elleman and Paine 2009)

The Jiaozhou (Ciau-Jou/Kiaochow) Bay and the city of Qingdao were conceded by Qing China to German Empire in the aftermath of the German Imperial Navy occupying Qingdao with little resistance. Germans wanted to natural resources of China and to establish a permanent naval presence in the Asian frontier. Formalized on April 29th, 1898, the concession also included Shandong, Confucius' birthplace. Chinese people perceived this move as a matter of national humiliation (Wang 2012). The Emperor was heavily criticized for China becoming a slave state comparable to African colonies. The German Empire had conceded the territories to Imperial Japan at the end of the First

World War (Coco 2019). China could only retrieve its territories at the end of the Second World War.

In the case of Hong Kong, the United Kingdom acquired Hong Kong Island in perpetuity in 1860 and New Territories in 1898 in the aftermath of the Opium Wars. In the negotiations process, Chinese leadership considered British side representative Lord George Macartney in the aftermath of the First Opium War negotiations as “barbarians” who wanted to pay tribute to the overlord of a superior civilization. Macartney believed that this exchange was “amongst sovereign civilizations” (Hanes and Sanello 2002). Following the Second Peking Convention, the New Territories were included in Hong Kong as part of a 99-year lease to the United Kingdom in 1898, which the British signatories viewed as good as forever (Buckley 1997). British Hong Kong flourished as a business hub in the 1950s’ through 1980s’, becoming a centre for Sino-British business hub as it transformed from a fishing village to a treaty port city, allowing British goods to be transferred to the Chinese mainland (Shuyong 2015).

Deng Xiaoping and Zhao Ziyang attempted to reintegrate Hong Kong into China in 1982, as the New Territories lease' in the Second Convention was set to expire on July 1st, 1997. Deng Xiaoping wished to incorporate Hong Kong to depict a pilot example and extend the implementation of Xiaoping's four modernization programs. Former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher convened meetings with Ziyang and Xiaoping, and after two years of discussions, the Sino-British Joint Declaration, signed on December 19, 1984, detailed the transfer process (Mark 2017). The handover was scheduled for June 30th, 1997, when Hong Kong would become a Chinese Special Administrative Region and the Great United Kingdom would relinquish all the Hong Kong territory. According to the agreement, the city would be autonomous in its executive, judicial, and legislative affairs, and the capitalist system and lifestyle in Hong Kong would not be intervened in for 50 years after the handover (U.N 1994). This handover would also end one of the most embarrassing symbols of the "century of humiliation" back to China’s sovereignty (Buckley 1997;Mark 2017).

On June 30th, 1997, the Great United Kingdom handed over the entire territory of Hong Kong Island and its extensions of Kowloon and New Territories back to China, marking

an end to the direct British territorial presence in China. With the transfer of Hong Kong, Xi Jinping claims that all traces of a century of humiliation were removed, and vengeance against the perceived barbarians was accomplished (Wang 2014).

6.3. Modern Implications of *Tianxia* in Belt and Road Initiative

Tianxia's understanding process has permeated into the rejuvenation process as Xi Jinping claims that it would integrate spiritual civilization into all areas of social life, closely related to the development and practice of basic socialist principles, and would allow China to become rich, strong, and mighty in terms of cultural, economic and political positions (Brown and Bērziņa-Čerenkova 2018). The Belt and Road Initiative is an elaborate way to address the century of humiliation via its set of unequal treaties within BRI and vulnerability concerns that have been the key to the economic competitiveness of contemporary China. According to the historical examples provided, BRI can be considered the re-emergence of concession politics, reminiscent of prior hegemony-building efforts by the United Kingdom and the United States. Therefore, Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative and its offshoot Maritime Silk Road Initiative were accepted as part of that national rejuvenation, and the project has been reminiscent of its imposed "unequal treaties" as the concessions of Sri Lanka's debt-default over Hambantota Port and Pakistan's Gwadar Port's company control have been exemplified as a vengeance towards rules-based international order (Acharya 2019). China's *Tianxia* doctrine gives the necessary political element for China to induce a "leading by example" strategy to bolster its position to challenge the rules-based international order (Acharya 2019).

