

# 1. Introduction: the Arctic Council, 'Asian states' and the 'global Arctic'

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## INTRODUCTION

It is now surely a truism to declare that global interest in the Arctic has never been greater (e.g. Keil and Knecht, 2017; Finger and Heininen, 2018; Dodds and Nuttall, 2019). The reasons for such enchantment and the ways in which that might be manifested are varied, ranging from appeals for synoptic knowledge-collection to popular representations of the Anthropocene (Hedin and Gremaud, 2018; Lehman, 2019). However, few would dispute that the intersections of ongoing environmental and geophysical change coupled with enhanced accessibility to the resource and transport potential of the region are integral to this assessment (e.g. Emmerson, 2010). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report on the ocean and cryosphere does not pull its punches (IPCC, 2019). The report states that "Arctic ice loss over the past two decades is likely unprecedented in at least 150 years" (IPCC, 2019). Whether the focus is on the state of Arctic sea ice, permafrost and/or interior ice and glaciers, the assessment is bleak. Changes affecting the Arctic are not simply of concern to human and non-human communities living in the North. Mid-latitude regions will continue to feel the collective effects of declining sea ice, ice sheet melting, thawing permafrost, wildfires in Siberia and Alaska, and higher air temperatures at the North Pole. The environmental fate of the Arctic speaks directly to global commitments to address climate change mitigation and resilience in the face of sea level change, which will be strongly influenced by the rate of melting of the interior ice of Greenland and Antarctica. Low-lying regions around the world, including mega-cities such as Shanghai and Mumbai have much to lose. City-states such as Singapore are also on the proverbial frontline.

As an array of state and non-state parties scramble to cement their national and transnational interests, the Arctic as a distinct geographical region (as defined by lines of latitude such as the Arctic Circle and/or bio-geographical transition such as the treeline boundary) continues to attract a cottage indus-

try of reports and stories positing a variety of futures and scenarios. Recent tensions between Russia and the United States and its NATO allies over the annexation of Crimea and ongoing crises in Eastern Ukraine have fuelled speculation at one point that instability might affect and even infect the Arctic and its governance structures. US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo's speech at the 2019 Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting took many observers aback. Strikingly, after critical comments about Russia, he turned elsewhere and told his audience that "China's words and actions raise doubts about its intentions ... Beijing claims to be a near-Arctic state ... Yet the shortest distance between China and the Arctic is 900 miles. There are Arctic states, and non-Arctic states. No third category exists. China claiming otherwise entitles them to exactly nothing" (US State Department, 2019). The reference to 'near-Arctic state' was a thinly veiled reference to China's 2018 White Paper on the Arctic. It was, without doubt, the most hard-hitting speech given by a senior minister in a forum that usually champions cooperation, goodwill and shared visions for a peaceful Arctic.

For the naysayers, the Arctic is experiencing a new 'scramble for resources and territories' involving northern communities, Arctic states and extra-territorial actors striving to leverage strategic advantage while maximizing the current and future potential of the High North (for a critical assessment, see Dodds and Nuttall, 2016). In reality, Arctic stakeholders have been able to maintain cooperation in areas such as polar science, coastguard and search and rescue coordination, and the working business of the inter-governmental forum, the Arctic Council (since its inception in 1996). But Pompeo's speech is a reminder that spatial distance and claims to relative proximity can elicit a practical geopolitical reasoning that is divisive and controversial. It also speaks back against Chinese geopolitical discourse that places emphasis on 'win-win' outcomes and recognition of the sovereignty and sovereign rights of the eight Arctic states and their Indigenous/northern communities (on the win-win outcome/solution, see Mações, 2018: 19–20). The US Secretary of State failed to mention 'climate change' once in his speech and instead used China's aggressive claims to the South China Sea as a warning of what could happen in the Arctic Ocean (on the South China Sea, see Hayton, 2014; Rolf and Agnew, 2016).

Into this febrile mixture of reporting and assessment, we might counter and posit the idea that there are other sorts of 'scrambles' at stake. One might be simply a scramble for knowledge and expertise for a region that is being scrambled itself by environmental and geophysical change. Permafrost is thawing, sea ice is thinning and disappearing, summer forest fires are more prevalent and long-lasting, and weather systems are producing unseasonably warm weather in winter. One driver for knowledge is focused on the Arctic seabed and marine environment because coastal states such as Canada,

Denmark/Greenland and Russia want to finalize their sovereign rights over the outer limits of the continental shelf (Riddell-Dixon and English, 2017). Another sort of scramble has been institutional, and here we might explore how the Arctic Council, as the leading inter-governmental forum for the Arctic states and permanent participants, has had to respond to growing interest in the Arctic, including in its governance and resources. A third might be an intellectual scramble to accommodate a range of geographical imaginaries about the Arctic region and its relationship to the wider world. Terms such as 'global Arctic' have been used recently to consider how Arctic cultures, ecologies, geographies and economies are being made and remade by transnational encounters and flows. In the recent past, there would have been a great deal more focus on the circumpolar Arctic/North, and the manner in which forums such as the Arctic Council helped to frame issues as distinctly 'Arctic' (Keskitalo, 2004; Steinberg et al., 2015). The Arctic in this sort of intellectual accounting is anything but a remote, isolated, disconnected and peripheral world region. Finally, there has been infrastructural investment which has been interpreted as 'scrambling' for geopolitical advantage, with Russian investments in drones, icebreakers and military bases frequently attracting concern from external observers that the Arctic is being remilitarized (Baev, 2018).

In this opening chapter, we explore how the admittance of Asian states as observers to the Arctic Council in May 2013 acted as a lightning-rod for analysis and commentary. Some commentators even spoke and wrote about 'Asia eyes the Arctic' (e.g. Wilson, 2013). Our approach is informed by literatures on post-colonialism and critical geopolitics that address contested imaginaries and practices, and the more technical literatures on Arctic governance including work that has followed closely the evolution of the Arctic Council. In an earlier collection of essays, a case was made for a 'critical polar geopolitics' and these essays continue in that spirit of interrogating the intersection of geographical imaginaries, geopolitical dynamics and regimes of governance (Powell and Dodds, 2014; Wehrmann, 2018). Thereafter, we explore the presence of an underlying anxiety about the current and future intention of Asian stakeholders, and the spectral presence of what some have called 'Polar Orientalism' (see e.g. Dodds and Nutall, 2016). Pompeo's 2019 speech would appear to be a good case study in its own right. This is not to underestimate areas of cooperation between the eight Arctic states (Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States) and Asian states such as China and Korea in fields such as science, shipping and business. The admission of new Asian observers made manifest five questions: Who exercises control in the Arctic? How are problems and issues dealt with in the Arctic and beyond? What demands are being placed on the Arctic? Where is the Arctic felt? And can the Arctic Council anticipate future problems and challenges? Arguably, Russia's intervention and annexation in

Crimea/eastern Ukraine and worries about 'spill-over' effects contaminating the spirit and purpose of Arctic cooperation merely added further fuel to ongoing debates about a 'global Arctic' (Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2017).

