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**CHINA:  
DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES**

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**NATIONAL INTERESTS OF CHINA:  
CONNOTATIONS, HIERARCHY, BALANCING**

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**Abstract.** The connotations of the interests of the PRC in the official scientific and political discourse during the period of the existence of the new Chinese state first transformed from class (*jieji liyi*, 1949–1978) to actually national (national-state – *guojia liyi*, 1979–2008), and then transition to “indigenous (core) national” (*hexin guojia liyi*, or simply “indigenous” – *hexin liyi*), and this emphasis became dominant after 2012. This process reflects substantive changes in the state’s strategy. At the same time, the spatial and geographical range of his interests was expanding – from a predominant focus on domestic needs to regional and global ones. Since the 12th Chinese Communist Party Congress of 1982 declared that China would adopt foreign policy according to its national interests, the term “national interests” has been frequently used in Chinese official documents. The problems of national interests in the Chinese academic community were first raised in 1987 at the Shanghai Scientific Conference on the Theory of International Relations. In 1995, Yan Xuetong published China’s first monograph on this subject, “Analysis of China’s National Interests”, on which he worked for two years (grant from the Chinese Academy of Contemporary International Relations) after returning from the United States, where he defended his doctoral dissertation. The publication of this book even sparked a “great debate” between young scholars and traditionalists about the normative requirements for writing papers. The article shows the dynamics of changes in the national interests of the PRC, their connotations and hierarchy both in academic discourse and in the practice of Chinese diplomacy (case of Russia and Ukraine).

**Keywords:** China, national interests, core interests, definitions, hierarchy, balancing, Russia, Ukraine.

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**НАЦИОНАЛЬНЫЕ ИНТЕРЕСЫ КИТАЯ:  
КОННОТАЦИИ, ИЕРАРХИЯ, БАЛАНСИРОВАНИЕ**

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**Аннотация.** Преобладающие коннотации интересов КНР в официальном научном и политическом дискурсе за период существования нового китайского государства трансформировались дважды: сначала от классовых (*цзецзи лии*, 1949–1978 гг.) к собственно национальным (национально-государственным – *гоцзя лии*, 1979–2008 гг.), а затем наметился переход к “коренным (сердцевинным) национальным” (*гоцзя дэ хэсинь лии*, или просто “коренным” – *хэсинь лии*), и этот акцент стал безус-

ловно доминирующим после 2012 г. Данный процесс отражает содержательные изменения в стратегии государства. Параллельно расширялся и пространственно-географический диапазон его интересов — от преимущественного сосредоточения на внутренних потребностях к региональным и глобальным. В статье показана динамика изменений национальных интересов КНР, их коннотаций и иерархии как в академическом дискурсе, так и в практике дипломатии Китая.

**Ключевые слова:** Китай, национальные интересы, коренные интересы, коннотации, иерархия, балансирование, Россия, Украина.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

The term “national interests” emerged in the system of social-scientific and political discourse in the post-Soviet space and socialist countries fairly recently, in the late 1980s–1990s. However, it soon proved its relevance as a convenient tool for analyzing intrastate and international processes. The adaptation of this concept was naturally based on the idea of the interests of the state as a sovereign form of political power. In particular, this is confirmed by the Chinese counterpart of the Western term “national interests” – *guojia liyi* (lit. “state interests”), placing emphasis upon the factor of the nation’s political sovereignty<sup>1</sup>. In contemporary discourse, national interests are recognized to have both external and internal vectors, and the former is most often preferred. National interests are deservedly considered the leading driving force of any state’s foreign policy. The role of such interests is all the more significant when it comes to a global actor in world politics, such as China.

