

EAST ASIA- ARCTIC RELATIONS

BOUNDARY, SECURITY AND
INTERNATIONAL POLITICS



EDITED BY KIMIE HARA AND KEN COATES

**EAST ASIA-ARCTIC RELATIONS:
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INTERNATIONAL POLITICS**

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Introduction

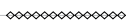


Kimie Hara and Ken Coates
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Global climate change is reshaping the Arctic region, both physically and in terms of international politics. The dramatic reduction in sea ice cover has provoked images of vast, increasingly viable transpolar shipping and accessible resources, generating significant commentary within and between the circumpolar states (Canada, the United States, Greenland, Iceland, Russia, Finland, Sweden and Norway). As a rising chorus of international voices remind us, changes to the region concern more than the circumpolar states. Three East Asian countries — Japan, South Korea and China — are more attentive to, and interested in, Arctic developments than ever before.

East Asian nations depend on global resources, fund scientific research and move their goods through sea lanes around the world. Accordingly, Asian commentators have expressed concern about Arctic states blocking them from participating in discussions about the future of the circumpolar world. East Asian nations are highly motivated to engage in Arctic affairs because of recent developments such as the great earthquake and nuclear disaster in Japan in 2011, oil price volatility and supply issues from the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa. This led to extensive investigations of alternative energy sources, supply routes and security. These processes reminded East Asian governments about the value of safe and secure shipping routes, access to natural resources, and environmental and scientific knowledge to inform decision making.

Canada, Russia and the United States have extensive commitments to the Far North and long histories of Arctic engagement. As the major polar nations with the gateways to the Asia-Pacific, they have lengthy experience with East Asia. Their northern responsibilities, geography and trans-Pacific engagement, combined with East Asia's growing interest in the Far North, make the nations of both regions key stakeholders in deliberations on the future of Arctic governance. Furthermore, the evolving situation in the Arctic could influence relations among East Asian nations, providing new opportunities for cooperation or additional sources of conflict.



East Asia-Arctic Relations: Boundary, Security and International Politics

This volume is an outcome of an international collaborative project, which aimed to launch a focused and detailed conversation about the historical, contemporary and future dimensions of East Asian countries' relationships and interests in the Arctic. The project started from a brainstorming discussion between the editors during the Japanese Studies Association of Canada conference held in Halifax, Nova Scotia in August 2011. Bringing together leading experts from Japan, China, South Korea, Russia, the United States and Canada, the project draws scholarly and policy-making attention to East Asia's growing interests in the Far North and identifies political, economic, legal and security connections between East Asia and the Arctic.

As major phases of the project, two workshops were held in 2013: the first in Whitehorse, Yukon on March 2-3, 2013, and the second in Waterloo, Ontario on March 5, 2013. The Whitehorse workshop provided an opportunity for 16 scholars to reflect on the issues at hand. Intensive discussions took place over two days on 13 papers, which were submitted and circulated prior to the workshop. Those papers examined the roles and impacts of East Asian interests on Arctic politics and diplomacy and those of the contemporary Arctic on East Asian affairs. There were also exchanges of views with local politicians in the Yukon. The second, policy-focused workshop in Waterloo built on the work concluded in Whitehorse. The participants in this workshop included nine scholars who attended the Whitehorse workshop, and an additional 12 individuals who are Arctic experts, foreign affairs specialists or government representatives. The workshop consisted of a series of facilitated discussions in greater detail on Arctic policy alternatives available to Canada, the Arctic Council and East Asian nations. The focus was to identify potential points of conflict and cooperation.

At both workshops, there were lively exchanges among the participants, who gathered from Japan, China, South Korea, Russia, the United States, Norway and across Canada. The workshops also generated significant personal and collective discoveries and inspired participants to consider anew the fundamental political and economic relationships in the Arctic, as well as several research outputs.¹

This volume consists of the revised Whitehorse conference papers. The two-day Whitehorse conference began with introductory addresses and a paper examining historical influences and forces for change in the Arctic. This was followed by the sessions considering the interests of East Asian powers (in particular, Japan, China

1 In addition to this volume, outputs of this project include workshop reports and an online paper series. See the CIGI project page for details: www.cigionline.org/series/east-asia-arctic-relations-boundary-security-and-international-politics.

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and South Korea) in the Arctic; concerns of Arctic powers with gateways to the Pacific (specifically the United States, Canada and Russia) on East Asia-Arctic relations; the changing Arctic and its implications for East Asia, in terms of security, economics and border regions; and East Asia-Arctic affairs from indigenous, global and circumpolar perspectives.

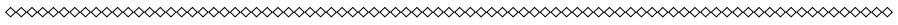
The composition of this volume is similar to that of the Whitehorse conference as a whole. The authors were asked to write papers on their respective areas of expertise. They do not necessarily share the same view on each area. This was reflected in the well-balanced discussions of both the Whitehorse and Waterloo workshops, where participants actively exchanged views and opinions, which are reflected in several parts of the contributed papers. A brief summary of each chapter follows.