Finally, we introduce the chapters that make up this volume. While we use the example of China as an entrée to the collection, our contributors make it clear that Korea, India, Singapore and Japan have their own distinct interests. Other communities hailing from Asia, such as the Philippines and Thailand, have made Greenland, Alaska and Svalbard their homes. The Filipino community in Alaska, for example, is intimately tied up with the demand for seasonal labour in the salmon canning industry, and the historic ties between the United States and its former colonial territory, the Philippines (Brody, 2010). The relationship between Asia and the Arctic is a complex one and not simply reducible to questions of security and resource politics on the one hand and implicating a small number of Asian states on the other hand. Moreover, some Asian cities such as Sapporo, Seoul, Shanghai and Singapore are important providers of expert knowledge on the Arctic and hubs for transnational exchange and collaboration. International conferences and workshops provide one illustration of that relationship. In May 2019, for example, Shanghai hosted a well-attended Arctic Circle forum event, which witnessed Chinese speakers addressing inter alia the 'Polar Silk Road', Chinese visitor numbers to the Nordic Arctic, resource extraction, transoceanic shipping operations and bilateral relationships with Arctic states such as Russia, Sweden and Finland (see Figure 1.1). What we, as editors, witnessed first-hand, however, was an underlying tension between the Arctic as a fixed territory with populations and resources and an Arctic being conceptualized as far more relational. Although not unique to the Arctic as 'region', the event revealed what Doreen Massey described as power-geometries (Massey, 2005). Networks and territories can work with one another, but they can and do reveal points of friction and tension as Arctic state representatives reminded their audiences about 'their waters', 'their sovereignty' and 'their Arctic peoples'.

## NEUTRALIZING THE CIRCLE? THE ARCTIC COUNCIL AND ARCTIC GOVERNANCE

In an interesting act of timing, former President of Iceland, Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson attended a National Press Club luncheon in New York. The date was 15 April 2013 and was approximately a month before an Arctic Council ministerial meeting was scheduled to be hosted in northern Sweden. The president came to present his vision for a new international assembly for the Arctic. To be called the Arctic Circle, the primary aim of the assembly, rather than an inter-governmental forum, was to provide a space for an array of Arctic and non-Arctic stakeholders to gather in order to discuss issues of mutual



Source: The authors.

*Figure 1.1 The opening ceremony at the 2019 Arctic Circle Forum in Shanghai*

concern and interest. The president talked of the Arctic Circle as an 'open tent', implying that while there would be some structure to Arctic Circle events (and a named location – Iceland), it would be characterized by an openness to participants. There would be, unlike in the Arctic Council, no such thing as an observer, with restrictions placed on where and when they could participate. He did not identify where 'closed tents' might be found but it was difficult not to conclude that the Arctic Circle was positioning itself as a rather different entity to the established Arctic Council (Keil and Knecht, 2017).

In conversation with an American commentator, Scott Borgerson, a former US coastguard captain and Arctic logistics specialist, President Grímsson elaborated further what he had in mind:

It will, for example, be a testing ground where South Korea can justify, why it is so interested in the Arctic. Why does the leadership of South Korea visit Greenland? Why does the Prime Minister of China talk about the Arctic when he comes to Iceland? What is the agenda? I was in India a few weeks ago. The first item on the meeting with the foreign minister of India was India's desire to be a member [sic]

of the Arctic Council. ... So in order to take the pressure off the Arctic Council membership, so to speak, this gathering – which we call the Arctic Circle, is partly a play of words of geographical location and having everyone sitting around the table, irrespective of protocol of [sic] power position – to broaden this dialogue and make it more inclusive and more exclusive. (Council on Foreign Relations, 2013)

While the president might be accused of being a little disingenuous when it comes to the idea that this was designed to take 'pressure off the Arctic Council membership', it brought to the fore a state of affairs pertaining to a further expansion of observer membership of the Arctic Council. It is probably no exaggeration to say that the signatories to the Ottawa Convention (1996) never anticipated countries such as China, South Korea, Singapore, India and Japan becoming sufficiently interested in the Arctic that they would apply to become permanent observers. Fast forward ten years or so, it was apparent by 2008–9 that wider international interest in the Arctic was turned upside down from those early days of the Arctic Council and its predecessor, the Arctic Environment Protection Strategy (AEPS). In 1996, European countries such as France, Netherlands and the UK became observers by default because of their observer status to the AEPS and long history of Arctic exploration, resource exploitation, Cold War military engagement and science.

What added extra frisson to the presidential initiative was the unhappiness felt in Iceland about being excluded from the diplomatic and political work of the Arctic Ocean coastal states namely Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Norway, Russia and the United States (A5). In May 2008, a Danish government sponsored meeting resulted in the release of the Ilulissat Declaration, which created the case for the A5 to be considered environmental stewards of the Arctic Ocean on the basis of their collective geographical proximity and sovereign rights as coastal states. Designed both to affirm as well as emoliate political and public reporting about a 'scramble for the Arctic', the Declaration by its very nature included some and excluded others, specifically the other three Arctic states. The exclusion was most keenly felt by Iceland, an island-state with an established North Atlantic and Arctic identity. To compound matters further, the A5 had a second meeting in Chelsea, Canada in 2010, which proved more controversial than expected in the light of US criticism of host Canada's failure to include Arctic Indigenous peoples (i.e. the permanent participants of the Arctic Council). Notwithstanding the diplomatic spate, the lingering political resentment felt in Iceland did not diminish.

So when President Grímsson came to the United States to present his 'big idea', he came to a country which had arguably been the most ambivalent member of the A5. In contrast to the other Arctic Ocean coastal states, the United States has not yet ratified the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and thus cannot formally submit their scientific and

technical details to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf. While the US accepts most of the provisions of UNCLOS as part of customary international law, it does not have the same formal relationship with UNCLOS as the other members of the A5. It is arguably the weakest 'Arctic nation' in terms of public awareness and formal political recognition of its identity as an Arctic power, although clearly not indifferent to the resource value and strategic potential of Alaska. The Obama administration, and specifically Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, had been critical of the Canadian A5 meeting. While not calling for the participation of Iceland, it had nonetheless exposed the exclusionary logic of the A5 meeting.

