

China's Arctic Interests

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During the last decade, there has been much speculation about whether the rise of China will represent a threat or opportunity for the international system. More recently, the debate has sped up with China's growing interest in the Arctic region. To date, China has not unveiled an Arctic strategy, but consistent with its rising global status, it is likely to take a more active role in Arctic affairs. As China's Arctic activities cannot be separated from its other national interests, this article examines them in the context of the party-state's overall foreign policy objectives. It begins with a review of China's rise to global power status and its perceived implications for international society, particularly for international Arctic politics. Following that, it explores China's foreign policy objectives and looks at how China's Arctic activities seek to promote these goals. The article concludes that China's main Arctic interests include climate change, economic development, and scientific research. In addition, as China wishes to be seen as a "responsible major power", it seeks to reassert its position in Arctic international politics without challenging the sovereign rights of the Arctic littoral states.

Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the world has witnessed two significant changes in international affairs. Firstly, the geopolitical position of the Arctic has changed from highly militarized confrontation towards international cooperation, both military and civilian (Heininen, 2010). Particularly, due to globalization and climate change, the Arctic has begun to emerge onto the international stage (Heininen and Southcott, 2010). Secondly, China's international status has risen dramatically, both in economic and political terms. During the last decade, there have been numerous speculations about whether the rise of China will represent a threat or opportunity for the world. More recently, debate has increased with China's growing interest in the Arctic region (see for example, Lasserre, 2010; Rainwater, 2013; and Wright, 2011). In the future, it is believed that the Arctic will provide business opportunities in energy, mining, fishing, and tourism sectors, and Arctic shipping routes may offer more logistically efficient shipping routes compared to traditional passages, such as the Suez Canal or Panama Canal. Not surprisingly, China has also become more and more interested in Arctic affairs. To date, China has not unveiled an Arctic strategy, but has actively increased its cooperation with Arctic states. In May 2013, China received observer status within the Arctic Council. In addition, Chinese companies have started to take part in many business projects within Arctic states, which has raised concerns around

the world.¹ Concerning international climate politics, the fate of the Arctic is deeply interconnected with China's climate change policies; while the Arctic is the fastest warming region on the earth (ACIA, 2004), China is the biggest greenhouse gas emitter in the world (PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency, 2007).

This article examines China's Arctic activities in the context of the party-state's overall foreign policy objectives. It begins with a review of China's rise to global power status, and its perceived implications for international society, particularly regarding international Arctic politics. It will also explore China's foreign policy objectives and examine how China's Arctic activities seek to promote these goals.

Rise of China and the Arctic

Since 1978, China has gone through a series of economic and political reforms, enabling rapid economic growth and significantly increasing its international status. Today, China cannot be ignored in political, economic, socio-cultural or strategic assessments. Its increasing wealth generates expectations of greater international respect, and China no longer accepts being left in the periphery, although it still struggles for "great-power recognition" (Deng, 2008: 2). However, due to vague definitions of great powerhood, there is no consensus whether or not China has achieved a great power status. China meets most of the material criteria to be seen as a great power – it is geographically very big, strategically located, ranks as the world's second largest economy and has a large military with nuclear weapons. It is also predicted to become the world's largest economy in 20 years, and is the most populous country in the world. Nevertheless, it does not undisputedly enjoy the status of being a great power.

China's rise has heated theoretical and political debates about its implications for the global economy and world politics. Many studies on international relations (IR) focus on the international balance of power and security dilemma that China's rise causes. Realists debate whether a rising China is a "status quo power" or an "imperialist power" (Morgenthau, 1993). Moderate approaches recognise an increasing "China factor" or "China effect" (Hutton, 2005) in world affairs, whereas some others predict the next century will be the "Chinese Century" and China will "rule the world" (Jasques, 2009). Many China observers have speculated whether or not a rising China will cooperate with international society according to Western-origin international norms and institutions created by the US after World War II. The most pessimistic commentators warn about the "China threat"², or even about the "coming China wars" (Navarro, 2007). China's increasing interests in the Arctic have also been greeted with scepticism. For example, a Chinese businessman's plan to buy a large area of land in Iceland was met with a dubious response by the European public in 2011. In the end, Iceland rejected the bid (Jackson and Hook, 2011). Furthermore, Martin Breum, an expert on Greenland's extractive industries, says: "Potential Chinese control of the rare earth elements in Greenland is scary to a lot of governments in the Western world" as cited in Acher and Fraende, (2012). In January of 2012, the Japanese newspaper *Sankei Shimbun* claimed that China is "casting menacing eyes on" the Arctic (as cited in *China Daily*, 2012 February 1). Many studies have suggested that the Chinese government does not want to be perceived as a threat but wishes to be seen as a "responsible stakeholder" instead.³ As to China's Arctic activities, various Chinese officials and scholars have assured the world that China's Arctic activities "have nothing to do with resource plundering and strategic control" but are for the "purposes of regular environmental investigation and investment" (*People's Daily*, 2012). "It is a normal action for China to broaden the investment in and trade with Europe", says Ruan Zongze, a researcher at the China Institute of International Studies. "It is virtually a paranoia to connect China's regular

commercial activities in northern Europe with strategic control of the Arctic region” (*People’s Daily*, 2012).

