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Наркоситуация и борьба с наркотиками в Китае: тенденции и возможности укрепления международного сотрудничества на примере ШОС

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Аннотация. В последние годы наркоситуация в КНР стабилизировалась, официальная китайская статистика фиксирует снижение числа наркозависимых. Однако Китай остаётся одним из ключевых источников синтетических наркотиков и прекурсоров для других стран.

Распространение запрещённых наркотиков (синтетических опиоидов, каннабиноидов, метамфетамина и др.) представляет угрозу для всех стран. Очень важно, что китайские государственные органы проявляют волю и способность контролировать большое количество фармацевтических производителей внутри страны и предотвращать появление на рынке новых аналогов и модификаций запрещённых психоактивных веществ и прекурсоров.

За последние годы руководство КНР предприняло ряд эффективных шагов по борьбе с бесконтрольным производством и распространением незаконных наркотиков, в частности, государством ужесточён контроль и регулирование производства синтетических психоактивных веществ. В Китае действуют строгие законы против незаконного оборота наркотиков, которые также служат эффективным сдерживающим фактором против распространения и потребления запрещённых веществ. Подобные меры китайского правительства вынуждают наркобизнес переносить лаборатории по производству готовых синтетических наркотиков из Китая в соседние страны, в первую очередь, в Мьянму и Индию.

Ситуация с международной торговлей наркотиками в современном мире требует согласованных действий на межгосударственном уровне. Взаимодействие правоохранительных органов государств-членов ШОС (Шанхайской организации сотрудничества) является хорошим примером сотрудничества в этой сфере. Одним из приоритетов этой организации является борьба с наркопреступностью.

На данном этапе необходимо дальнейшее углубление сотрудничества между правоохранительными органами стран ШОС по выявлению установленных каналов оборота наркотиков, по борьбе с незаконным оборотом наркотиков в даркнете и по предотвращению появления аналогов различных психоактивных запрещённых веществ.

***Ключевые слова*:** Китай, Россия, ШОС, наркоторговля, синтетические наркотики, наркотрафик.

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Drug situation and drug combating in China: trends and opportunities to strengthen international cooperation by the example of the SCO

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***Abstract*.** In recent years, the drug situation in China has generally stabilized, and according to official Chinese statistics, the number of drug addicts is reducing. However, China remains one of the key sources of synthetic drugs and precursors to other countries.

The spread of narcotic drugs (synthetic opioids, cannabinoids, methamphetamine and others) threatens all countries. An important factor is that the Chinese government is able to control the large number of pharmaceutical manufacturers in the country, thus making it difficult for new types and modifications of drugs and psychoactive substances to appear on the market.

In recent years, the PRC leadership has taken a number of effective steps to combat the uncontrolled production and distribution of illegal drugs, in particular, the state tightens control and regulation of the production of synthetic psychoactive drugs. China has strict laws against drug trafficking, which also serve as an effective deterrent against the distribution and consumption of illicit substances. Due to these measures, the international drug business is forced to move laboratories for the production of synthetic drugs from China to other nearby countries such as Myanmar and India.

The situation with the international drug trade in the modern world requires concerted action at the interstate level. The interaction between law enforcement agencies of the SCO (the Shanghai Cooperation Organization) member states is a good example of cooperation in this area. One of the priorities of this organization is the fight against drug crime.

At this stage, it is necessary to further deepen cooperation between the law enforcement agencies of the SCO countries to identify established drug trafficking channels, fight against drug trafficking in the dark web and prevent the emergence of analogues to various psychotropic substances prohibited by law.

***Keywords*:** China, Russia, SCO, drug trade, synthetic drugs, drug trafficking, national security.

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Introduction

The distribution and use of drugs continue to be one of the main threats to modern society. According to the data provided by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in 2020, approximately 275 million individuals worldwide used drugs, compared to 226 million individuals in 2010. Additionally, according to data collected in 2019, approximately 36 million individuals were suffering from diseases and health-related harm due to drug use, up from an estimate of 27 million in 2010[1].

According to experts, the annual turnover of the global drug market exceeds $400 bln[2], making it comparable to the oil global market, for example.

The three countries together – China, the Russian Federation and the United States – account for 26 % of the world's population aged 15 to 64 and account for 43 % of injecting drug use worldwide. China, Pakistan and Russia together account for 51 % of the estimated injecting drug use among people living with HIV[3].

Drug situation in China

The National Drug Control Commission of China reports that during the 2010s the number of drug addicts peaked in 2014, reaching more than 3 million. Since then, the numbers have been declining. In 2019, approximately 2.14 million Chinese people were taking drugs, or 0.16 % of the

[1] World drug report 2021. Policy implications. Boocklet 1. *UNODC,* June 2021. URL: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21_Booklet_1.pdf (accessed: Feb 1, 2024).