The Arctic Circle initiative, launched in New York, also presented itself as a potential provocation to Arctic states and permanent participants as they approached the ministerial meeting in Sweden. On the agenda, as was well appreciated, was the formal application of six states and other non-state actors to be considered formal observers to the Arctic Council. The first Arctic Circle meeting was scheduled for October 2013, and depending on the outcome of the ministerial meeting, there would either be Asian participants welcomed as both observers to the Arctic Council and Arctic Circle attendees or not. In order to process the observer application, consensus was required from all Arctic states. Iceland's support for the Arctic Circle was interpreted as a direct challenge to those Arctic states that might have been reluctant to embrace a wider stakeholder community, and the application of the European Union (EU) was also likely to prove divisive. Canadian and Danish displeasure over an EU seal exports ban was widely cited as a stumbling block. Despite the strong support of Finland and Sweden, the fate of the EU was far less assured than Asian applicants such as China and South Korea.

If the observer applications proved too divisive during the ministerial meeting, then the Arctic Circle stood ready to offer an alternative space to trade ideas and opportunities within and beyond the Arctic. While President Grímsson never presented the Arctic Circle as a formal alternative to the Arctic Council, the initiative was compared to a northern latitude 'Davos' where commercial, political and scientific stakeholders could gather to do Arctic business. In the Arctic Circle environment, there was no reason to be simply an 'observer' who had to be given permission by the Arctic Council to participate in council business including its working groups and task forces. Either way, Asian state interest in the Arctic offered up a catalyst for the Icelandic government to re-imagine itself as an economic and political gateway for a more explicitly global Arctic, which was geographically expansive and sensitive to areas of the region that were legitimate areas of international interest, including the international waters of the Central Arctic Ocean. Post financial crisis, Iceland had also actively looked to developing a free trade agreement



with China and the signing of a bilateral Framework Agreement on Arctic Cooperation.

Embedded within this Arctic Circle initiative was the involvement of Alaskan and Greenlandic partners. Icelandic disappointment about being excluded from the A5 became an opportunity to reassert a role for what we might consider were more marginalized elements of the Arctic state community. While Alaska is integral to the United States and Greenland a part of the Kingdom of Denmark, representatives of both entities have long noted their comparative marginalization when compared to decision-making hubs in Washington DC and Copenhagen respectively. Alaskan, Greenlandic and Icelandic stakeholders found common cause as gateways willing to reach out to both Asian partners and non-state actors such as business giants like Google. Greenland and Iceland, moreover, have worked with the Faroe Islands for many years in developing the West Nordic Council (established in 1985), which proposed greater cooperation between the islands and their collective desire to develop trading relationships beyond traditional markets in mainland Europe.

After much discussion, the ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council accepted the observer applications of six states, namely China, Italy, South Korea, Singapore, Japan and India. Applications from the EU and a series of non-governmental organizations such as Greenpeace were not formally considered. There were 14 applications to consider in total. The meeting itself was beset with foggy and icy weather, which seemed in keeping for an event plagued by a series of other controversies. Outside the formal meeting, anti-mining protesters including Sami activists were contesting the decision by the Swedish government to continue mining to the detriment of traditional herding activities. At the same time the Danish delegation had to deal with its own controversy regarding the decision of the Swedish host to provide three formal places for the Kingdom of Denmark. The Greenlandic Prime Minister Aleqa Hammond refused to attend as a consequence. In different ways, this ministerial meeting was defined by a very public debate about inclusion and exclusion of different kinds.

After the formal adoption of the new observers, the then-Swedish foreign minister Carl Bildt announced that this was evidence of the “strength [of] the position of the Arctic Council on the global scene”. Others, however, argued that had the six new observers, especially the Asian applicants, not been admitted, then the Arctic Council risked marginalization in favour of the Arctic Circle. Whatever the motivations of the Arctic states and the permanent participants (who were consulted about the applications), the new entrants were made aware that there was a price to ‘membership’, namely a public recognition of the sovereignty and sovereign rights of the Arctic states and commitment to support the work of the Arctic Council. The expansion of the



Arctic Council observer community arguably contributed to making the Arctic region less exceptional – a region with a mosaic of governance reflecting the diverse interests of territorial and extra-territorial stakeholders.

The admission of the new observers in May 2013 was also a deliberate attempt to reposition Arctic discourses, which had flourished in the previous five years. At the heart of the matter was a concern that the Arctic was being imagined and represented as thinly governed and subject to a scramble for resources and territory. The planting of a Russian flag in August 2007 on the bottom of the Central Arctic Ocean unleashed a plethora of stories and images purporting to sustain a 'scramble for and of the Arctic'. The May 2008 meeting of the A5 was a deliberate attempt to reposition the Arctic marine environment as a legally governed space, where the provisions of UNCLOS not only applied but were accepted by the relevant coastal states. All the parties also committed themselves to follow UNCLOS rules for the delimitation of their outer continental shelves and thus were confident that their sovereign rights over the Arctic Ocean seabed would be peacefully established. While the international waters of the Central Arctic Ocean were unaffected, the flag pole was deposited on the seabed rather than photographed floating on the surface. The May 2008 meeting in Greenland was designed to change the optics of the Arctic marine environment, and the final official photograph involving the five foreign ministers of the A5 was designed to reinforce this collective sense of purpose and agreement.

What the May 2008 meeting also sought to achieve, and arguably succeeded, was further discussion within and beyond Europe regarding an Arctic treaty. European Union parliamentarians had tabled a resolution calling for such a treaty, arguing that the Arctic needed more formal governance in the wake of concerns that there might be a 'scramble over the Arctic'. This resolution was not well received by the Arctic states who were alarmed that international observers were positing the notion that the Arctic was lacking in governance. The EU's role in the Arctic was for some Arctic states already problematic and illustrative of how a large regional organization could make its presence felt through trade, living resource regulation, and by the simple fact that three out of the eight Arctic states are EU member states. As Keil and Knecht (2017) helpfully conclude, this discussion was not just a discussion about functionality but one that pivoted around geopolitical imaginaries pertaining to who governs, where governance takes place, and what is to be governed with regard to the Arctic.

Six years on from the admission of those Asian states to the Arctic Council, there is a wealth of change to be registered. Some countries such as Singapore have appointed Arctic ambassadors while others have issued their policy frameworks and strategies. Asian states contribute to the working business of the Arctic Council and perform their roles as 'observers' to the Arctic Council.