This political element is diluted with Xi Jinping's discourse elaborated in the 19th Congress and 100th Year speech since the "common shared destiny" and "national rejuvenation" are directly reminiscent of the teachings of *Tianxia* and The Book of Rites (Jinping 2021). China's modelling of the Belt and Road Initiative and its offshoots have been modelled after these objectives when combining the historical understanding of *Tianxia* and Xi Jinping's ambitions. The notion of "common shared destiny" and "spiritual civilization" culture can be considered a reinterpretation for the contemporary context of *Tianxia* doctrine. The implementation of "debt-trap diplomacy" is reminiscent

of the “collection of tributaries” within *Tianxia*’s interpretation (Zhao 2021). The tributary understanding became so significant in the Chinese proposal to sustain competitive economics that it is possible to argue that the BRI's primary ideological purpose is historical vengeance against the "unequal treaties" imposed on China. The attitude of historical revanchism conveyed by Xi Jinping against Western countries is so prevalent that the United States warned BRI-recipient countries in Africa about the risks of asset acquisitions and loss of capabilities to China (Brautigam 2020).

In the context of the Arctic, China may be able to achieve its aims of maintaining a competitive economy and establishing a combined military force by sharing responsibility and control with Russia in a mutually advantageous manner. In February 2022, Russian and Chinese joint declarations bolster mutual beneficiaries' case in the Arctic and allow China to alleviate the maritime lines of communication hindrances (Russia 2022). The buck-passing and buck-catching international propositions of John Mearsheimer fit into this instance since they share responsibilities and allow themselves to avoid international sanctions and tariffs imposed in the Russian-Ukrainian War. As a result, they have paved the way for challenging the international order based on norms.

7. CONCLUSION: HEGEMONIC STRUGGLE IN THE ARCTIC?

China may have discovered the limits of its burden-sharing with Russia when the practical effects of the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage are considered. Russian sovereignty concerns have been heightened because of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and sanctions linked to Russian military capabilities are endangering China's interests in the Arctic. Diversion of Russian capabilities to protect and reinforce the Ukrainian frontier as there is less emphasis on protecting the Arctic frontier. There is also the factor that Russia has less incentive to secure a transport route that Eurasian countries have flanked. As a result, the Russian guarantee provided to commercial vessels travelling via the Northern Sea Route may have been put on hold. Russia may not provide the necessary security capabilities that have been calculated as a presumption by the Chinese government, and the political discourse that has been eluded in the Joint Declaration may only be accepted in a principal capacity (Russia 2022).

Russia's use of China's banking system and ties to Western firms to evade raw material sanctions extends this collaboration, but it also impedes China's objective of economic competitiveness maintenance and political reshaping outside the rules-based international order. These concerns became evident in the United Nations General Assembly voting on the condemnation of Russian aggression against Ukraine on March 24, 2022. China and allies in Central Asia and most Sub-Saharan African countries abstained, demonstrating that the Ukrainian conflicts' humanitarian and economic consequences are still being weighed. China does not want to put itself in the danger of secondary sanctions targets, which would hit China's most significant concern of continuing economic competitiveness (U.N 2022). China would be stigmatized if it supported Russia's efforts in the Ukrainian war and would be on target for further pressure by the international community. Consequently, until the sanctions on Russian assets are lifted, China will be unable to operate its cargo vessels under the protection of the Russian Navy, defeating the purpose of the transiting in the first place through the Northern Sea Route.

