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Co-Progressiveness of Arctic Governance and the Initiative of Polar Silk Road

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ABSTRACT

Although witnessed some external incidents, like the impacts of Ukrainian and Syrian Crises which intensified some geo-political concerns among the eight Arctic States, the arctic governance & cooperation process has undergone fairly steady development in recent years. The five Arctic Coastal States (Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway, Russia, and USA, hereinafter as A5) and other five major stake-holders, China, Japan, South Korea, Iceland and EU reached an Agreement on the regulation of the IUU fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean in October 2018. This A5+5 mechanism, to some extent, is a kind of innovative paradigm for the normative generation for Arctic governance, and is also positive for the Non-arctic States' involvement. Besides that, the Polar Code promulgated by the International Maritime Organization (IMO) has entered into force since January 2017, which is the first legally binding instrument regulating the shipping on the ice-covered water areas at both polar regions; and also in May 2017, the Arctic States signed the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation, which is the third binding treaties within the ambit of the Arctic Council since 2011Nukk Conference. Thus how the newly emergent arctic norms interact with the existing international regulations and domestic laws of the Arctic States is a key point for further research. In short, the coherent development of a normative system is vital for the performance of Arctic governance itself.

In January 2018, Chinese government unveiled its first official Arctic Policy Whitepaper, in which China committed to work with all parties to build a "Polar Silk Road" (PSR) through developing the Arctic shipping routes based on the principle of wide consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits. It encourages Chinese enterprises to participate in the infrastructure constructions for the routes and carry out commercial trial passages in accordance with relevant legal regulations to pave the way for their commercial and regular operation. In addition, relying on the development and utilization of sea lanes in the Arctic, the PSR consolidates infrastructure, reduces transportation costs, and increases energy supply. In this light, China is expected to gain its weight in Arctic affairs including energy cooperation, and the Yamal LNG project has been successfully launched by China and Russia under the framework of PSR.

The PSR initiative also marks China's investment commitments on building the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and other part of shipping route in the Arctic jointly with relevant Parties based on win-win and sustainable principles. It provides new impetus for international cooperation in the Arctic such as the Arctic Corridor project launched by the European Union, Finland and Norway. In 2017, President Xi Jinping of China visited Finland. Both countries believe that the Sino-Finnish new-type partnership for the future as a supplement to China's comprehensive strategic partnership with the EU, will promote the implementation of the China-EU Cooperation 2020 Strategic Plan and China-Nordic cooperation. Finland has proposed to link the PSR with its "Arctic Corridor", a railway which is at the cost of \$3.4 billion, will connect the city of Rovaniemi in northern Finland with the Norwegian port of Kirkenes,¹ making Finland a hub country connecting the Arctic with Eurasia. The "Arctic Corridor" could open the way for the PSR to reach the Nordic countries and eastern European markets so as to connect China and Russia with the "pan-European transport network" and jointly build a grand transport network across Europe and Asia. The project is supported by the Finnish government, academics and business leaders and could be a possible and promising project under the PSR framework.

China has actively worked with other parties to build the PSR, which will bring opportunities for cooperation in promoting connectivity and sustainable economic and social development in this region. At present, the concept of PSR advocated by China and Russia is still under its initial stages and arouses some anxiety in Western media. The benign interactions between PSR framework and the current Arctic regimes are essential for its future development. In this regard, the Nordic Countries and Eastern Asian States could play constructive roles as reliable channels and partners through equal consultation and concrete cooperation. The author visited the Nordic Countries like Norway and Finland several times on the arctic cooperation/governance and China's Policy Development during 2013 – 2018 financed by China-Nordic Arctic Research Center (CNARC) Fellowships, etc. and hopes to do some in-depth research on Eastern Asian Nations cooperation on the Arctic Economic governance under the post-ArCS project for the year 2020-25, in collaboration with Kobe PCRC and other universities and research institutions. The friendly cooperation among China-Japan-Korea on the arctic is indispensable to the smooth operation of PSR.

¹ Kirkenes: the nearest western port to Asia which is ice-free. It is a free trading, logistics and industrial port in use for supplies and services to the Russian Barents, Pechaora and Kara seas, Yamal and other Northern Russian onshore and offshore sites.

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