But the scale and scope of the engagement are far greater than simply policies and participation. For example, India's relationship with Russia is growing and in September 2019 the two political leaders met in the Russian Far East, as part of the 20th annual summit between India and Russia and later the Eastern Economic Forum (EEF). Putin and Modi's joint statement explicitly mentioned the Arctic, and Indian commentators have urged an 'Indo-Arctic' policy, supporting the wider 'Look East' policy. Russia and India agreed to expand economic, energy and defence cooperation, including LNG (liquefied natural gas) trading from the Russian North. China, Korea and Japan have hosted annual trilateral ministerial meetings since 2008, but their interrelationships are complicated by the contested geopolitics of North East Asia. The relationships between Asian states and communities and the Arctic is complex, multi-faceted and shaped by strategic competition.

Since their 2013 admittance, the geopolitics of North East Asia has sharpened further as Japan and China have clashed over islands in the East China Sea, South Korea and Japan have had trading and wartime legacy clashes, and South Korea and China have different strategic relationships with the United States and North Korea (see Emmers, 2009). At the same time, Russia in particular has actively courted Japan, India, South Korea and China with the promise of trade and energy opportunities in the Russian Far East. This, in part, helps to explain why US Secretary of State Pompeo expressed concern about the Arctic becoming an arena of strategic competition. Asian states, in his reading, are doing more than simply 'observing'. Paradoxically perhaps, US and EU sanctions against Russia encouraged Putin and the regime to turn 'East' and find new markets and collaborators.

The implications for Arctic governance are profound. While the eight Arctic states guard jealously their sovereignty and sovereign rights, Asian states are building an array of relationships within and beyond the Arctic region. China inevitably looms largest in this changing strategic picture but as our contributors note, we should not lose sight of other Asian countries such as South Korea and India. From Chinese tourism in Iceland and Finland to South Korean shipbuilding and Indian interest in purchasing Russian natural gas, the relationships between Asia and the Arctic are complicated and not defined by national governments alone. This presents a dilemma for smaller Arctic states in the Nordic world in particular. They have enjoyed an unprecedented rise not only in Asian-Arctic tourism and a boost to academic exchange networks but also had to watch strategic relationships form with near neighbour Russia. China and other Asian states' 'greater influence over the Arctic' is noted with public concern (cited in South China Morning Post, 2019).

## ‘OBSERVING’ THE ARCTIC (AND ARCTIC COUNCIL)

As part of the preparatory work prior to the May 2013 ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council, however, the Arctic states also committed themselves to updating the rules and conventions for observers. The 1996 Ottawa Convention has little to say about the rights and duties of observers beyond establishing the category of permanent and ad hoc observer. The earliest observers, overwhelmingly European states and international governmental organizations, were accredited and ad hoc observers to the AEPS. There was no observer manual and certainly no list of ‘observer rules’. The history of the Arctic Council, between 1996 and 2007, is one of steady expansion of the observer community (e.g. France being admitted in 2000 along with the International Arctic Social Science Association) with a recognition that as the observer community expanded it might require further regulation. In 2002, the Senior Arctic Officials (SAO) attached to the Arctic Council revisited their earlier 1998 guidelines. One driver for the creation of a permanent secretariat in Norway was the recognition that the Arctic Council needed more regularized administrative support. Just after the infamous Russian flag-planting incident in August 2007, SAO reports record that countries such as South Korea and China expressed an interest in becoming observers. In 2009 and 2011 respectively, Japan and Singapore joined what is described as a list of observer candidates.

In May 2011, mindful of this surge of interest from new states with less well-established histories and geographies of Arctic engagement, a SAO report to Arctic state ministers spelled out further guidance about what should be expected of observers. The subsequent Arctic Council Observer Manual was adopted at the 2011 ministerial meeting in Greenland and became a public resource for those seeking formal adoption as observers. Crucially, the Observer Manual asked of observers to affirm their recognition of the sovereignty of the Arctic states and the special position of permanent participants. If accepted as permanent observers, they would transition away from ad hoc membership which meant in effect having to apply over and over again to gain formal admission to Arctic Council meetings.

The May 2013 ministerial meeting provided a very obvious focal point for public speculation about what might be driving predominantly Asian interest in the Arctic. As a series of blog essays in *The Diplomat* probed – what did countries such as China, South Korea and Singapore *really* want from the Arctic and the Arctic Council? The question was never asked of the other

applicant country, Italy. In one essay, the contributor Arthur Guschin (2013) argued:

However, 'scientific' diplomacy alone will not seem to be helping China join the most influential and important Arctic organization (the Arctic Council) as a permanent member state [sic]. At present, China's Arctic initiatives suggest that Beijing is eager to camouflage its true interests in the region with environmental monitoring, Arctic life protection and concerns about indigenous peoples. Beijing's rhetoric aims at defining the Arctic as an international zone where changes must make sense for all countries and climate change is a problem for the highest levels of diplomacy.

According to this analysis, China was found to be disguising its 'true interests' and thus stood accused of being surreptitious and disingenuous. The evidence for such claim lay, according to the author, with the proposition put forward by the Chinese government that China was a 'near-Arctic state'. This framing of proximity revealed the true interests of a country committed to a hemispheric grand strategy (as epitomized in the 'Belt and Road' initiative) (see Sidaway and Woon, 2017; Woon, 2020).

Indeed, as the quote above also demonstrates, China has been the frequently 'observed' subject under the broader watchful scrutiny of Asian forays into the Arctic. The public announcement that China was framing itself as a 'near-Arctic state' was first announced in May 2012, exactly a year before the Arctic Council ministerial meeting in Sweden (Jakobson and Peng, 2012). The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported that the country was describing itself as relatively proximate to the Arctic region. In a recorded interview with Yang Jian the then Vice President of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, it was noted that China preferred to talk about 'Arctic affairs', which then could be separated out as 'Arctic regional affairs' and 'Arctic global affairs'. Such a distinction recognized that China, alongside other extra-territorial states and organizations, had legitimate interests in the Arctic regarding climate change, sea ice melting, natural resource development and shipping. This is a distinction that Mia Bennett has helpfully described as the inchoate intersection of extra-regional and inter-regional narratives (Bennett, 2015).

In his survey of China's emerging Arctic policy, Nengye Liu (2017) offers a helpful evaluation of the topic in hand. It is noted, for example, that China's evocation of 'near-Arctic state' supplements the idea of the country as an 'Arctic stakeholder'. In order to advance China's interests, a three-pronged approach has been unveiled – mutual respect, cooperation and win-win.