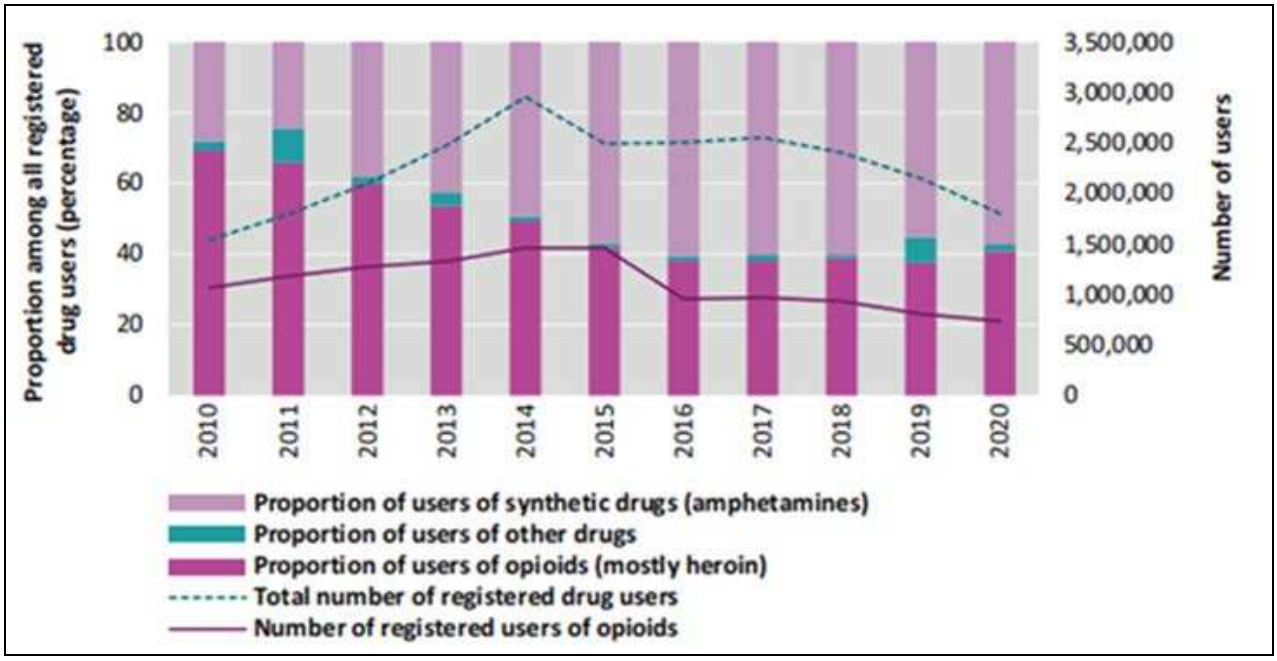
[2] Avinash T. (2017). Report: Global Drug Trafficking Market Worth Half a Trillion Dollars. *Talkingdrugs*, Apr 21, 2017. URL: https://www.talkingdrugs.org/report-global-illegal-drug-trade-valued-at-around-half-a-trillion-dollars (accessed: Jan 14, 2024).

[3] World drug report 2021. Drug demand and drug supply. Boocklet 2. *UNODC,* June 2021. URL: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21_Booklet_2.pdf (accessed: Feb 1, 2024).

country's population. In 2020 this number decreased to 1.8 million, including 1.03 million synthetic drug users and 734,000 opioids.

Methamphetamine is the most widely used drug, accounting for more than half (55.2 %) of all users, followed by heroin at 37.5 % and ketamine at 2.3 %. According to the Chinese government, 220,000 individuals underwent compulsory medical treatment for drug addiction under state supervision in 2019, and another 300 thousand people underwent course of ambulatory treatment and rehabilitation[4].

If in the early 2000s the share of heroin and opioid users in China was 75 % of the total number of drug addicts, then in 2020 it was already 40 %, which indicates a sharp increase in dependence on synthetic drugs, that corresponds with the global trend. At the same time, after 2014, there has been a stabilization in the dynamics of the use of synthetic drugs (see pic. 1).



Pic. 1. Trends in registered drug users, China, 2010–2020.

Source: World drug report 2022. Boocklet 3. *UNODC,* 2022. URL: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2022/MS/WDR22_Booklet_3.pdf (accessed: Feb 1, 2024).

In the period 2019–2020 opioid users in China formed 40 % of all treated for drug addiction. The Chinese drug addicts registry data shows a decline in opioid use and an increase in amphetamine use among registered users over the last ten years. Young people in China account for a significant proportion of drug abuse. There are also indications of the use of opiates for non-medical purposes in the pharmaceutical industry. According to a general survey conducted in 2017, 2.1 % of Chinese university students reported using pharmaceutical opioids for recreational purposes, which included codeine, “licorice pills” (which contain opium) and tramadol hydrochloride.

[4] Doklad Mezhdunarodnogo komiteta po kontrolyu nad narkotikami za 2020 god [Report of the International Narcotics Control Board 2020]. *International Narcotics Control Board*, 2021. URL: https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2020/Annual_Report/E_INCB_2020_1_rus.pdf (accessed: Jan 23, 2024). (In Russian).

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected drug supply chains and facilitated drug addicts to seek substitutes for commonly used drugs. In China, according to a UN drug report, drug addicts replaced methamphetamine and heroin with other cheaper and more accessible locally produced substances such as methaqualone, pethidine, synthetic cannabinoids, nitrous oxide and fluoroquetamine, as well as tramadol and dextromethorphan[5].

In 2018–2019, an analysis of sewage water from wastewater was conducted in 25 cities of China, which showed the average level of drug use among the population is 56.7 mg per day per 1000 inhabitants (56.7 ± 56.8 mg per day per 1000 inhabitants). In this analysis, methamphetamine was in the first place, followed by heroin. According to the data obtained, heroin consumption is highest in southwestern China (amounting to 108 ± 147 mg per day per 1000 inhabitants), central China (59.2 ± 48.0 mg per day per 1000 inhabitants) and northwestern China (51.5 ± 50.3 mg per day per 1000 inhabitants) [Vinogradov, Mamakhatov 2022].