In the 21st century, Beijing acts as the main political force among those who form international financial structures alternative to the Western ones [1]. It presents itself as a representative of the huge developing world taking shape in international practice and conceptualized in international theory as the collective non-West [2]. Studying China’s national interests has become especially relevant for political sciences in connection with Russia’s Special Military Operation (SMO) [source 1], which brought Russia into the epicenter of world politics and ultimately established it as the third pole of international relations, bringing to an end the “era of unipolar world order” [source 2] and thus shaping a “tripolar” structure of world politics (USA – China – Russian Federation) (see [3]). The joint statement of Russia and China on international relations in the new era [source 3], made by Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Chinese name of the United Nations – Lianhe Guo (lit. “United States”).

in Beijing on February 4, 2022, 20 days before starting the SMO, in fact, secures the military-political alliance, or “alliance without signing a treaty” (see [4]), between the two countries, confirmed by the participation (for the first time) of three types of armed forces (land, naval, and air forces) in the international exercises Vostok-2022 [5], as well as the establishment of “competing norms” in the practice of international relations [6]. In no small measure, it was Russia’s SMO, provoked by the aggressive actions of the USA in Ukraine aimed at expanding the NATO infrastructure, that prompted Beijing to take an even tougher position in the Taiwan issue [7], which the US is trying to “Ukrainize” [8, 9, 10, 11], bringing NATO military activity closer to the PRC borders [12, 13].

In this global context, the systemic nature of China’s national interests, determining the country’s foreign policy behavior and exerting a marked impact on the balance of power in world politics, is clearly manifested. The PRC’s successful foreign policy course maintained for more than 40 years (since Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978) testifies to Beijing’s consistent building of a clear hierarchy of national interests (see [14, 15]). Along with a strong economy, stable political system, and global ambitions, China has a strong national idea in the form of the “Chinese dream” (*zhongguo meng*), accumulating goals and objectives related to achieving Beijing’s national interests for the next half century [source 4].

The issues of “nation-state interests” (*guojia liyi*) in the Chinese academic community were first discussed in 1987 at the Shanghai Scientific Conference on the Theory of International Relations [16, 17]. Before, this formulation was almost never used, and until 1976, during the rule of Mao Zedong, China’s interests were presented almost exclusively as class interests, meeting the needs of the Chinese and world proletariat. At the same time, the international component of these interests was much less significant than the set of

goals and tasks related solely to China's own territory. Chinese political scientists attribute such a structure of China's interests to distrust in the policies of the powers whose aggression China had suffered before 1949 and the desire to limit interaction with them to the greatest possible extent [18, p. 19; 19].

In this paper, "national interests" in a broad sense are understood as preferences of the state with regard to the essential development areas, goals, and tasks. The main interests are always the interests of self-preservation (*shengcunxing*)<sup>2</sup>, that is, the country's security and the development of its economy as the basis for the existence of the state [21]. According to Zhang Junguo, in the period of Mao Zedong's leadership, China advocated the *class* interests of the proletariat in its foreign policy, and this position manifested itself in the phraseology of discourse on the country's interests [22]. Zhang Jinping, Yu Xuebo, and Zhu Bingyuan believe that Deng Xiaoping in his policy of openness and reform already pursued the *national* interests of the entire country, and this emphasis was preserved as a priority by his successors [23, 24]. Already by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the term "core (indigenous) interests" (*hexin liyi*) entered into official use and became widespread, and Xi Jinping's rise to power and ambitious programs finally made this connotation of state interests dominating [25, 26]. The circumstances in which the core interests of rising China may clash with the interests of the currently dominant world power, the United States, and the possible extent of such collisions are subjects of permanent interest to international scholars in China and abroad (see, for example, [27]).

The analysis of the academic discourse on the content, hierarchy, and balancing of China's national interests, relevant doctrines, and their manifestations in the practice of Chinese diplomacy makes it possible to reveal both the focal points of Chinese public thought, marking the main tasks of the nation from the perspective of its self-preservation, and some essential features of implementing these tasks by means of foreign policy.

<sup>2</sup> Hereinafter, it is appropriate to translate this Chinese word, literally meaning "survivability", as "self-preservation" – this term was proposed by academician A.A. Kokoshin as a definition of the main of "national interests" [20 p. 6].

## THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO THE ISSUE OF NATIONAL INTERESTS

**National interests as a subject of academic research.** According to the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (*CNKI, Zhongguo zhi wang shuju ku*), 378 articles on the issue of national interests were published by the country's academic and educational institutions between 2000 and 2020. Institutions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) published the most articles (38). The Institute of World Economics and Politics, the main research center of the CASS, which publishes the journal *World Economics and Politics (Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi)*, made the most significant contribution to research on national interest issues. Its staff includes such well-known researchers on the subject as Wang Yizhou, Li Shaojun, Gao Weikai, Wang Dong, and others. The CASS is followed by Jilin University (11 articles), Renmin University of China (10), as well as Peking University and the Central Party School of the Chinese Communist Party (9 articles each). Tsinghua University published eight papers, and Shandong, Fudan, and Jinan universities each published seven papers. In total, these 11 institutions accounted for 116 articles, or 30.7% of the total sample, indicating that a certain pool of academic institutions and universities concentrated their efforts on the corresponding research area [28, p. 12]. Among the most exuberant authors over the same 20 years, one can note Zhang Junguo (Henan University of Science and Technology) – six papers, Qin Zhengwei (Liaocheng University), and Wang Dong (CASS) – five papers each, Shu Shengfang (Shanghai University of Sport) and Shen Jianhua (Shanghai Normal University) – four papers each, Du Baogui (Northeastern University of China), Wang Yizhou and Gao Weikai (CASS), Liu Zhiyuan (Xiamen University), and Li Yukun (Sanxia University) – three papers each [28, p. 13].

In terms of the frequency of use in academic literature during 2000 alone, the term "national interests" (used 218 times) left behind such popular words in public discourse as "ideology," "globalization", "Russia", and even "national sovereignty" [28, p. 13].

**Interpretations of "national interests" in China.** The adaptation of the concept of "national interests" in China was somewhat complicated by the

fact that there was a combination of two different meanings – “interests of the state” and “interests of the nation”, which can also be expressed by separate lexemes; moreover, the Western concept of “nation” became a novelty for China in the 20th century and even received different linguistic equivalents. At the same time, Chinese scholars, of course, are aware that the term “national interest” in the original understanding correlated with the international and global interests of the country and only over time began to imply also the interests of the government or the state represented by it in the internal political context [29, p. 4].

The phenomenon of national interests has been studied in China for many years, but the interpretations of this concept still vary. For instance, Wang Yizhou believes that national interests belong to the “basic goods”, rights, or benefits that a national state demands, and reflect the needs and interests of all citizens of the country and various groups [30]. Li Shaojun supposes that national interests are the needs and desires, that is, the “benefits” received by sovereign states for self-preservation and development [31]. Gao Weikai believes that the main connotation of the concept of “national interests” is a certain synthesis of objective factors that are conditioned by the self-determination of a nation-state in relation to other nation-states [32].

The authors of a reference book on the issues of international relations published in Tianjin in 2013 argue that although Chinese researchers define national interests in different ways, all of them believe that the carrier of such interests is the sovereign state, the main content of which is the nation. National interests are common for all classes and peoples of the country and are characterized by a certain stability, while their predominant connotation in public discourse changes following the transformations of the internal and international environment. Self-preservation and security are considered to be the main interests of the nation-state, stable in the long term, while economic and cultural interests are a continuation of national interests and are adjusted to a greater or lesser extent according to changes in the external environment.