The first refers to the 'price of admission' to the Arctic Council as an observer in May 2013. Citing and recognizing the sovereignty/sovereign rights of the Arctic states and noting China's signature to the 1920 Spitsbergen Treaty, Chinese ministers have acknowledged that the Arctic is a governed

space. At the 2015 Arctic Circle meeting, which is a public and publicized event unlike the Arctic Council equivalents, the Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming (2015) told the gathered audience that:

Geographically speaking, China is a “near-Arctic state”. The changing natural environment and resources exploration of the Arctic have direct impact on China’s climate, environment, agriculture, shipping, trade as well as social and economic development. Therefore, China is a major stakeholder in the Arctic. As Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi states in the video message, “China’s participation in Arctic affairs has always been guided by three principles: respect, cooperation and win-win.”

And importantly the Vice Foreign Minister went on to acknowledge that:

Third, respect the inherent rights of Arctic countries and the indigenous people. The territorial sovereignty over the Arctic continent and islands belong [sic] to the Arctic states. They enjoy territorial seas, exclusive economic zones and continental shelves in the Arctic. The indigenous people account for one fifth of the Arctic population and have unique cultural traditions and lifestyles. Countries have the obligation to respect and uphold the sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction of the Arctic countries, respect the traditions and culture of the Arctic indigenous people, and protect the natural environment and resources they live on. Fourth, respect the rights of non-Arctic countries and the overall interests of the international community. The Arctic seas include high seas and international sea-bed areas. Non-Arctic countries have the rights to conduct scientific research, navigation and exploration in the Arctic region under international law, and these rights should be respected and upheld. The international community must work together to protect and utilize the Arctic, and in particular to address such global issues as climate change, ecology, environmental protection and shipping. At the same time, the overall interests of the international community in the Arctic should be respected.

The second and third area of cooperation and win-win was touched upon in a 2015 Arctic Circle video speech by Foreign Minister Wang Yi. The minister noted:

Cooperation is the fundamental approach China follows in participating in Arctic affairs. China is ready to step up exchanges and cooperation with Arctic countries, non-Arctic countries and other stakeholders and work for concrete outcomes in a wide range of areas including climate change, scientific research, environmental protection, shipping, sustainable development and people-to-people exchanges. Win-win results are the ultimate goals for China’s participation in Arctic affairs. The future development of the Arctic bears on the common destiny of mankind. An Arctic that enjoys peace, security and sustainable development serves the interest of the Arctic region and people and the overall interest of the international community. China is ready to work with all parties to share opportunities, jointly meet challenges and strive for win-win results. (Wang Yi, 2015)

What emerges from the speeches is actually more than simply 'observing' the Arctic Council but using other venues such as the Arctic Circle to articulate an agenda for the Arctic which is both rooted and routed. China is rooted in the Arctic as a consequence of its research station in Svalbard (see Figure 1.2) but also because of interests in the international waters of the Central Arctic Ocean and other marine environments. Those concerns are also routed in the sense that China has used cooperation with the Nordic countries in particular to encourage and facilitate scientific cooperation, academic exchanges, trade deals, and investment packages to create linkages with Arctic states and specialist institutions such as the Arctic Centre at the University of Lapland in Finland.



Source: The authors.

*Figure 1.2 China's 'Yellow River' research station in Svalbard*

But that rooted/routed contemporary relationship with the Arctic is also capable of generating controversy and intrigue when it found expression in particular places and in relationship to specific objects. Expressions of

fear, anxiety and suspicion are not new when it comes to how Europeans and Americans observed Asian communities in the North. In the nineteenth century, Chinese, Filipino and Japanese workers and businesses operating in Alaska became caught up in what was termed the 'yellow peril' (Bille and Urbansky, 2018). By the early 1880s, Chinese immigrants to North America were facing aggressive anti-immigrant legislation, which ended up facilitating a new influx of Filipino seasonal labour destined for the fish canning factories located in southern Alaska. New terms such as 'Alaskeros' were invented to describe these Asian Alaskan residents and their migratory travels from Seattle and California to the north (Miller, 2017 [1859]). By the 1930s, up to 5,000 Filipinos were working in the fish canning industry at any one time. As the numbers grew, fears were expressed about the impacts that youngish Asian men might have on local and native communities (Lee, 2015). Alaska was not alone in voicing fears, however, as other countries such as Russia worried about Chinese and Japanese ambitions in the far east of the country. Both the United States and Russia were embroiled in wars with Japan in the northern portions of their countries, with Japanese forces occupying the Aleutian Islands in 1942.

Seventy years later, the talk about Asia in the Arctic is very different. We use the term 'polar Orientalism' to capture a sense of what appears to be at stake when China is discussed as a potential Arctic stakeholder (Dodds and Nuttall, 2016). Edward Said's pioneering work on *Orientalism* (1978) posited that European writers, travellers and painters actively distinguished between 'Europe' on the one hand and the 'Orient' on the other hand. As 'polar opposites', the 'Orient' in particular was framed as corrupt, decadent and sclerotic. Orientalism functioned as a powerful proxy for European and later American imperialism, which ensured that a sense of civilizational superiority underwrote overseas expansionism. In the case of polar Orientalism, we make the point that what unnerves Western commentators is the polar 'orientation' of Asian countries, and their willingness to act on those interests. Historic tropes of 'yellow peril' were rooted in anxieties about the mobility of Chinese and other Asian peoples and their capacity to influence European and North American cultural and economic life (Yang, 2017).

In October 2012, for example, there was feverish reporting by newspapers such as *The New York Times* which posed the following question, "Why might China need up to 500 personnel in its embassy in Reykjavik, the capital of Iceland, a country of 320,000 people?" According to its report, the question was answered indirectly by a whole series of observations about China's relationship with the Arctic, some of which intersected with Iceland and some of which did not. The report cites the following factors: oil and gas resources, shipping routes, minerals in Greenland, great power rivalries involving Russia and the United States, interest in the Arctic Council, and perhaps most quix-



otically of all, “for those who may question the geographical justification of China’s interest in the Arctic, consider this: Within Chinese territory (as well as Indian territory, of course) is an area known as the Third Pole – the Himalayas” (New York Times, 2012). The story concluded that China and India were using the ‘Third Pole’ to opportunistically justify their involvement in both the Arctic and Antarctic. It is now common, as Anne-Marie Brady (2017) highlights, for Chinese speakers to present China as a ‘tri-polar’ power and use maps that depict China as intimately connected to the global cryosphere (Brady, 2017).