This testifies to the negative impact of Myanmar and Afghanistan on neighboring Yunnan Province and Xinjiang respectively, as sources of drug trafficking. For example, some territories of Myanmar, which are mainly controlled by ethnic armed organisations, are actively involved in the international drug trade and are sources of non-traditional threats to China. First of all, this concerns drug smuggling. Bordering China, Shan State in Myanmar continues to be the center of opium production. The state accounts for 82 % of Myanmar's opium poppy cultivation. It is also cultivated in other parts of Myanmar, in particular in the Kachin and Kayah states [Vinogradov 2023].

China in the world drug trade

The Chinese chemical industry has reached a really high level of development in recent years. Today it can already be said that it occupies the second place in terms of productivity in the real sector of the country's economy. China produces many substances and medicines for export. However, along with legal shipments from China, there are also illicit supplies of various chemicals that can be used as drugs and precursors (substances used in the manufacture of narcotic drugs).

A serious threat both to China itself and to the whole world is the production of synthetic (designer) drugs and precursors. Synthetic drugs (mephedrone, alpha PVP, methamphetamine, fentanyl, spices, and others) form a quick physiological and psychological dependence and have the most devastating effect on health, intelligence, and, if urgent treatment measures are not taken, quickly lead to death. Often, death can also be caused by both overdose and inappropriate actions under the influence of these substances.

China is one of the main suppliers of chemicals that can be used as precursors (substances involved in reactions to produce toxic chemicals) for drugs. For example, China is a leader in the production of even simple substances such as potassium permanganate, which can be used to make mephedrone and methcathinone, or acetic anhydride, which can be used to make heroin. This is important, given that China directly borders with the world's main producers of the same heroin – Afghanistan and Myanmar.

[5] World drug report 2022. Boocklet 2. *UNODC*, 2022. URL: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2022/MS/WDR22_Booklet_2.pdf (accessed: Jan 27, 2024).

Expansion of production and distribution of methamphetamine

A 2020 UN report demonstrates Myanmar as the place of production and shipment of methamphetamine in Asia, especially in the period 2015–2019. At the same time, analysis of US drug seizure data also indicates that in the first half of 2019, 99 % of methamphetamine was manufactured by a method based on P-2-P precursors imported from China. An analysis of seizures on the European drug market in 2019 showed that among the precursors of amphetamine and methamphetamine, MAPA (methyl alpha-phenylacetoacetate), P-2-P (1-phenyl-2-propanone) and APAA (alpha-phenylacetoacetamide) dominated, mostly imported from China [Vinogradov, Mamakhatov 2022]. This indicates the importance of China as one of the main suppliers of precursors to the global drug market.

In East Asia and the ASEAN region, there has been an increase in seizures of substances used to manufacture ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. In China, propiophenone and 2-bromopropiophenone have been predominant in terms of seized substances in 2020[6]. Between 2009 and 2017, China accounted for the majority of methamphetamine seizures in the East and Southeast Asian region. However, since 2018, Thailand has emerged as the leading country in terms of methamphetamine seizure activity[7].

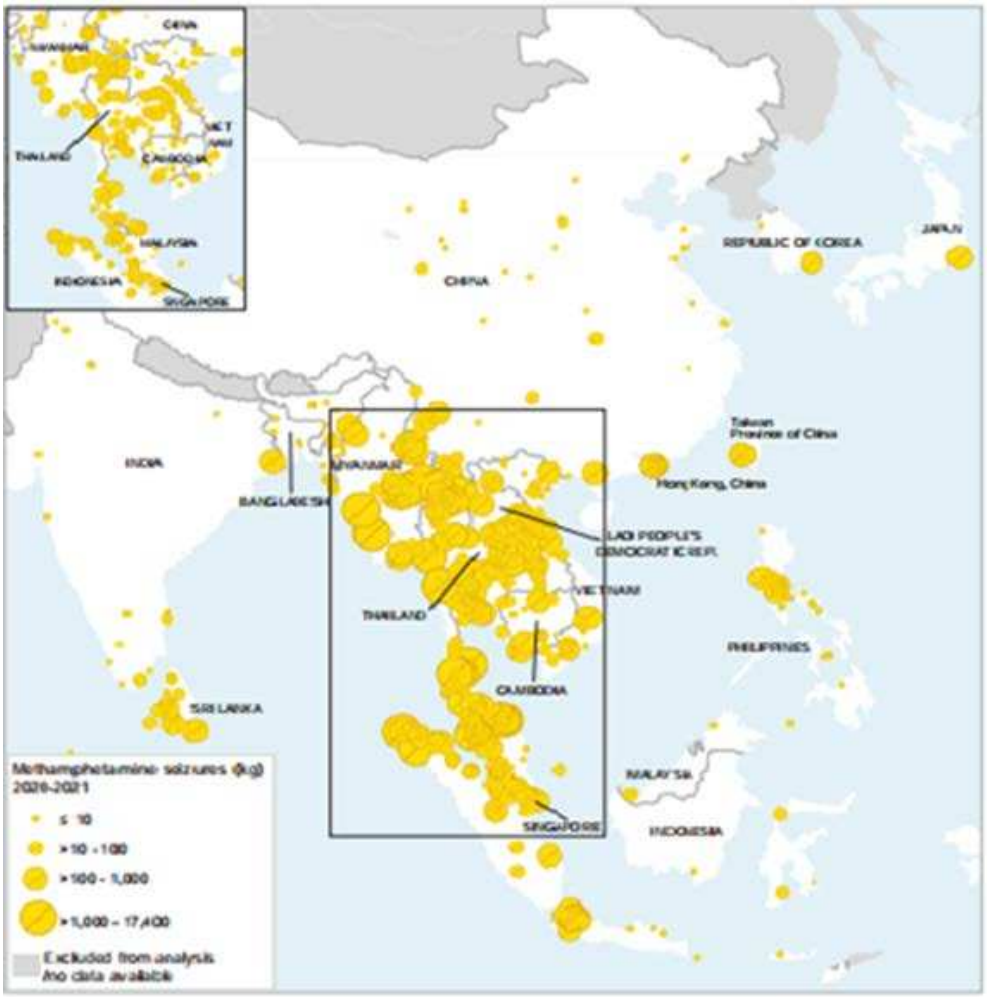
During the period between 2015 and 2019, most of the liquidated methamphetamine manufacturing laboratories were located in countries in Asia, including China and Iran. There has also been an increase in methamphetamine manufacture in neighboring countries during this period.