The above-mentioned reference book also states that in Chinese academic discourse, there is also a broader understanding of national inter-

ests as a set of factors contributing to the general self-preservation and development of the overwhelming majority of the country’s inhabitants. Besides, national interests a) “are located within the country”, b) differ in their material content, and c) reflect the common interest rather than a simple sum of different interests. According to the authors of the manual, the main international factors that contributed to the emergence of national interests should include such processes and events as the creation of national states after the Treaty of Westphalia, the formation of modern bourgeois-democratic ideas, and imperialist wars of the 20th century. In their view, national interests first and foremost reflect specific social relations that cannot be identified with specific material goods and only under certain historical conditions can be associated with sovereign states. According to the needs accompanying national interests, it is proposed to divide the latter into primary and secondary, as well as into long- and short-term interests, and, depending on the degree of generality, into general and specific interests. The authors of the reference book also propose to divide national interests into security-related, economic, political, and cultural interests [source 5, p. 244].

In China’s doctrinal documents, the concept of “national interests” first appeared in the White Paper “China’s National Defense” (2002). They were interpreted as “safeguarding state sovereignty, unity, territorial integrity and security” and implied the need for “upholding economic development as the central task and unremittingly enhancing the overall national strength; adhering to and improving the socialist system; maintaining and promoting social stability and harmony; and striving for an international environment of lasting peace and a favorable climate in China’s periphery” [source 6].

In 2011, the White Paper “China’s Peaceful Development” was published, which defined the country’s core interests: state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification, China’s political system established by the Constitution and overall social stability, and the basic safeguards for ensuring sustainable economic and social development [source 7]. The 2019 White Paper “China’s National Defense in the New Era” introduced the concept of “foreign interests” (*waiguo liyi*), which were recognized as

an important part of China's national interests. Effective protection of the security and legitimate rights and interests of Chinese citizens, organizations, and institutions abroad is entrusted to the Chinese armed forces [source 8].

**Conceptualization of national interests.** The theoretical foundation for studying national interests both within and outside China is basically three main paradigmatic approaches to the study subject.

1. Classical constructivism (see [33, 34, 35]), which brings to the surface the interrelation between state interests and identities. One of its main sources is the concept of power as a source of discourse, proposed by the 20th-century French theorist Michel Foucault. Within the framework of this theoretical trend, states are presented as the main actors of international relations, whose behavior is motivated by a variety of interests rooted in corporate, type, role, and collective identities, as well as in the great cultural and historical diversity of countries [36].

2. Political realism, prioritizes the idea of "interest". The classical ideas of realism were formulated by Hans Morgenthau, an American political scientist of the last century, who believed that the idea of "interest" is the essence of politics and does not depend on time and place. Statesmen are supposed to think and act from the perspective of such an interest as power (by way of comparison, economists act from the perspective of another interest – wealth). Classical realism states that the key concept of interest (defined as power) is an objective category with a universal meaning, but does not endow this concept with a single fixed meaning (see [37]).

3. Neoclassical realism, which goes back to the writings of a contemporary American researcher Gideon Rose, takes a power structure as an independent variable, assuming China's strategic orientation and the reactions of border/peripheral/neighboring countries to be intermediate variables. Relying on the correlations of these variables, Chinese political scientist Ye Xiaodi categorized the shift/transit of national interests as "defensive national interests", "constructive national interests", and "competitive core interests", expanding the space of application from domestic and regional to interregional and global levels (see [38, 15, 39]).

Contrary to the conclusions of traditional realism that China has become a "revisionist" country within the existing system because of changes in relative power and then has gradually adopted expansionist and aggressive behavior, changes in China's concept of national interests also occur for other reasons – because of transformations in the international power structure – and are a strategic response to changes in this structure. Such a response is passive and reactive rather than becoming a choice of the rising power taking the strategic initiative. As a strategic response to changes in the international power structure, the scope of China's national interest concept extends from the country itself to intraregional and finally to interregional affairs.

Taiwanese researchers believe that since the beginning of the official use of the concept of national interests in China in the 1980s, the refinements of the concept of "interests" in Chinese academic and political discourse have mainly been of three types: "domestic demand national interest" (*neixiuxing guojia liyi*), "extensible national interest" (*waixingxing guojia liyi*), and "adversary core interest" (*duikangxing hexin liyi*) [40].