China and Arctic Governance

Generally, we can define the “Arctic” as the region above the Arctic Circle at 66° 32" N. Thus, the Arctic includes the North Pole, the Arctic Ocean and parts of the Arctic states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States). No country owns the North Pole or the ice-covered Arctic Ocean surrounding it,⁴ but five littoral Arctic states (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States) have exclusive economic zones (EEZs) extending 200 nautical miles out from their coasts. To some extent, the Arctic states and China pursue different themes in their Arctic discourses: in contrast to Arctic states’ focus on national sovereignty over their Arctic territories, China emphasizes that the Arctic is one of the global commons. For example, Hu Zhengyue, China’s Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs, gave a speech on the Chinese government’s perspective at an Arctic forum in Norway’s Svalbard Archipelago in 2009. Hu described the Arctic as a global heritage of humankind (as cited in Wright, 2011: 28):

The Arctic occupies a unique position for all of us as humankind who live on the blue planet. The changing natural environment in the Arctic is enormously influential toward the existence and environment of all humankind. The Arctic is a sensitive region in global climate change. The entire planet in turn reacts to natural changes in the Arctic, especially the climate of the northern hemisphere.

Although Hu did not question the Arctic states’ sovereignty rights, his statement is generally considered contradictory to China’s overall foreign policy principles⁵. For example, Jakobson (2010: 13) notes:

China’s insistence that respect for state sovereignty be a guiding principle of international relations makes it difficult for China to question the Arctic states’ sovereignty rights. There is some irony in the statements by Chinese officials calling on the Arctic states to consider the interests of mankind so that all states can share the Arctic. These statements appear to be contrary to China’s long-standing principles of respect for sovereignty and the internal affairs of other states.

However, it should be noted that China has never disputed the Arctic states’ sovereign rights over their EEZs, but emphasizes the global dimensions of the Arctic region outside of the EEZs. Although Chinese Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo’s statement in 2010 has been considered alarming by the West, this has been mainly due to an incorrect translation in some Western media.⁶ According to China News Service (2010, March 5), Yin declared that “According to the UN law of the Sea, the North Pole and areas surrounding it do not belong to any country but are common wealth of the whole human population” (author’s translation).⁷ More recently, Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei has said that “Arctic-related issues are not only regional matters, but also cross-regional matters involving climate change and navigation” (as cited in *Xinhua*, 2013, January 22).

The Arctic Council was established in 1996 to promote cooperation and to coordinate interaction amongst the eight Arctic states and Arctic indigenous communities on sustainable development and environment protection. Since 2007, China has been an ad hoc observer at Arctic Council meetings. At the Nuuk Ministerial meeting in 2011, the “criteria for admitting observers and role for their participation in the Arctic Council” was published. According to the criteria, new observers have to

“recognize Arctic States' sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the Arctic”, for instance (Arctic Council, 2011). Officially, the Chinese government did not comment on the criteria but various Chinese scholars criticised it (Jakobson & Peng, 2012: 14). For instance, Guo Peiqing (2011, author's translation), professor of the Law and Politics School, Ocean University of China, argued: “Arctic states announce to the world: The Arctic is “Arctic-states” Arctic. They oppose the idea that the Arctic is a common property of the whole humankind and desire to advance their own interests and to impair the participation of non-Arctic states through Monroe Doctrine.” In May of 2013, China gained an observer status in the Arctic Council. Observer status does not allow China to participate in decision-making, but it guarantees access to all Arctic Council meetings and activities. From the Chinese government perspective, the new status means that “China supports the [Arctic] Council's principles and purposes, recognizes Arctic countries' sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the Arctic region as well as their leading role in the Council and respects the values, interests, culture and tradition of the indigenous people and other people living in the Arctic region” (Hong, 2013).