The Drug Enforcement Agency of China reported that 70 % of methamphetamine seized in 2018 was of foreign origin. This indicates that Myanmar is now the main producer of methamphetamine in Asia. Over the past few years, Yunnan Province has seen an increase in the number of narcotics, including methamphetamine, entering the country from Myanmar. This suggests that drug control in Myanmar is not sufficient to prevent the flow of these substances into China.

In 2020, approximately 20 tonnes of narcotics were seized in Yunnan, accounting for 36.3 % of total seizures in China. This suggests that Myanmar remains the main source of methamphetamine for China. The main route for drug trafficking from abroad into China passes through Yunnan, where express delivery is the preferred method due to its cost-effectiveness and anonymity [Vinogradov 2023].

[6] World drug report 2022. Boocklet 4. *UNODC,* 2022. URL: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2022/MS/WDR22_Booklet_4.pdf (accessed: Jan 27, 2024).

[7] World drug report 2021. Boocklet 4. *UNODC,* 2021. URL: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21_Booklet_4.pdf (accessed: Jan 27, 2024).



Pic. 2. Significant individual methamphetamine seizure in East, South-East and South Asia, 2020–2021.

Source: World drug report 2022. Boocklet 4. *UNODC,* 2022. URL: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2022/MS/WDR22_Booklet_4.pdf (accessed: Jan 27, 2024).

The center of methamphetamine production today is the Golden Triangle region, as many organized international groups of drug dealers moved there from China under pressure from government persecution (see pic.2)[8].

In general, as the UN report shows, the role of China as a country of origin of finished methamphetamine has been noticeably declining since 2016, which may indirectly indicate the effectiveness of the Chinese government's measures in combating drug manufacture. However, at the same time, there is a clear tendency to move methamphetamine manufacture from China to neighboring countries.

There is a link between Chinese organized crime and drug laboratories for the production of crystal methamphetamine in Myanmar, namely in Shan State, where insurgent groups among the local indigenous population, as well as the Chinese diaspora, are traditionally strong. The latter was able to organize a well-established scheme of cheap and mass production of synthetic drugs in the

[8] World drug report 2021. Boocklet 4. *UNODC,* 2021. URL: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21_Booklet_4.pdf (accessed: Jan 27, 2024).

forests of Myanmar, and the necessary precursors were transported from China from border chemical plants. In 2021 Tse Chi Lop was detained on an Interpol warrant in Amsterdam. According to the Australian Federal Police, Tse Chi Lop is responsible for 70 % of drug trafficking in Australia. It is noteworthy that the drug lord moved freely between Macau and Hong Kong and the Chinese authorities did not demand his extradition[9].

Distribution of fentanyl

In some cases, fentanyl is used in medicine as a strong analgesic for anesthesia, in the treatment of oncology, severe pain. In particular, in Russia, fentanyl refers to narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances whose turnover in the Russian Federation is limited and for which control measures are established in accordance with the legislation and international treaties of the Russian Federation. This synthetic opioid has a strong narcotic effect, and its use is extremely life-threatening, given its powerful toxic effect.

According to American experts, since 2013, fentanyl has emerged as the most significant type of opioid drug in the US. Today, we can speak of a true epidemic of fentanyl usage in the country. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 47,000 individuals perished due to opioid overdoses within the US in 2017 – 28,000 of those deaths were caused by synthetic opioids resulting from fentanyl intake[10]. The fentanyl epidemic poses a serious danger to the American authorities.

Fentanyl enters the United States in small batches by mail, but in recent years there has been a tendency to increase the transportation of synthetic drugs from China to the United States and Canada through Mexico, as well as Chinese precursors to Mexico, where they enter local drug laboratories for the manufacture of finished psychotropic substances. So, in 2019 in Mexico, new precursors (N-phenylpiperidine-4-amine and 4-piperidone) for the manufacture of fentanyl were intercepted and seized, which could be used in the illegal manufacture of fentanyl. These drugs were delivered from China and India by services of express mail and courier delivery[11].

In the European Union, most fentanyl derivatives originating in China are purchased on online platforms on the darknet[12].

Drug situation in Russia

According to the UN report on drugs in Russia, since 2010 there has been a decrease in the number of drug users registered in medical institutions. According to the reports of the State Anti-

[9] Moiseev D. Opiumnaya epopeya "aziatskogo El' CHapo" okonchilas v Amsterdame [Opium saga of the “Asian El Chapo” ended in Amsterdam]. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Jan 21, 2021. URL: https://www.ng.ru/world/2021-01-24/6_8064_amsterdam.html (accessed: Jan 22, 2024). (In Russian).