American political scientist Alexander Wendt notes that although the concept of "national interests" is abstract, states, due to their corporate identity (as institutions of public power), have some common features, due to which they generate to a certain extent universal "national" interests. These interests are not just normative guidelines for action, but causal forces stimulating states to act in certain ways. He distinguishes four key components of national interests: physical "survival", autonomy, economic well-being (life, liberty, and property), and collective self-respect [41]. Martha Finnemore emphasizes that states require a combination of power, security, and wealth for basic existence [42].

In China's diplomatic discourse, there are three theoretical schools within which China's national interests are considered (see Table 1).

#### "CORE INTERESTS" IN THE HIERARCHY OF CHINA'S NATIONAL INTERESTS

In 2006, Pan Weijuan and Jiang Xinxue, associate professors at the International Policy Re-

**Table 1.** Theoretical directions of diplomacy in China

	Traditional ( <i>chuantong pai</i> )	With Chinese specifics ( <i>tese pai</i> )	Non-traditional ( <i>bu chuantong pai</i> )
External situation (factors under study)	Anarchy, balance of power	International system, cultural identity/authenticity	Globalization, a community of shared destiny
Philosophical basis	Realism, neorealism	Marxism, constructivism	Liberalism, postmodernism
Core issues	Politics among nations	Politics between China and the World	Politics among networks
Actors of diplomacy	State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies	State, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, embassies	State, non-state actors
Main connotations of the concepts	Power, strategy, game	Epoch, order, features	Dialogue, networks, legitimacy
Focus of the study	Power diplomacy, strategy games, unions/alliances	Chinese specifics/features, relations, processes	Democratization, socialization, public diplomacy
Leading representatives	Yan Xuetong, Ye Zicheng	Liang Shoude, Qin Yaqing	Wang Yizhou, Zhao Qizheng

Sources: [43, p. 41; 44].

search Center of the Chinese People's Liberation Army Foreign Language Institute, in a paper titled "Comparison of the Core National Interests of China and the United States", provided one of the first definitions of China's core interests. They noted that in the English version, there are *vital national interests*, and in the Chinese – "core national interests" (*hexin guojia liyi*), which mean the following: 1) uphold the interests of national development, promote comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable economic and social development, and continuously build up the comprehensive strength of the country; 2) put an end to division and promote unity, prevent and resist aggression, protect national sovereignty, territorial integrity, and maritime rights and interests; 3) pursue an independent foreign policy of peace, be committed to mutual trust and a new concept of security based on mutual benefit, equality, and cooperation, striving for the long-term favorable international conditions and environment; 4) be cautious and do everything possible to be a responsible great power in the world community [45].

Taiwan researchers meticulously calculated statistics on the use of the term "core interests" in two central Chinese media, the Renmin Ribao newspaper and the Xinhua News Agency, and found an explosive growth in the popularity of this term (see Table 2). They relate this phenomenon to the 2008 global financial crisis and increased pressure on China on the part of the US.

In the PRC's normative documents [sources 6, 7, 8] one can find a recurrent classification of national interests, which establishes their hierarchy. Among them, the following are distinguished:

- ensuring sovereignty, primarily territorial (integration of Taiwan, the Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, and islands in the South China Sea into the PRC, as well as defending Beijing's international position on Tibet, Xinjiang, and Hong Kong), i. e. "China's core interests";
- ensuring the country's political, economic, technological, and information development;

**Table 2.** Number of annual appearances of the term "core interests" in the materials of the CPC Central Committee's *Renmin Ribao* newspaper and the PRC's Xinhua news agency in 2005–2026

	<i>Renmin Ribao</i>	<i>Xinhua</i>
2005	55	166
2006	47	128
2007	54	134
2008	75	172
2009	242	638
2010	250	938
2011	285	772
2012	309	668
2013	251	776
2014	290	776
2015	216	646
2016	290	889

Compiled by the authors based on [40].