In the instance of the Northwest Passage, China's use may be hampered as the Wanzhou-Kovrig case ended in a fashion resembling a hostage negotiation process and the manifestation of Sino-Canadian rivalry (Kuo 2021). Being a NATO ally and staunch adherer to the rules-based international order, Canada may not allow the passages of China owned, operated, or leased vessels and sovereign vessels exemplified by the *M/V Xue Long* and *Xue Long II*. Therefore, Canada can reject the usage of the Passage due to concerns regarding the protection of the environment and safety regulations for China-bound vessels. Canada would be rigid in its actions toward Chinese investments due to changing international conjuncture after the heightened threat perception towards the Sino-Russian partnership.

The appeal of Chinese soft power through the "common shared destiny" narrative is being negated and harmed by sovereignty-defying movements such as island dredging campaigns in the South China Sea, defying international tribunal verdicts, exemplified by the 2016 Philippines versus China case (Hwang and Frettingham 2020). These concerns regarding defiance of sovereignty were reinforced by corporate espionage and Iranian sanctions evasion by Huawei's senior executives in Canada. The point was furthered by defying the Hong Kong Handover treaty by implementing National Security Law in the face of protests in Hong Kong. Historical irredentism and revanchism drive China to repeat the United Kingdom and the United States' hegemony practices in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. All three of these hegemonies emphasized freedom of navigation and globalisation and attempted to dominate international relations. In essence, China followed John Mearsheimer's (2001) concept of structural realism by attempting to strengthen its local alliance structure to face stronger countries, and now China can challenge the former hegemon (Mearsheimer 2001).

Nonetheless, the discrepancy between rhetoric and reality is emphasized in the case of China in a historically similar fashion. In John Mearsheimer's (2002) perspective, China's promotion of normative arguments can be interpreted as liberal by its rhetoric (Mearsheimer 2002). *Tianxia* may seem to cover China's thinking as a benevolent actor in international relations, with "no outsiders" and "harmonious world" arguments (Zhao 2021). In Mearsheimer's (2002) perspective, China's approach to its Western counterparts is an example of "liberal talk and realist thinking" as the pretext of a "harmonious world"

is a cover-up for its despicable and morally unjustifiable acts (Mearsheimer 2002). This approach proved by the Wanzhou case and Hong Kong Handover Treaty violations. As seen in the Hong Kong protests in 2019 and the implementation of the National Security Law, unilateral arbitrariness can also be seen in the multilateral treaties to assure national sovereignty (Toru 2020).

When it comes to China maintaining industrial capabilities via securing its marine lines of communication with the Belt and Road Initiative and the Maritime Silk Road Initiative, Mearsheimer's power maximization argument is evident in the Arctic case (Mearsheimer 2001). James Rosenau's (1995) approach captures *Tianxia's* primary idea of Chinese dominance and the pre-dominance of great powers controlling their subject relations through international organizations. Rosenau would have recommended adopting the Global Governance framework, which would allow China to promote a more convenient separation from the rules-based international order toward Beijing Consensus (Rosenau 1995). China's pragmatic interpretation and rejection of rules-based international relations reveal that it wants to maximize its competitive advantage and become a hegemon of "all under the heaven" (Acharya 2019). Nonetheless, *Tianxia* indirectly invalidates the rejection of Chinese hegemony, which is the focal point of Xi Jinping's ideology. As a result, contrasting China's actions and rhetoric creates a significant disparity. This disparity would cause significant disillusionment among many prospective nations. For prospective nations, picturing the "Chinese dream" would be similar to Chinese domination in international relations. As a result, these nations may be reluctant to join this order and protection system for fear of losing their leverages in the rules-based international order and uncertainty over their sovereignty areas. Mearsheimer (2001) suggested that a state is only concerned with amassing power to itself (Mearsheimer 2001). As previously mentioned, the "zero-sum game" posits an invariable amount of total power split in this hegemonic war and independence between the opposing sides. (Mearsheimer 2001) China is not different to this power maximization attitude, as it has followed its path to power maximization in a similar fashion to the United Kingdom and the United States, respectively. Allison (2017) exemplified two instances of peaceful hegemony transition. These instances include the United Kingdom's deposition from hegemony by the United States and Germany's dominance in Europe since the Cold War