[10] Mexico’s role in the deadly rise of fentanyl. *Wilsoncenter.org*, Feb 11, 2019. URL: https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/fentanyl_insight_crime_final_19-02-11.pdf (accessed: Feb 7, 2024).

[11] World drug report 2021. Boocklet 4. *UNODC,* June, 2021. URL: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21_Booklet_4.pdf (accessed: Jan 27, 2024).

[12] World drug report 2021. Boocklet 3. *UNODC,* June, 2021. URL: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2021/field/WDR21_Booklet_3.pdf (accessed: Feb 1, 2024).

Drug Committee of Russia, in 2016 the number of registered patients with disorders associated with drug use was 496 thousand people, in 2021 – 388.4 thousand people[13].

As the President of Russia noted at a meeting of the Security Council in November 2020, largely due to the measures taken over the past 10 years, the number of officially registered drug users has decreased by more than a quarter. The number of crimes in the field of drug distribution also decreased by 17 %. Among the measures taken by the state that contributed to reducing the level of the drug threat, the president named increased responsibility for the sale and smuggling of drugs and narcotic substances – up to life imprisonment; tougher punishment for their distribution via the Internet and in places of recreation. A good example is the law signed by the President in 2015, which introduced a ban on the circulation and promotion of new psychoactive substances, including the so-called spices (synthetic cannabinoids). In 2019 Russia ranked 3rd in the world for the largest seizures of synthetic cannabinoids (after Egypt and Turkey)[14].

The introduction of a new legal mechanism into Russian legislation also played a role in the decline in drug use: the incentive for treatment and rehabilitation for drug addicts. Moreover, a positive preventive measure was the mass testing for drug use of students in secondary, secondary specialized and higher educational institutions.

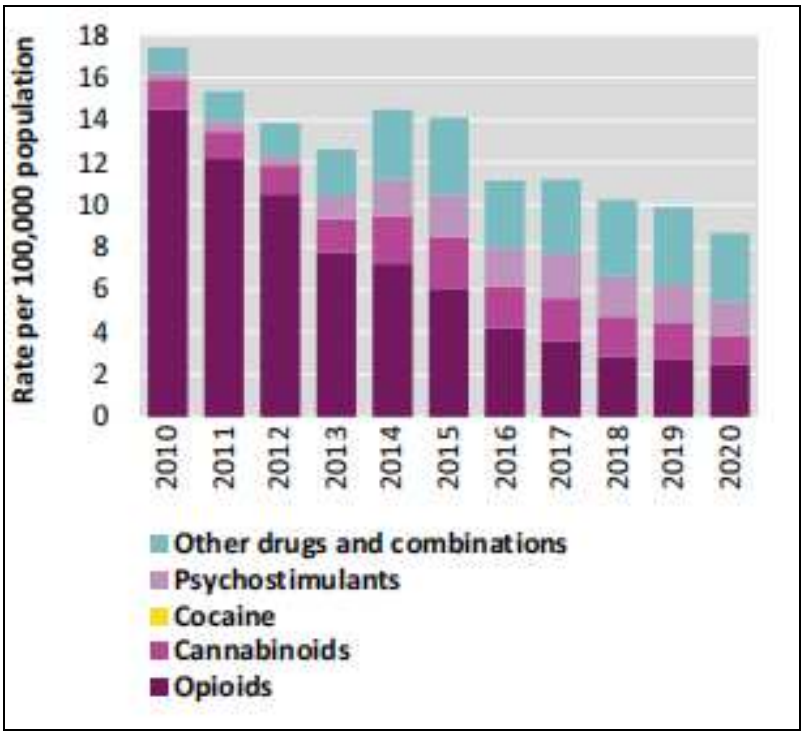
However, it should be noted that according to the results of sociological studies conducted by anti-drug commissions in 2021, the number of respondents who have experienced at least one drug use in their lifetime is estimated at 8.2 million people (5.6 % of the Russian population), and those who use drugs regularly or episodically (within 12 months) is estimated at 1.3 million people (in 2020 this figure was estimated at 1.8 million people)[15]. Thus, the problem of drug use in Russia remains extremely acute.

Despite the fact that since 2010 in Russia, according to the UN, the number of first entering treatment among drug users has been decreasing (see pic. 3), the drug market is diversifying and there is an increase in the proportion of users of synthetic drugs such as alpha-PVP cathinones, mephedrone, amphetamines and a decline of heroin and opiate users, which also corresponds to the global trend. There is also an increase in the number of patients with polydrug addiction (i.e. the use of different types of drugs) and with dependence on psychostimulants.

[13] Doklad o narkosituacii v Rossijskoy Federacii v 2021 godu [Report on the drug situation in the Russian Federation in 2021]. *Pravovaya Narkologiya*, 2022. URL: https://правовая-наркология.рф/images/documents/norm_akt_2022/2021_report_on_the_drug_situation.pdf (accessed: Feb 8, 2024). (In Russian).

[14] World drug report 2022. Boocklet 4. *UNODC,* 2022. URL: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2022/MS/WDR22_Booklet_4.pdf (accessed: Jan 27, 2024).

[15] Doklad o narkosituacii v Rossijskoj Federacii v 2021 godu [Report on the drug situation in the Russian Federation in 2021]. *Pravovaya Narkologiya*, 2022. URL: https://правовая-наркология.рф/images/documents/norm_akt_2022/2021_report_on_the_drug_situation.pdf (accessed: Feb 8, 2024). (In Russian).