The 2012 story about the potential capacity of the Chinese Embassy building in Iceland performs as an analogy for China’s Arctic interests. It connotes that the capaciousness of the building is in keeping with the desire of the Chinese government to fill the Arctic with its presence while extracting commercial and strategic value from the region. This might actually be reminiscent of earlier patterns of European-led colonial harvesting of the Arctic as opposed to being indicative of a forward-looking vision of Asian expansion and exploitation. If China is making connections, harvesting resources, generating knowledge and moving through the Arctic, then this would seem to be uncanny, with a distinctively European flavour. In October 2018, China hosted at the Arctic Circle a so-called ‘China Night’ and used a lavish reception to articulate its relationship with the Arctic while entertaining the audience with, amongst other things, freely distributed toy panda bears (see Figure 1.3). Ten years earlier, China and Iceland agreed to establish a Northern Light Confucius Institute, involving the University of Iceland and China’s Ningbo University. If we were to ask what China and the other Asian states really want from the Arctic, then perhaps the answer is not that surprisingly different to other states and empires past and present. While we might detect signs of ‘Polar Orientalism’ at play, what might be more productive to think about is how the Arctic is being framed and reframed as a place to gather data, extract value, and connect up to other parts of the world. A key question for us might be how and where does this discursive and material work unfold? What is clear is that particular settings such as the Arctic Circle have provided a discursive space for Asian states such as China to assert their interests in the Arctic region and beyond – and working with Arctic states, Indigenous peoples’ organizations and other non-Arctic states. But observing the work of the Arctic Council and participating in the Arctic Circle are only two of the forums that China and other Asian states use when it comes to articulating, curating and performing their interests in the High North.



Source: The authors.

Figure 1.3 'China Night' at the 2018 Arctic Circle Assembly

## MORE THAN OBSERVING: THE CENTRAL ARCTIC OCEAN AS 'GLOBAL ARCTIC'

The final element to be considered is how the interests of Asian states in the Arctic have run alongside discussions about a 'global Arctic' as opposed to 'the Arctic' or 'the circumpolar Arctic'. As geographers are swift to point out, the manner in which we draw boundaries around places and regions is never innocent. And the introduction of 'global Arctic' into political discourse is notably recent. Since 2010, we begin to see more evidence of its usage in speeches and written publications ranging from research commissioned by the Northern Research Forum to reports by the Finnish Institute of International Affairs (2013), which state that "the Arctic is no longer a spatially or administratively confined region, but is instead taking its new form in the midst of contemporary global politics". The use of the moniker 'global Arctic' really accelerated after the admission of the five Asian states to the Arctic Council in May 2013. *Scientific American* (2013) in their editorial on 'The future of the Arctic is global' noted, "The Arctic Council added China and five other countries as official observers yesterday, expanding the focus of the organization and underscoring the complicated politics created by newly open waters in the north because of climate change".

What many of these reports did not dwell on is what might be at stake when we use terms like 'global Arctic'. It seems to act as a short-hand for implying that now that China, Singapore, Japan and South Korea are observers to the Arctic Council, the Arctic is now 'global' in a way that it was not when there were only European observers such as Poland, France and the UK. Geophysical change such as further sea ice reduction has, however, been a major driver of this framing of the Arctic as 'global', again with this time a more explicit premise that less sea ice will mean more Asian interest in Arctic shipping lanes and resources.

The relationship between the global and the Arctic is also something that attracts policing and vigilance. Arctic states have been eager, as global interest in the region has grown, to ensure that those who are said to represent the global such as China, Korea and Japan, are respectful of their sovereignty and sovereign rights over the land, sea, ice and air. As we have noted, the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration was a deliberate attempt to ensure a consensual approach among the Arctic Ocean coastal states eager to present to the wider global community a common approach to the management of the Arctic Ocean. The management of the observer question within the confines of the Arctic Council would be a good example of how the Arctic states and the Permanent Participants have contributed to this policing; ensuring that observers perform and engage in particular ways. An Observer Manual to the Arctic Council was adopted at the Kiruna Ministerial in 2013, and will be updated again to ensure that observers continue to play a supportive (and respectful) role to the Arctic states and Permanent Participants.

But the global Arctic can also be used to highlight how Asian countries can make their presence felt outside the confines of the Arctic Council. The International Maritime Organization's Polar Code and the ongoing negotiations over the future management of the Central Arctic Ocean (CAO) provide illuminating examples of how China and other extra-territorial parties have been embedded in this 'global Arctic'. Of the two, the CAO negotiations are the most interesting because they are ongoing, and we know relatively little about China's involvement in the Polar Code negotiations (as opposed to implementation in the future). What the CAO case also does well is highlight how the Arctic as a volumetric space attracts different legal and political forces and procedures (Li and Huang, 2016; Dodds, 2019).

Fundamentally, the Arctic seabed has been subject to a series of UNCLOS-led submissions by Arctic Ocean coastal states led by Russia in 2001 and since then Canada, Denmark/Greenland, and Norway have all followed the rules of engagement as laid out in Article 76. At stake has been a procedure designed to allow coastal states to extend their sovereign rights over continental shelves. Depending on certain technical criteria, coastal states can potentially extend those rights to around 350 nautical miles from the coastal baseline and possibly

further. The UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), a technical-scientific body based in New York, is responsible for evaluating the submissions by coastal states. But as it does not enjoy a legal personality, it can only issue 'recommendations' rather than legal judgements. The net result is that Canada, Denmark/Greenland and Russia have all been exploring, mapping and surveying vast areas of the Arctic Ocean seabed. Each party will seek a recommendation from the CLCS and because the 'claims' of the three parties will overlap due to the nature of their respective coastlines, the final delimitation of sovereign rights over the Arctic Ocean seabed will require trilateral negotiation. Thus far, despite worries about the intentions of Russia in particular, the consensus of opinion accepts that all three parties are respecting the UNCLOS provisions. This would appear to be important for a peaceful resolution of an emotive subject (i.e. who owns the seabed around the North Pole) but also mutually beneficial when it comes to reminding others (e.g. China and the EU) that the Arctic Ocean is a governed space.

Regardless of the fate of the geographical extent of sovereign rights over the seabed of the Arctic Ocean, the waters beyond the exclusive economic zones of the five Arctic Ocean coastal states are international waters. There are four areas of international waters in the Arctic region: the so-called 'Banana Hole' in the Norwegian Sea, the 'Loophole' in the Barents Sea, the 'Donut Hole' in the central Bering Sea, and the Central Arctic Ocean. The latter is estimated to measure around 2.8 million square kilometres in extent. The A5 recognized that their claims to be environmental stewards of the CAO were likely to be challenged by extra-territorial parties. In February 2014, the A5 agreed a common approach in a meeting in Greenland after earlier discussions following the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration. In July 2015, the A5 signed a 'Declaration Concerning the Prevention of Unregulated High Seas Fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean' (often called the 'Oslo Declaration'). The Declaration notes that, "they share the view that it is desirable to implement appropriate interim measures to deter unregulated fishing in the future in the high seas portion of the CAO". Within six months, the A5 recognized that they would need to engage with extra-territorial parties that were likely to be involved with any commercial fishing in the CAO in the future.