It seems that a majority of Chinese scholars agree that China should seek the “right to speak up” (话语权) in Arctic affairs (Wright, 2011: 7). Like many other specialists from non-Arctic states, several Chinese Arctic scholars have criticised the Arctic Council's position as the sole decision-maker for the region (Jakobson & Peng, 2012: 13-14). For example, Cheng Baozhi (2011), a scholar from Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, writes, “It is unimaginable that non-Arctic states will remain users of Arctic shipping routes and consumers of Arctic energy without playing a role in the decision-making process, and an end to the Arctic states' monopoly of Arctic affairs is now imperative”. Other Chinese scholars have also noted that if the Arctic Council had not accepted new permanent observers, it would have weakened its legitimacy and questioned its position as the primary institution to negotiate Arctic affairs (Jakobson & Peng, 2012: 14). This was understood by Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs Espen Barth Eide who explained why Norway was in favour of China's permanent observer status: “We want people to join our club. That means they will not start another club” (as cited in Brugård, 2013).

China's Interests in the Arctic

For many years, the top priority for the Chinese government has been political, social, and economic stability at home, and peace in the Asian region. All are important to the continuation of China's economic development, and to the legitimacy of the Communist Party of China (CPC). Generally, many Western observers have argued that China's foreign policy has become more assertive since 2008 (see for example, Swaine, 2010; Swaine, 2011; Pei, 2010).⁸ China's contemporary, over-all, core interest doctrine started to evolve under the leadership of President Hu Jintao. In the first round of the China-U.S. Strategic and Economic Dialogue in July 2009, Chinese State Councillor Dai Bingguo (2009) called on the United States to respect China's core interests, which include safeguarding China's basic systems and national security, maintaining sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as ensuring sustained economic and social development.

China's fifth generation of leadership came into power in November 2012, and party secretary general Xi Jinping was nominated as China's new president in March 2013. Shortly after his nomination, Xi introduced his new catch phrase, “China dream” (中国梦), which is already considered the major slogan of his leadership era, albeit its meaning is still being worked out amongst media, scholars, and internet users. In contrast to the “American dream”, which focuses on individual success, the China dream

seems to focus on national glory. According to Xi, “Realizing the great renewal of the Chinese nation is the greatest dream for the Chinese nation in modern history” (as cited in *Xinhua*, 2012, November 29). It is still too early to assess whether the new slogan means that the new leadership will adopt more nationalistic policy approaches. President Hu Jintao’s report to the 18th CPC National Congress gives the best hint of Chinese foreign policy under the Xi Jinping era. As Miller (2012: 2) describes, the work report “is a synthetic document that reflects the consensus of the broader party leadership” and “sets forth general guidelines for the party’s priorities, emphases, and tasks for the coming five-year period until the next congress”. As an incoming general secretary, Xi Jinping oversaw the formulation process of the report (*Xinhua*, 2012, November 20). Hu (2012) did not mention the Arctic, but, in contrast to earlier reports, took a more assertive approach to foreign affairs. First, he declared that “[W]e are firm in our resolve to uphold China’s sovereignty, security and development interests and will never yield to any outside pressure”. Second, he promised to protect “China’s interests and the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese nationals and legal persons overseas”.

Climate Change

There is strong scientific evidence that climate change is occurring due to human influences, mainly the increasing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (IPCC, 2007). In the Arctic, climate change occurs faster and more severely than around most other parts of the Earth (ACIA, 2004). As the Arctic plays a key role in many global natural processes, Arctic climate change will have tremendous impacts globally, including on China. The Chinese government recognises that China is “one of the countries most vulnerable to the adverse impact of climate change” (The National Development and Reform Commission, 2012: 2). Due to climate-related extreme weather and natural disasters, 430 million people were affected and economic losses of 309.6 billion yuan were caused in 2011 alone (*Ibid.*). Climate change also poses a serious risk to food security in China. Because of impacts on sea levels and agriculture, for example, “China is greatly influenced by climate and environmental changes in the North Pole” (*China Daily*, 2012, February 1). Therefore, the Chinese are eager to learn more about linkages between Arctic climate change, China’s agriculture, and extreme weather and floods in China. In addition, the issue of climate change is also considered uncontroversial enough to build up partnership with the Arctic states. In contrast to sensitive issues such as sovereignty and resource exploitation, a number of Chinese scholars have recommended that China focus on climate change in its Arctic policies (Jakobson & Peng, 2012: 16).

In addition to polar regions, other cryospheres, regions which are covered in ice and snow, are affected by climate change faster and more dramatically than in other regions on Earth. The future of the Himalayan cryosphere, also known as the “third pole”, is a key concern in the greater Himalayan region, which includes India, China, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, and neighbouring countries. The melting of Himalayan glaciers poses a dramatic human security threat in the region as millions of people are dependent on the Himalayan water sources. Like ice melting in the Arctic, glacier melting in the Himalayas will also raise sea levels significantly. As Iceland President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson pointed out in April of 2013, “the Arctic, the Himalayas and Antarctica (AHA) are not isolated and separate parts of the globe...” and that, on the contrary, “...their fate and fate of the people and future are closely connected” (Grímsson, 2013).⁹