Pic. 3. First-time entrants into drug treatment, Russia, 2010–2020.

Source: World drug report 2022. Boocklet 3. *UNODC,* 2022. URL: https://www.unodc.org/res/wdr2022/MS/WDR22_Booklet_3.pdf (accessed: Feb. 1, 2024).

Today, the drug market has been greatly modernized. If previously opiates primarily entered Russia via the border with drug smugglers, now, with the addition of synthetic supplies, the situation has worsened, and they continue to enter the country through various means, including by mail. In addition, 80 % of the synthetic drugs entering Russia originate in China[16].

China continues to be a source of entry into Russia of precursors for the manufacture of popular new and extremely dangerous psychoactive substances. This can be illustrated by the recent incident, when in October 2022 employees of the Far Eastern Operational Customs seized 848 kilograms of a precursor used for the production of mephedrone. The cargo arrived in Vladivostok by sea from China in four plastic barrels. It is noted that this amount of substance would be enough to create about 1.5 million single doses[17]. Separately, it should be noted that the fight against the illegal distribution of drugs through the darknet is of great importance for Russia. An important step in the fight against drug trafficking was the liquidation of the world's largest marketplace Hydra Market, which operated in Russian-speaking countries. The servers of this darknet platform were confiscated by the German police in April 2022. However, few doubt that the new marketplaces will continue to work in Russia again, and they need to be severely suppressed in cooperation with law enforcement officials from other countries.

[16] Smert do vostrebovaniya. Rossiyu zavalivayut mezhdunarodnoy narkopochtoy [Death on demand. Russia is flooded with international drug mail]. *RIA Novosti*, Mar 12, 2020. URL: https://ria.ru/20180312/1515976956.html (accessed: Jan 19, 2024). (In Russian).

[17] Na Dal'nem Vostoke iz'yali 848 kg vvezennogo iz KNR veshchestva dlya proizvodstva mefedrona [848 kg of a substance imported from China for the production of mephedrone seized in the Far East]. *TASS,* Oct 27, 2022. URL: https://tass.ru/proisshestviya/16169843 (accessed: Jan 14, 2024). (In Russian).

Countering drug trafficking in China and cooperation within the SCO

A serious concern is the will and ability of the Chinese government to take tough measures against individuals and companies that illegally transport precursors for the manufacture of drugs and opioids such as fentanyl to other countries. This, first of all, involves monitoring hundreds of thousands of legal entities and requires significant resources of law enforcement agencies. Tight control over the pharmaceutical market seems to be an urgent task for the Chinese leadership, as a result of its often uncontrolled development and, as a consequence, opportunities for use in the global drug trade. According to UNODC, by the end of 2019, China reported 201 new psychoactive substances, second only to Japan in Asia (which reported 366 new psychoactive substances)[18].

In China, according to the rules in force since September 2010, all organizations that sell controlled precursors via the Internet are required to be registered with the competent national authorities.

The problem also lies in the fact that synthetic drugs have a low weight and are easily transported by postal and courier services. A significant part of the “synthetics” is distributed on the trading platforms of the darknet, and therefore the documentation of crimes for the sale of prohibited substances is highly complicated. In addition, often sealed packaging does not allow odors to pass through, and it is almost impossible to identify the source with the help of service dogs. Moreover, the serious danger is the sale of analogues of narcotic substances through the darknet, for example, the same fentanyl (carfentanyl and sufentanyl), as well as precursors [Vinogradov, Mamakhatov 2022].

Therefore, it is worth noting the timeliness and importance of the decision of the government of the People's Republic of China adopted in May 2019 to include the entire class of fentanyl analogues in the national list of controlled substances. It is obvious that this measure has already directly affected the reduction of seizures of fentanyl and its analogues around the world, as recorded in the Interpol report in 2021. This further confirms the trend mentioned above regarding the transfer of synthetic drugs production from China to neighboring countries.

These legal measures of the government of the People's Republic of China went hand in hand with large-scale liquidations of illegal laboratories and Internet sites for the sale of fentanyl, measures were also taken to improve the legal training of law enforcement officers.

In addition, in May 2021, a representative of the Chinese National Drug Control Commission announced that China would add 18 substances, including cannabinoid substances and ketamine, in the list of narcotic and psychotropic drugs. Thus, China will become the first country in the world to regulate all synthetic cannabinoid substances in order to prevent the spread of new dangerous analogues whose chemical properties are not yet subject to regulation[19]. This measure is extremely necessary, due to the active spread of synthetic cannabinoids around the world (for example, there was a recent epidemic of “spices” in Russia). This group of synthetic drugs, unlike marijuana, have a much more active effect on the body's receptors, an extremely negative effect on intelligence,

[18] Doklad Mezhdunarodnogo komiteta po kontrolyu nad narkotikami za 2020 god [Report of the International Narcotics Control Board 2020]. *International Narcotics Control Board*, 2021. URL: https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2020/Annual_Report/E_INCB_2020_1_rus.pdf (accessed: Jan 23, 2024). (In Russian).

[19] China moves to regulate all synthetic cannabinoids. *Reuters*, May 11, 2021. URL:: https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-moves-regulate-all-synthetic-cannabinoids-2021-05-11/ (accessed: Feb 10, 2024).

cause rapid addiction and are also cheaper than natural cannabinoids. The production and sale of synthetic cannabinoids is growing especially actively in Xinjiang. The regional authorities stopped 301 such cases, arresting 390 suspects and seizing 15.75 tons of cannabinoid substances. In 2020, the drug enforcement authorities of Shandong Province uncovered large-scale production and trafficking of synthetic cannabinoids involving 13 provinces and more than 40 cities. According to the officials, 360 kilograms of synthetic cannabinoids were seized[20].