**Table 3.** Classification of China's national interests

Classification	Content
By the space of distribution	1. Internal 2. Regional 3. Global
By the degree of stability	1. Permanent 2. Changing
By importance	1. Economic development 2. Territorial integrity 3. Security (cyber, bio, information, etc.)
By the level of manifestation	1. At the state level (constitution, legal documents, etc.) 2. At the non-state level (formulated by parties, public organizations, the scientific community, etc.)
According to the main connotations and periods of Chinese leaders' rule	1. Class-based (the rule of Mao Zedong) 2. National (the rule of Deng Xiaoping and his successors Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao) 3. Core (the reign of Xi Jinping)

Compiled by the authors according to [sources 6, 7, 8].

- establishing the country's national security system;
- ensuring the stability of international relations;
- protecting the rights of Chinese abroad – legal, economic, and social security.

Combining the ideas contained in doctrinal documents and expressed in China's academic discourse, national interests can be classified as follows (see Table 3).

China's national interests, which include protecting sovereignty and territorial integrity, maintaining internal stability, economic growth, and ensuring the status of a great power status, have remained rather consistent and unalterable over decades. According to Xu Jia, with the growth of economic power and export opportunities, a slow process of "spreading" the boundaries of China's national interests beyond its territory was taking place [46, p. 19], which accelerated after China's accession to the WTO in 2001.

### THE PROBLEM OF BALANCING CHINA'S NATIONAL INTERESTS

China builds its national security and system of national interests according to its own specifics. Its particular feature is special attention to the tools for balancing interests [47, pp. 55-68]. Yuan Peng, president of the Chinese Academy of

Contemporary International Relations, states that the term "five balances" (*uge pingheng*) in modern Chinese discourse means a balance between development and security, between openness and security, between traditional and non-traditional security issues, between China's security and the general security of the world, as well as between protecting national security and creating favorable conditions for it [48, p. 5]. Opposing itself to the United States, which strives for international expansion and hegemony, justifying it by the interests of its national security, China declares the desire to maintain global security and build "a community with a common future for humanity"<sup>3</sup>. According to Yuan Peng, in contrast to Russia, which puts national security above everything else, China seeks a *balance* between development and security, and unlike Europe and Japan, which entrust their national security to other countries, it has always been committed to the principle of independence and self-reliance. A substantial feature of national security with Chinese specifics is that Beijing advocates the unity of people's security, political security, and the primacy of national interests [48, p. 5].

The strong geopolitical influence of Russia's SMO on China's global competition with the US and building new approaches to the European Union with regard to their sanctions policy require

<sup>3</sup> In this way, Chinese official materials in the Russian language convey the wording *zhenlei minyun gongtunti*, which in scientific literature and journalism is often translated also as "the community of the common destiny of humankind".

Beijing to balance its national interests in relation to Russia and Ukraine. While China's relations with Russia are dominated mainly by global strategy considerations, its relations with Ukraine are determined by tactical issues of food security.

**China-Russia: strategic trust.** Despite the existence of different points of view regarding the dynamics of Russian-Chinese relations, Russia remains China's main and only global strategic partner [15]. Their interaction is characterized not only by an increase in bilateral trade (2020 – \$106 billion, 2021 – \$146.9 billion, and 2022 – \$190.3 billion) but also, to a certain extent, by the growing importance of Russia as a factor in China's national security (assistance in creating an early warning system against missile attack, supplies of S-300 and S-400 air defense systems, SU-35 aircraft of the 4++ generation, joint patrols of Russian TU-95 strategic missile carriers with the Chinese Air Force in the adjacent seas, regular large-scale joint military maneuvers, etc.).