In chapter 1, Ken Coates steps back from the current political, economic and diplomatic debates about the Far North to consider the broader patterns in the history and geopolitics of the region. Coates, who was raised in the Yukon, is something of a northern development skeptic, not convinced that the ambitious plans for regional economic development, the opening of the Arctic passageways to commercial shipping and other grand strategies for the region will come to fruition. The North, Coates argues, has disappointed its promoters and advocates in the past and will do so again in the future. At the same time, he points out, the Far North has produced some of the world's most innovative approaches to indigenous empowerment, environmental management and intraregional planning, including the creation of the Arctic Council. It is these institutional reforms and institutions that will likely be the most prominent legacy of the contemporary debates about the Arctic.

In chapter 2, Fujio Ohnishi argues that Japan's Arctic policy is in the process of developing toward more active engagement in the region. Three milestones of Japan's past involvement in the Arctic are discussed, and the current processes formulating Japan's Arctic interests are summarized. The chapter then considers opportunities and challenges for Japan in the Arctic, in areas such as Arctic shipping, oil and gas exploitation, and fisheries. It concludes with a discussion of three strategic considerations that influence Japan's Arctic policy: the need to combine scientific findings with economic interests; possible diplomatic linkages between Arctic and East Asian states; and making diplomatic efforts toward subnational actors, such as indigenous groups in the region.

In chapter 3, China's interests and participation in the Arctic are discussed. As China's presence in the Arctic grows, international attention also increases. Kai Sun clarifies China's interests in the Arctic and touches on future trends in this regard. Beginning with a discussion of China's recent Arctic capacity building and

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diplomacy, this paper suggests that China looks north for basically four reasons: it is influenced by environmental changes in the Arctic; it is drawn by the business opportunities arising from the opening of the Arctic passages and better access to Arctic resources; and it is also committed to maintaining good governance in the Arctic — which is also in its best interests. At present, China’s participation in Arctic affairs is limited, but it is preparing to make greater contributions to good governance in the Arctic.

In chapter 4, Young Kil Park examines South Korea’s interest and involvement in the Arctic and analyzes its challenges, summarizing the Arctic-related activities the country has pursued so far; examining specific interests in the fields of science, sea routes and hydrocarbon resources, fishing and governance; and, finally, evaluates the challenges ahead. South Korea has made significant progress in entering the Arctic Ocean, but many challenges must be addressed before the Arctic can become a source of economic prosperity.

Chapter 5, by Jerry McBeath, concerns the US view of East Asian nations’ involvement in the Arctic, emphasizing the perspective of Alaska, the only US Arctic state. It treats six different areas of US/Alaska policy: US national strategy for the Arctic; oil and gas exploration and development; marine transportation; fisheries; investment in infrastructure; and governance. McBeath’s study finds few differences between the positions of Alaska and the United States, notwithstanding often-hostile rhetoric from leaders in the United States’ farthest north frontier.

In chapter 6, P. Whitney Lackenbauer and James Manicom examine Canadian perceptions of East Asia’s Arctic interests. Whereas some commentaries conceptualize Asian states, particularly China, as potential threats to Canada’s interests in the Arctic, the authors argue that the basis for this alarmist rhetoric (apart from more generalized discourses associated with the “rise of Asia”) is speculative and imprecise. Using Canada’s Northern Strategy and the Statement on Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy as filters, this chapter suggests where Asia’s Arctic interests may converge or diverge with those of Canada. It also recommends various messages that Canada may wish to emphasize in its interactions with Asian states to safeguard its national interests, promote sustainable development for the benefit of Northerners, and enhance cooperation and constructive dialogue in the circumpolar world.

In chapter 7, Tamara Troyakova interprets the Arctic as a key economic resource as the main driver of Russia’s activity in the region. Siberia and the Russian Far East, she argues, could be integrated into the conventional Northeast Asian region in economic, social and cultural arenas. Rather than simply exploiting natural



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resources, she suggests that we should be able to predict where Siberia and the Russian Far East will go, together with the rest of Northeast Asia. Cooperation among Northeast Asian countries would be useful for Russia's plan to transform the Arctic into a "strategic resource base."

In chapter 8, Kimie Hara argues that the evolving situation in the Arctic region could have significant impact on the political relations and the regional security architecture in East Asia, providing new opportunities for cooperation and additional sources of conflict. The chapter considers security implications of the Arctic thaw to East Asia, where the structure of the regional Cold War confrontation remains to this day. It first highlights the post-World War II developments of the regional political and security environment in East Asia, with particular attention to the regional conflicts, considers possible impacts of the emerging Arctic thaw to the status quo, and concludes with some recommendations to prepare for possible climate change in the security environment in East Asia and the Arctic.