The priority task in the SCO security sphere is to contain drug trafficking from Afghanistan. The SCO states form a single barrier in the fight against global drug aggression, which threatens not only the SCO member states, but also the rest of the world [Третьякова 2020].

Through the interaction of the SCO–Afghanistan contact group, a roadmap is being implemented, which pays attention not only to capacity-building and law enforcement cooperation, but also to coordinating positions in promoting alternative development of Afghanistan, reducing the dependence of its economy on income from drug trafficking [Черняева, Журавлева 2022].

The symbiosis of drug trafficking with other cross-border threats is also in the focus of special attention of the SCO. In particular, the phenomenon of drug terrorism is of great concern, when the proceeds from drug trafficking are used to finance terrorist organizations. This dangerous phenomenon is counteracted by the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) of the SCO, which promotes the interaction of the competent authorities of the organization's member countries in the fight against terrorism, extremism and separatism. In particular, in 2019, 24 channels of terrorist financing were blocked with the coordinating role of the RATS[21].

Examples of China's international cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking

International cooperation plays a significant role in the fight against drug trafficking. This can be illustrated by the example of China's interactions with countries in Southeast Asia, both on a bilateral and regional level. In November 2019, for example, China, along with Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and Myanmar, approved the Bangkok Declaration on effective responses to the drug problem in the Mekong River basin, within the framework of the previous Mekong Memorandum of Understanding. The countries also adopted the eleventh Subregional Action Plan on Drug Control, covering the period May 2019 to May 2021. The Action Plan focuses on four key areas of collaboration: drug control and public health, law enforcement cooperation, legal and judicial support, and sustainable alternative economic development.

Another constructive example is cooperation within the framework of the Anti-Drug Strategy of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states for 2018–2023. In July 2019, the international anti-drug operation “Web” was carried out. The operation was coordinated by the CARICC (Central Asian Regional Information Coordination Center) in Almaty. The objectives of the web-based initiative were to prevent the dissemination of new psychoactive substances and synthetic drugs via the Internet and electronic payment platforms. The initiative aimed to coordinate efforts between relevant authorities to combat drug smuggling. All ministries of internal affairs and anti-narcotics agencies from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member countries, as

[20] China issues total ban on synthetic cannabinoids. *The Associated Press*, May 11, 2021. URL: https://apnews.com/article/china-health-f093206666969b3cd748a47964de7ae0 (accessed: Feb 10, 2024).

[21] V ShOS nazvali prioritetnoy borbu s nezakonnym oborotom narkotikov [The SCO called the fight against drug trafficking a priority]. *TASS*, June 26, 2020. URL: https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/8819911 (accessed: Jan 23, 2024). (In Russian).

well as representatives from Afghanistan (the SCO observer country), participated in the operation[22].

In turn, the large-scale distribution of Chinese-made synthetic opioids and precursors in North America partly indicates a lack of cooperation between law enforcement agencies in China, the United States and Mexico. Back in 2018, Donald Trump openly expressed outrage about the penetration of fentanyl from China into the US postal system and called on the Senate to completely ban the supply of this synthetic opioid in order to stop the spread of dependence on it in American society. In response, the National Commission on Drug Control of the People's Republic of China stated that there was no "evidence" of this, and called President Trump's comments "unacceptable" and "irresponsible", but at the same time suggested that the United States should better exchange intelligence with China. The weak cooperation between the US and Chinese authorities is also indicated in the advisory report of the US Congress, which seriously hinders efforts to curb increasingly sophisticated forms of illegal trafficking in fentanyl[23]. The report also points to weak supervision and regulation of the Chinese chemical and pharmaceutical industries, as well as the coalescence of the Chinese drug business with Mexican drug cartels. The US authorities point out that Chinese criminals are increasingly using the Chinese banking system to launder Mexican drug money. However, as it usually happens, the American authorities are trying to shift the blame completely to the other side, while not pointing out serious problems within their own law enforcement agencies and the poorly controlled spread of drug addiction within the country.

Legislative measures to ensure security

Under Chinese law, drug use is an administrative, not a criminal offense. Drug addicts are sent to special rehabilitation centers, the so-called "mandatory quarantine detoxification centers". According to the anti-drug law adopted in China in 2008, people caught using drugs can be held in these centers for up to two years. And despite their name, they are run by the Ministries of Justice and Public Security, not the Ministry of Health. These institutions use the practice of labor re-education and public propaganda. Those who have recovered from drug addiction should also meet regularly with the local police and be checked. It should also be noted that China uses methadone substitution therapy for heroin addicts. This practice is very controversial and often causes negative assessments in the narcological community.

The Criminal Code of the People's Republic of China provides for very harsh penalties for drug-related crimes. According to Article 347 of the Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China, the smuggling, sale, transport, and manufacture of narcotics, under certain circumstances, may result in imprisonment of up to 15 years or an indefinite prison sentence, or the death penalty[24].

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[22] Doklad Mezhdunarodnogo komiteta po kontrolyu nad narkotikami za 2020 god [Report of the International Narcotics Control Board 2020]. *International Narcotics Control Board*, 2021. URL: https://www.incb.org/documents/Publications/AnnualReports/AR2020/Annual_Report/E_INCB_2020_1_rus.pdf (accessed: Jan 23, 2024). (In Russian).