Russia's SMO has demonstrated the strength of such variables in international relations as strategic trust and strategic interdependence. Both countries have come a long way to establish stable and reliable relations, and the level of these relations enables them to exert significant influence on international policy. The progressive dynamics of the Russia-China rapprochement results from the increasing pressure of the international system on both countries, especially after the incorporation of Crimea and Sevastopol into Russia in 2014, the start of the US trade and sanctions war against the PRC in 2018, and the accession of four regions to Russia in 2022. In turn, the unwillingness to create a formal alliance is due to obstacles related to the imperatives of the domestic economy and historical memory [49].

During Xi Jinping's visit to Moscow on March 2023, the parties adopted two joint statements of great importance for bilateral relations: on deepening the relations of comprehensive partnership and strategic cooperation between Russia and China, entering a new epoch, and on the plan for the development of key areas of the Russian-Chinese economic cooperation until 2030. Thus, cooperation will expand in almost all areas, and strategic trust will be reinforced.

Some researchers use for the current Russian-Chinese relations the term “*asymmetric*

*win-win*”. The widely known statement about the “economic complementarity” of Russia and China is in fact a constraining factor for the development of the Russian economy, contributing to the establishment of an unfavorable model of economic interaction between Russia and China. It is appropriate to say that Russia is stuck at the stage of “comparative advantage of backwardness”, securing for itself the role of a raw-material economy in its relations with China [50], and the results of bilateral trade for 2022 show that the growth of trade volumes was due to the increase in supplies of Russian oil, gas, and coal to China [source 9]. Economically interdependent states, as a rule, consider the threat concerning an economic partner primarily in the sphere of material interests [51], which, nevertheless, in 2022 receded into the background and are now considered by Russia mainly in the context of geopolitical acquisitions – an increase in the territory (due to the inclusion of the Donetsk People's Republic, Luhansk People's Republic, Kherson and Zaporozhye Regions), population (8 million people), and export opportunities for agricultural products (10 million tons of exported grain) [52].

All-encompassing sanctions imposed on Russia became a reason for similar or even tougher sanctions that could be imposed on Beijing, if it decided to restore its sovereignty over Taiwan. Balancing the structure of production, trade, finance, inbound and outbound investment to minimize the losses and costs for the sanctioned party becomes an important strategic issue for Beijing. This necessary adjustment is likely to reinforce China's strategic patience in solving the Taiwan problem peacefully and enable it to focus on eliminating its weaknesses and further comprehensive development. As a result, China will exert more efforts to improve its relations with the world, including the United States and the West in general (especially the European Union), to create favorable conditions for preparing a solution to the Taiwan issue. On the other hand, China will continue its resolute struggle against the expansion of U.S. – Taiwan cooperation, among other things, by demonstrating its force and resorting to sanctions, while preventing the spread of the impact of the Taiwan-related conflict to the areas of the economy and politics that are currently free from its influence.

**China-Ukraine: China's food security as the main factor in interstate relations.** In 2021, trade between China and Ukraine reached the highest levels since 2016: the PRC's exports to Ukraine amounted to \$9.8 billion, and imports – \$9.4 billion. Despite the sustainable growth, trade between Ukraine and China amounted to only about 0.3% of China's foreign trade volume. China accounted for about 15% of Ukraine's foreign trade. Cereals (primarily corn, barley, and wheat) accounted for half of Chinese imports of agricultural products from Ukraine in 2020. The only important high-tech product that China imported from Ukraine was gas turbine jet engines. China bought almost half of iron ore, barley, jet turbines, and vegetable oils manufactured in Ukraine [source 10].

As early as 2018, China opened a trade and investment center of the Belt and Road Initiative in Ukraine, which was a sign of the forthcoming increase in Chinese corporate investment, especially in Ukrainian ports. For example, the Chinese food industry giant *COFCO Group* invested 50 million dollars in the Mariupol port to triple its cargo capacity. China has also established a direct railroad connection with Ukraine. Nevertheless, according to the register of Ukrainian corporations, the Chinese owned less than 500 firms in Ukraine, of which only 40 firms had annual revenues exceeding \$1 million [source 11].

