

The Ice Silk Road Initiative and Its implication for the Arctic Governance

Abstract

Liu Xu

CIEESS, Renmin University of China

The Ice Silk Road initiative was proposed jointly by China and Russia's Leaders in 2017, as a new form of the China's involvement into the Arctic affairs and a supplement to the Belt and Road Initiative in the northern part of the Eurasian continent. In the white paper of China's Arctic Policy which was published early this year, Chinese government delivered the willingness to cooperate with all the stakeholder-countries within the framework of the ISR initiative, which was granted significant meanings not only on the bilateral but international levels.

Energy resources and the Northern Sea Route are the most concerning issues of China in the ISR initiative. There are lots of energy resource mainly in the hydrocarbon form along the NSR, while china is eager to them, especially natural gas, to meet the rising domestic demand and counter the severe air pollution. The energy resources along the ISR are mostly located on the Russian territory, but the development and transportation of the produced energy products are organized in various international frameworks. The exploration activities of energy resources are multibeneficial for all the countries involved but on different extents related to resources, technology, capital and manufacturing capabilities.

China's involvement into the NSR will focus on the transit shipping, coastal infrastructure and energy resource transportation. Chinese shipping company has completed and continuing the test transit voyage along the NSR. Accompanied with the development of energy resources in Russia arctic area, the shipping volume most of which is directed to the China-led Asian market will no doubt increase sharply. The infrastructure on the coast area of the NSR is vulnerable and the Russian government are attempting to improve them for the reason of social development and state control of the Northern territory. The infrastructure development are creating another cooperating field for Russia and China.

China's involvement into the Arctic issues through the Ick Silk Road initiative means both opportunities and challenges to the energy, maritime and environmental governance in the region, but with high uncertainties. The extent of the uncertainty depends on several domestic, bilateral and multilateral factors. Out of them, Russia's attitude and policy to the ISR initiative, US-EU-led sanction on Russia and the global energy transition will be most concerned about.