The five countries/organizations invited were the EU, Iceland, China, Japan and South Korea and they met the A5 in Washington, DC. The place of the EU is notable because unlike China and other Asian states it has yet to secure admission as anything but an ad hoc observer to the Arctic Council (Raspotnik, 2018). The diplomatic price of formal observation has been relatively high; the EU has struggled to find an Arctic strategy that has not alienated Arctic states such as Canada, Norway and Russia and has had to invest heavily in attendance at Arctic meetings and summits as well as participate in multi-stakeholder forums. The EU is an Arctic actor by virtue of its member states and policy

footprint in areas such as fishing, science and transport. The EU's regulatory and scientific presence means that in the case of the international management of the CAO it was impossible to exclude. On the table was a possible international fisheries agreement which stipulated that the A5 would not authorize their vessels to conduct any commercial fishing in the CAO until appropriate management measures were in place. Driving the discussions was a shared interest amongst the A5 in preventing illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the CAO. It remains a moot point as to the future shape of high seas fisheries management in the CAO and whether it might lead to a regional fisheries management organization that the United States in particular (under the Obama administration at least) appeared to champion.

Fisheries research thus far has been cautious about the viability and extent of any commercial fishing in the CAO. What perhaps is more interesting in the short-term is not whether such activity will develop but how it might serve as illustrative of how the A5 are working with those five extra-territorial parties and in doing so enacting a 'global Arctic'. The Oslo Declaration (2015) was intended as a first step towards establishing a regional fisheries management organization (RFMO) for the CAO, with the support of those extra-territorial parties deemed vital for international credibility and support. Some commentators have made the point that China has said very little about the ongoing discussions despite participating in meetings at Washington, DC (2015), Iqaluit (2016), Tórshavn (2016) and most recently Reykjavik (2017). One Chinese analyst noted, however, that Chinese reticence might be due to the fact that "China may simply not be confident enough to provide proposals based on its own scientific data in the fisheries negotiation" (Liu, 2016). However, whatever reticence there might have been did not prevent the eventual negotiation in 2018 of the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the CAO, with China, Japan and Korea as two of five non-Arctic signatories (Schatz et al., 2019). While the Agreement proposes a moratorium on commercial fishing in the CAO for 16 years, it stipulates that the ban on fishing is temporary. Thereafter, extra-territorial stakeholders such as China and Korea are likely to push for the establishment of an RFMO. Notably any RFMO for the CAO will be quite different to what exists in the Southern Ocean (CCAMLR – Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources) because the focus is explicitly on its role as a fisheries organization rather than a conservation-minded body, which permits the 'rational use' of resources if it does not compromise the integrity of the marine ecosystem.

## CHAPTER OUTLINES: FOCI AND THEMES

In the chapters that follow, the themes of 'observing' and 'being observed' as they 'play out' in the context of the Arctic Council and beyond are explored in

a multiplicity of ways by the contributors. The book is divided into two parts. Part I, 'Institutional and Geopolitical Context: The Arctic Council, Arctic States, Permanent Participants, Observers', sets the stage to understand the intricate workings of the Arctic Council and how this forum sets the parameters and boundaries for exchanges and encounters between a plethora of Arctic and Asian actors. Indeed, the Arctic Council is not an institutional space that is free for all; rather there are hierarchies, norms and rules addressing the role and scope of 'observers' (and 'Arctic' stakeholders as well). Observers not only 'observe' the business of the Arctic Council but they can also work more proactively with Arctic states and Permanent Participants. The chapters in this section are thus united in their efforts to conceptualize these dynamics of interactions in the Arctic Council and in the process, reflect on their broader implications for Arctic geopolitics and governance.

Sebastian Knecht kicks off the section by exploring the institutional structure, division of labour and the flow of information across different networks in the Arctic Council. Conceptualizing the Arctic Council as an international boundary organization, Knecht shows that power relations are fully imbricated with the Council's ongoing work that straddles and mediates the science-policy boundary divide. This in turn enables a close interrogation of the paradoxes, challenges and problems that account for why Asian observers are able to be better integrated into the existing policy networks of the Arctic Council as compared to scientific ones. While Asian states are experimenting with novel ways to harness informal channels for the horizontal coordination of their Arctic endeavours, Knecht concludes that epistemic-scientific knowledge and authority remain a domain that the eight Arctic states are careful to preserve, inevitably yielding a politics of exclusion.

Concurring with Knecht's observation that Asian observers are seeking out 'new' pathways to assert their influence in the Arctic Council, Mia Bennett turns her attention to the ways in which some Asian countries (Singapore and South Korea in particular) have sought to forge collaborative partnerships with the Council's Permanent Participants (PPs) who essentially comprise the Arctic Indigenous groups. According to Bennett, such engagements constitute the rise of multi-stakeholder diplomacy in the region where diplomatic manoeuvres do not remain the sole domain of the state. But as the chapter is quick to point out, these emerging forms of cooperation do not replace the primary mode of interactions in the Arctic Council, which, by and large, still occur within and between nation-states possessing Arctic territory. They do, however, demonstrate how the Arctic Council's organizational structure, in the course of keeping Observers on the 'side-lines', is inadvertently fostering alliances between stakeholders lacking territorial sovereignty in the region.

The final chapter in this section by Sanjay Chaturvedi looks at the Asian Observers beyond the remits of the Arctic Council to elucidate the complex

intertwining relationship they share with the region more broadly. To do so, Chaturvedi relies on an expanded conceptualization of connectivity, whereby the notion is stripped of its powerful material and physical infrastructural/logistical connotations to make space for considering its social, ecological and geopolitical aspects. Indeed, Chaturvedi contends that social, ecological and geopolitical connectivities have enabled Asian states to demonstrate their Arctic relevance whilst effecting a host of implications on the region. As a result, conflicting signals are often sent out with regard to the roles and responsibilities that these Asian actors play in the circumpolar North. A good case in point is China. As the purportedly 'rising' Asian state emphasizes its ecological and social affinities to the Arctic (i.e. sharing similar concerns with Arctic stakeholders on issues pertaining to climate change and multiculturalism) to justify its interest in the region, it is simultaneously eliciting heightened geopolitical fears and suspicions about its incessant Arctic ambitions. This leads Chaturvedi to exhort for a deeper understanding of the contradictory dynamics and relationships of connections and disconnections that are likely to characterize Arctic politics in the years to come.