Russia and Ukraine are China's essential partners in agricultural trade in the European market. For example, in 2021, a year before the SMO, China's agricultural imports from these countries reached \$4.29 billion and \$5.24 billion, respectively, with net imports of \$2.62 billion and \$4.98 billion, respectively, and agricultural imports from Ukraine exceeded imports from Russia for the first time. In 2021, China's total imports of agricultural products from Russia and Ukraine accounted for 25.8% of the entire European market in the correspondent nomenclature. Even against the background of the total value of agricultural products purchased by China that year (\$84.4 billion), these figures are remarkable [53, p. 120].

After the announcement of the SMO, the volume of trade between China and Ukraine began to decline and in 2022 amounted to \$7.656 billion, which was 60% less than in the previous year, in-

cluding China's exports to Ukraine – \$3.3 billion, and imports – \$4.35 billion, i. e. a decrease of 64.8 and 55.4%<sup>4</sup>, respectively. However, Ukraine still ranks third in terms of trade volume with China among Northeast Eurasian countries after Russia and Kazakhstan.

China, on the one hand, is an important economic and technological partner of Kyiv; on the other hand, it pursues its own interests in this partnership. Ukraine considers China as a potential competitor in the economic area, therefore it has drawn several "red lines" in its cooperation with it, keeping it out of the most sensitive sectors, including critical infrastructure elements, cybersecurity, 5G networks, etc. China remains Ukraine's largest trade partner and a potential source of financing for investment projects, but from a political perspective, relationships with it are significantly limited [source 11].

At the beginning of 2023, China proposed its own way to resolve the conflict in Ukraine. On February 24, Xi Jinping suggested a 12-point peace plan (ceasefire, creation of humanitarian corridors, etc.), which was taken in the West with great skepticism. However, this theme became relevant again when it became known that on April 26, 2023, Xi Jinping called President Zelensky and they talked for about an hour. Later, it turned out that Zelensky had asked Xi Jinping for this conversation a month before through diplomatic channels. The main result of this conversation should be considered to be the confirmation of the positions and proposals earlier put forward by China. In this regard, it is noteworthy that any fixation on the current situation will mean actual success for Russia, which has already annexed four regions of Ukraine and is not going to return anything. Thus, all of Xi Jinping's initiatives are advantageous for the Russian Federation; therefore, at their first meeting in Moscow on March 20, Vladimir Putin thanked President Xi Jinping for his peace plan for resolving the conflict.

\* \* \*

China's foreign policy relies exclusively on the priorities of its national interests. Russia's Special Military Operation has had little effect on the hi-

<sup>4</sup> 中国同乌克兰的关系—外交部 Available at: [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq\\_676201/gj\\_676203/oz\\_678770/1206\\_679786/sbgx\\_679790/](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/oz_678770/1206_679786/sbgx_679790/) (accessed 27.04.2023).

erarchy of China's preferences. Defending its core interests and, first and foremost, resolving the Taiwan issue through peaceful means remains the cornerstone of Beijing's diplomacy.

The diversity and sometimes multidirectional nature of opinions on the issue of national interests voiced in PRC academic circles lead analysts from the Central Party School of the CPC Central Committee to conclude that some rigorous, hawkish, nationalist views "steal national interests", that is, claim to be their exclusive expression [54, p. 44], presenting views of the minority as the basic trend of the great country's strategy. There is also a view that China's diplomacy is excessive-

ly influenced by internal propaganda, although it should be independent from the latter. Faced with complex external challenges, China's internal public opinion seriously diverges from the reality of its diplomacy [55, p. 31].

China's position in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is last of all determined by preoccupation with the further fate of Ukraine and should rather be considered through the prism of China's geostrategic antagonism with the US. China is unlikely to ever join the anti-Russian sanctions since this would mean subordination to the US national interests, which is unacceptable for Beijing, upholding its agenda of core interests.

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