In chapter 9, Carin Holroyd looks at East Asia's economic interests in the Arctic. East Asia has discovered the Arctic, both because of a growing global interest in the effects of climate change on the fragile circumpolar ecosystem, and because of the economic potential of resource development in the region. Japan, South Korea and China are determined to be part of Arctic political processes, including the Arctic Council, Holroyd argues, so that they can influence decisions over oil, gas and mineral development. East Asian companies have become increasingly active in the region, developing Arctic-ready commercial ships, supporting Arctic research and exploring opportunities for resource development in the Far North. This chapter reviews current economic activity in the region, identifying areas of East Asian interest and examining the long-term strategies for Japan, South Korea and China in the area.

The Arctic Sea is touted as a new available space as the ice-melting process has accelerated in recent years. Debates over the Arctic are featured in aspects such as military competition, resource hunting and transportation rivalry. Active newcomers such as China, South Korea and Japan (all recently admitted observers to the Arctic Council) are developing, and their southern rivalries over maritime areas now extend to the north. The dual process between conflict and cooperation around the Arctic will feature in relations with those sea border dynamics. Chapter 10, by Akihiro Iwashita, explores the seas around the continent as the "Sea of Eurasia," positing the Arctic as an eastern component of this proposed body of water. After reviewing trends in continental cooperation over border issues, lessons applicable toward maritime affairs are drawn.

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In chapter 11, David A. Welch suggests that, contrary to popular belief — and contrary to the views of many politicians and scholars — the Arctic is completely uninteresting geopolitically from a traditional national security perspective. It is somewhat more interesting geopolitically from various non-traditional security perspectives (for example, human security, cultural security, energy security, economic security and environmental security); but it is truly important only in the one respect that attracts the least attention and action from policy makers: namely, ecospheric security.

In chapter 12, James Manicom and P. Whitney Lackenbauer write a second contribution to the volume, focusing, this time, on the applications of East Asian nations for observer status at the Arctic Council. It begins with a general reflection on East Asian nations' interests in the Arctic, followed by a brief background on the Arctic Council and observer status (including the criteria laid out in the 2011 Nuuk Declaration) and the formal applications of China, Japan and South Korea. While East Asian states have offered little explicit rationale for observer status, academic and media commentators in Asian nations have offered reasons why the council should extend it. The authors critically analyze commentators' viewpoints in light of the Nuuk criteria, as well as the interests of the Arctic Council member states and its permanent participants (PPs). Western academic, media, and think-tank commentary on East Asian nations' applications are also assessed, as are the anticipated implications for the future of the Arctic Council and circumpolar governance more generally. Despite concerns that Asian state involvement in the Arctic Council may dilute the power of the member states and PPs, the authors argue that denying Asian states observer status — which would force them to pursue Arctic discussions in other fora — risks undermining the Arctic Council's place as the premier forum for high-level discussion on regional issues.

The papers presented at the Whitehorse workshop and the intensive conversation and debate that followed at the Waterloo workshop brought to the forefront the fundamental importance of East Asian engagement in the Arctic. Although the level of involvement is comparatively small — China, Japan and South Korea are much more heavily invested in Africa than they will be in the Arctic for the next half century — a new pattern has been established. Most importantly, the East Asian nations want to be part of the scientific research, regional planning and economic development activity in the Arctic. They clearly see in the North some of the crucial warning signs about global warming, offset by the possibility that the Arctic holds the raw materials needed to sustain industrial development in East Asia. Twenty years ago, only a handful of East Asian scientists and occasional tourists could be

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seen in the Arctic; now, state-owned companies, regular Arctic tours for East Asian visitors, major research groups, and extensive Arctic profile-building operations can be seen across the North.

It is not clear, however, that the Arctic states or the Arctic peoples are either aware of the level of East Asian interest or fully prepared for their engagement. There are suspicions about the motives of their external agenda, particularly regarding their resource aspirations in the Far North and their insistence on being part of the Arctic Council and other northern diplomatic and political organizations. In a real and substantial way, most northerners do not see China, South Korea and Japan as truly Northern nations, with other than self-interested commitments to the region. Reconciling East Asian aspirations, which are part of the three countries' global strategies for environmental management and resource planning, with the desire of the Arctic states to regulate the circumpolar world themselves and in their collective interests, represents a major political and diplomatic challenge.

This collection, and the two meetings that led to the publication of this book, represent the launch, rather than the conclusion, of an ongoing, international collaboration on the future of East Asia in the Arctic; these issues will not soon disappear. East Asian interest in the region is real and sustainable. The search for governance structures and consultative processes that respect indigenous, circumpolar and global interests in the Arctic is well underway. What is clear is that the Arctic now has a significant East Asian component. The shape, nature and intensity of East Asian engagement in the Arctic is much less clear. Therefore, close monitoring, international collaboration and continued research will be essential if the shared, but far from similar, interests of East Asia and the Arctic are to be reconciled.

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