[23] Exclusive Limited Chinese cooperation hindering U.S. fentanyl fight -congress report. *Reuters,* Aug 24, 2021. URL: https://www.reuters.com/world/us/exclusive-limited-chinese-cooperation-hindering-us-fentanyl-fight-congress-2021-08-24/ (accessed: Feb 6, 2024).

[24] Ugolovnyy kodeks Kitayskoy Narodnoy Respubliki [Criminal Code of the People's Republic of China]. *Embassy of the PRC in the Russian Federation,* Jan 11, 2016. URL: http://ru.china-embassy.gov.cn/rus/zfhz/zgflyd/201601/t20160111_3149373.htm (accessed: Jan 22, 2024). (In Russian).

The role of the SCO in the fight against the global drug trade and ensuring national security

Today, the SCO is the most authoritative regional organization that conducts an anti-drug policy. The SCO has a regulatory and flexible institutional framework for cooperation, covering almost all aspects of international anti-drug policy. This includes conducting operational investigative measures, as well as a whole range of preventive measures in the field of medical care and rehabilitation of drug addicts. In its activities, the SCO uses the mechanism of three levels of regular consultations of the competent authorities involved in the implementation of the Anti-Drug Strategy and Action Program. Thanks to well-coordinated work, up to half of all opium drugs have been withdrawn from circulation throughout Eurasia.

The SCO members, primarily Russia and China, are improving their national security system and are always ready for new challenges. This is most relevant against the background of changes taking place on the black market of narcotic substances in the context of the global Covid pandemic. In the modern digital world, the development of the availability of means of communication and money transfer greatly simplifies the work of illegal drug distributors.

The SCO also holds a number of joint events dedicated to combating the drug threat in partnership with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. The main field of activity is the shadow segment of the Internet "darknet". Such measures include the above-mentioned anti-drug operations "Web". According to the results of the last two anti-drug operations of the SCO "Web", more than 10 tons of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances were detained.

In conclusion, we can say that the SCO stands on the inviolability of the three UN anti-drug conventions. But, unfortunately, the current trend towards the legalization of so-called light drugs for recreational purposes contributes to the erosion of existing international anti-drug law. The SCO countries, primarily Russia and China, are firmly opposed to the legalization of narcotic substances, which, according to the SCO, is a violation of existing international legal obligations and human rights, including the right to life and health [Mamakhatov 2023].

For 10 years, the organization has been the main regional partner of UNODC, receiving due recognition. The SCO secretariat took part in the last meeting of the Paris Pact initiative, dedicated to cross-border cooperation and prevention of leaks of precursor chemicals. The organization is also actively developing cooperation with such international organizations as the CSTO, CIS, ASEAN, OSCE and Interpol. Mutual participation is held in specialized events dedicated to the topic of combating drug trafficking in the world.

Conclusion

We see that the measures taken by the PRC government have led to a noticeable improvement in the drug situation inside China. According to official Chinese statistics, the number of registered drug addicts decreased by 42 % between 2016 and 2021.

First of all, it is worth noting the effective actions of the law enforcement agencies of the PRC to suppress drug-related crimes, including special campaigns to break the chain of production and drug trafficking of drugs from abroad. From 2016 to 2021, 451,000 drug-related cases were solved in China, 588,000 suspects were arrested, and 305 tons of drugs were seized. In addition, strict criminal laws against drug-related crimes remain an effective deterrent in the fight against drug trafficking.

It is also worth noting the outreach work to raise public awareness about the fight against drugs. In the 5-year report for the period 2016–2021, the Office of China National Narcotics Control Commission reported on the establishment of the National Digital Platform of Drug Prevention Education for Youth, which annually provides drug control knowledge to more than 100 million students from more than 230 thousand schools throughout China each year[25].

Undoubtedly, a very important development in the fight against the spread of synthetic drugs in China have been the measures taken by the PRC government in recent years to regulate the production and ban the distribution of a number of dangerous synthetic drugs (fentanyl and synthetic cannabinoids), which have already affected the reduction in seizures of synthetic drugs in China.

The PRC government is faced with the task of operational control over the regulation of the constantly developing pharmaceutical market, tracking the emergence of new precursors and psychoactive substances. Chinese authorities have tightened control over precursors by expanding the list of precursor chemicals. The PRC government also launched the National Precursor Chemicals Management Information System, thereby streamlining end-user verification, establishing a source tracking monitoring mechanism, and cracking down on related offenses. We see that Beijing is actively engaged in this issue, the measures and mechanisms introduced by the PRC government on the issue of control and regulation of synthetic psychoactive substances and precursors are a good example for other countries.

The cooperation of law enforcement agencies of the PRC with their counterparts from other countries is of great importance in curbing the spread of drugs, but at present, the depth of cooperation seems to be insufficient and requires further development. We see synthetic drugs from China like mephedrone still being smuggled into Russia or fentanyl through Mexico into the US. A good example of cooperation in combating drug trafficking is China's interaction with the SCO countries, but further expansion of cooperation is required to identify established international drug trafficking channels and coordinate the fight against the spread of drugs on the dark web.

In addition, preventing the smuggling of precursors and analogues of synthetic drugs to other countries, as well as the transfer of laboratory production of synthetic drugs from China to neighboring countries, remains an acute problem. It is clear that the PRC government should continue to fight the Chinese criminal syndicates involved in cross-border drug trafficking on an industrial scale. And within the framework of the SCO, it is necessary to actively develop cooperation with Myanmar and Afghanistan, as the main sources of drug trafficking in Eurasia.

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