Part II features chapters under the heading of 'Asia and the Arctic and Arctic States in Asia'. The aim of this section is to 'ground' Asia–Arctic relations in specific empirical contexts in order to illuminate the concrete policies, plans and practices that Asian and Arctic actors employ in order to strategize their Arctic positionings and identities. Inevitably, this brings to fore the artificiality and porosity of the Arctic/non-Arctic divide as these strategies are relationally produced in response to or in cooperation with peoples from both sides. The opening two chapters of the section are concerned with the perspectives of Arctic states, delving specifically into their geographical and geopolitical imaginations of Asian forays into the region. Nadezhda Filimonova focuses on Russian elites' (governmental officials and academics) interpretations of Sino-Russian cooperative ventures in the Arctic. Through analysing their writings and speeches, she systematically underscores that these Russian actors picture Beijing's Arctic involvement in relation to their country's own strategic interests in the region. Although historical links are an important foundation for Sino-Russian partnerships in the Arctic, Russian elites also allude to geopolitical reasons (e.g. the 'West's' economic sanctions on Moscow) for their country's turn to Chinese investments. In particular, China's immense interest in the Northern Sea Route (NSR) has attracted considerable Russian attention – concerns about the economic feasibility of the NSR aside, claims abound that a 'win-win' situation will come to define China and Russia's combined efforts in developing shipping routes and resource/energy projects along the NSR.

Alternatively, Ingrid Medby's chapter zooms in on the narratives advanced by government representatives of two small Nordic Arctic states (Iceland and



Norway) to shed light on how their 'Arctic identities' are being produced and shaped by the sheer presence of Asian Observers in the region. Interestingly, she detects discourses of 'Othering' being purposefully used by these officials to legitimize Norway and Iceland's rightful stake in the Arctic. For example, the Asian states' geographical locations in the 'South' have been cited as one of the reasons for placing them in a lower hierarchy of involvement in Arctic affairs, thereby giving their 'Northern' counterparts the 'moral' duty to lead and decide on the region's developmental trajectory.

The next four chapters in the section eschew over-privileging the 'voices' of Arctic states/actors to give prominence to the ways Asian Observers have characterized their Arctic objectives and agendas. Crucially, the contributors depart from the extant literatures that seem to focus overwhelmingly on analysing the Asian states' Arctic undertakings from the point when they obtained 'Observer' status. Instead, they are keen to trace the genealogy of Asian–Arctic interactions, to underline that Asia's Arctic commitments do not emerge out of 'nowhere' but are rooted in longer histories and geographies. Nong Hong reflects on the heightened scrutiny that has been cast on China's 2018 White Paper that details the country's Arctic policy directions. Hong argues that the release of the White Paper and China's admittance into the Arctic Council as Observer have become significant moments in time, allowing China to expand its (previous) bilateral diplomatic Arctic approach to experiment with other multilateral and multi-scalar avenues to get involved with Arctic matters. But as Hong rightfully cautions, given ongoing critical questionings on what China *really* wants in the Arctic, the sustainability and success of China's Arctic interventions will rest on whether Beijing can ultimately deliver on its promises set out in the White Paper about engaging the Arctic in a respectful and cooperative fashion.

Young Kil Park's chapter pays due attention to South Korea's early Arctic interests which he asserts are premised upon geopolitical and economic realities in the 1950s. In fleshing out Korea's recent aspiration to become a 'rising middle power', Park explicates that the country is leveraging its Arctic accomplishments to signal its global geopolitical presence and prestige. Indeed, he goes into a detailed assessment of the achievements attained by Korea's first Arctic Policy Plan before moving on to explore the challenges that lie ahead for the second iteration of the plan. In so doing, the chapter offers a critical evaluation of where Korea's future Arctic interests may reside and the ways they might serve to enhance Korea's standing and reputation in the Arctic region and beyond.

India has maintained a relatively low profile in the Arctic since gaining Observer status in 2013 and Uttam Kumar Sinha attributes this to the country's policy machinery's historical reticence in having explicitly stated policy positions. But rather than a lack of Arctic discourses and accounts within India,

Sinha argues that ancient Indian texts are instructive in teasing out the fact that India's relationship to the Arctic has racial, philosophical, anthropological and linguistic dimensions. However, despite these rich narratives, India's policy choices in the Arctic, although evolving, fluid and dynamic, still have a distinct scientific emphasis to them (as a result of the country's longstanding involvement in the Antarctic). This leads Sinha to conclude that India's Arctic approach should not be polarized between the idealism of the scientific and the realism of economic and strategic issues. According to Sinha, this is particularly important given the increasing acknowledgement that Arctic challenges need to be tackled through a holistic framework where the complex relationship between humans and the ecosystem is taken into account.

The penultimate chapter by Woon and Dodds shows how debates on small state diplomacy within the Singaporean society have guided the pragmatic and flexible diplomatic dealings that Singapore has tried to initiate in the Arctic. Describing such diplomatic strategies as 'jacking up' and 'stretching out', Woon and Dodds stress their importance in helping the Singaporean government to ultimately achieve two desired outcomes in the Arctic. First, they help to 'play up' Singapore's contributions and relevance to Arctic affairs such that the country will not be bypassed in important deliberations that are of tremendous concern to its ecological and economic well-being. Second, they simultaneously downplay Singapore's Arctic ambitions in order to allay possible fears and suspicions of Singapore's forays into the region and create more benign geographical imaginations of Singapore's role and positioning within the Arctic Council.

The book ends with an 'Afterword' by an Asian-Arctic specialist, Nengye Liu, who shares brief reflections on the volume's key themes and speculates on the future of Asian-Arctic relations. There is plenty of further research to be undertaken. Asian communities, states and other constituencies such as migrants, scientists and tourists will further enrich and complicate the observational relationship with the Arctic. Our decision to omit a conventional 'Conclusion' chapter is deliberate, as it serves as a crucial reminder that the editors and contributors are unlikely to have the last word on the topic of Asia and the Arctic. Indeed, as state-change continues apace in the Arctic, the 'who', 'what' and 'how' of 'observing' and 'being observed' will morph and take on new meanings, as will the complex intersections of terms and discourses such as 'Global Arctic' and 'Rising Asia'/'Asian Century'. What is clear is that the distinction between Arctic and non-Arctic is going to become ever more complicated and this will change the meaning and scope of the Arctic and what it means to be an Arctic state, people, ecology and culture.

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