through settling economic, political and systemic unity with the establishment of the European Union (Allison 2017). However, there is a significant difference in the Sino-American power struggle. In contrast to the British and German examples, the Chinese supremacy component in *Tianxia* is an all-encompassing concept that is opposed to the rules-based international order and its normative justifications that have held power since the last hegemonic struggle. The “benevolent governance” element is a direct anathema for the rules-based international order as it promotes hierarchical international relations (Allison 2017).

Under the pretext of “genuine multilateralism” and “win-win cooperation over zero-sum understanding” China also promotes its own alliance mechanism similar to rules-based international order via BRICS and BRI for its economic frontier (Xinhua 2022). In the political and security frontier, the establishment of the Global Security Initiative as a direct security component of the Belt and Road Initiative, China increases the stakes against the rules-based international order which has benefitted in this first place, citing concerns of “vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, follows the philosophy that humanity is an indivisible security community, and aims to create a new path to security that features dialogue over confrontation” (Xinhua 2022). This security initiative appears to agree with the United Nations Charter since it calls for the “transformation of the global security governance structure,” with an emphasis on “community with a shared destiny for mankind” (Yucheng 2022). However, as we have shown throughout the dissertation, the difference between discourse and action might be seen as a continuation of the neo-realist argument of John Mearsheimer (Mearsheimer 2002).

Regardless of the potential outcome of the anticipated Sino-American conflict, the conventional war would lead to an economic recession and downturn as international commerce would be stopped in its tracks. The total loss of trade volume between the United States and China would be estimated at around USD 716 billion worth of goods annually. China would also lose its fourth-largest trading market (Service 2022). Losing the chain of goods and services would be catastrophic for both great powers, as they would be losing their economic capabilities. China’s anticipated victory would not yield spoils as expected as the export-driven economies of both sides of the war would be

devastated by the conflict. The war also is direct contradiction to the China's understanding of linkage-building through the economic interdependence, between China and the United States. On the other hand, China's Belt and Road and Maritime Silk Road would determine the resilience of the Beijing Consensus with its economic and political elements. In the perspective of Graham Allison, the geo-economic leverage that China holds would inherently upset the balance of power in favour of China (Allison 2017). However, Allison does not rule out an armed conflict between China and the United States. Allison also determined that the case of war would set China's economy up to 35 per cent of GDP for a single year's non-nuclear conflict (Allison 2017). The potential loss of economic competitiveness would be so catastrophic that China may not be able to bear the brunt of a total loss of its connectivity in a case of war.

In the case of war, there is a slew of unaddressed factors for this scenario: Is there a strategy for China to safeguard its supply lines through the Belt and Road Initiative and the Maritime Silk Road Initiative in the case of conflict to offset its potential losses in imports and exports? Is there a role for the Arctic Ocean as a logistical and strategic component in the widely anticipated Sino-American conflict? Will the Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic aid the hegemonic challenge via transportation and extraction of natural resources? Would Russia deploy its military capabilities to assist China's war efforts through the Arctic? These questions may be unanswered until the anticipated conflict is underway.

If China wants to offset its losses across the Arctic Ocean via Belt and Road Initiative, it is still highly reliant on Russian and Canadian consent to use these routes. This dependence means that China cannot feasibly assert its geoeconomical and geopolitical interests, which is a significant disadvantage to China's ambitions of obstruction-free sea lines in the Arctic Ocean. During the new Cold War era, the Arctic Ocean and its periphery would transform into an economic and political frontier for geopolitical and geoeconomical hegemony competition. Like the South China Sea, the Arctic frontier will not tolerate hubris and miscalculation on both sides. If that happens, the implications of this confrontation will reverberate throughout international relations for generations to come.

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