In international climate politics, China plays an important, though contradictory, role. On the one hand, it is a developing country in which millions of people still live in poverty; on the other hand, due to poor energy efficiency and the intensive use of coal, it has become the world’s biggest emitter of

carbon dioxide. In addition, as a leader of the developing world, China also has an important role in setting the tone for other emerging powers, namely the BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) countries, and more broadly, for all developing countries' arguments in international negotiations on climate change. China's serious commitment in global efforts to tackle climate change has also become an important precondition for the United States' entry to UN climate negotiations. Looking forward, China's role in international climate politics will be crucial in the future. The continuation of "business as usual" in China would result in a 2.7° C rise in global temperatures by 2050 – even if all the other countries in the world achieved an 80% reduction in their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (Watts, 2009). However, it should be noted that GHG emissions per citizen are significantly lower in China than in developed countries, and a significant proportion of China's emissions are actually "offshore emissions" caused by manufacturing goods exported to Western consumers (Wang and Watson, 2007).

Although international climate agreements do not obligate China to cut its emissions, the Chinese government has implemented important policies towards moderating the future growth of the country's greenhouse gas emissions and to promote sustainable development. For example, China's latest Five-Year Plan (2011-2015) pledges to cut energy consumption per unit of GDP by 16% by 2015, and CO₂ emissions by 17%, respectively. The government has also started to restructure China's economy in order to balance economic growth with environmental protection (Wu 2013, May 25). In 2012, a draft for Climate Change Law in China was published, and a nationwide carbon emission trading system is planned to be established in the next Five-Year Plan (2016-2020) (Xinhua 2012, December 6). Obviously, there are still many problems, notably China's poor energy efficiency and heavy reliance on coal, and there are no expectations China's overall emissions will reduce in the near future. Various Chinese scholars, think tanks, and research groups predict China's emissions will peak between 2020 and 2050.

Science

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the USA, New Zealand, Japan and Australia "gave crucial support" to enable China to establish its own Antarctic research programme (Brady, 2012: 104). In 1980, two Chinese scientists took part in Antarctic research activities organised by Australia, and in 1981, the Office of the National Antarctic Expedition Committee (later the Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration) was established (the Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration, 1999). In 1983, China joined the Antarctic Treaty, and in 1984, China organised its first scientific expedition to the Antarctic. In 1985, China's first Antarctic station was established, followed by a second station in 1989, and a third in 2009.¹⁰ However, China's overall investments in Antarctic research stayed relatively modest until 2005, when the government doubled the Antarctic affairs budget (Brady, 2012: 104). Since 1988, academic works on "Arctic glaciology, climatology, oceanographic science, upper atmospheric physics, as well as on the Arctic biological and environmental studies" started to appear in China (Alexeeva & Lasserre, 2012: 81). Since the early 1990s, China has sent scientists to the Arctic to "collect data and samples, join in multinational projects, and gain experiences" (the Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration, 1999). Since 1994, the Chinese have conducted expeditions both in the Arctic and Antarctic regions on-board the research ice-breaker *Xuelong* (Snow Dragon), which was built in Ukraine in 1993. The first, and only, Chinese Arctic scientific research station was founded in 2004 in Ny-Ålesund, Spitsbergen Archipelago of Norway. And from March 2007 to March 2009, a group of Chinese scientists participated in the International Polar Year programme (Feng, 2007).

The primary interest of Chinese polar research is to gain better understanding of climatic changes in the Arctic and their impacts on China. Therefore, China's research "not only concerns China's economic and social development, but also helps deepen humanity's knowledge of climate change" (*China Daily*, 2012, February 1). In 2007, Guo Peiqing, professor of the Law and Politics School, Ocean University of China, suggested that China should not limit its Arctic research only to natural sciences but broaden its research and strategic agenda. "Polar issues are not only a question of natural sciences though it is more like an issue of human society, including dimensions of politics, law, and diplomacy et cetera", he explained (as cited in *Cankao Xiaoxi*, 2008, author's translation). Recently, the government has started to fund research in Arctic-related social sciences, such as international law and geopolitics on the Arctic, and many efforts have been made to increase international cooperation on Arctic-related issues (Jakobson & Peng, 2012). In 2014, a China-Nordic Arctic Research Center will be established in Shanghai to "increase awareness and knowledge of the area and promote cooperation for its sustainable development" (Wang, 2013, June 6).

In the opening address of the Third World Academy of Sciences 9th General Conference held in 2003, President Hu Jintao declared that "over time, each great civilization has greatly influenced and contributed to the global advancement of science and technology" (as cited in TWAS, 2003). Today, as Chinese leaders recognise that higher education and scientific research are essential to China's economic development and emerging global status, China is investing heavily on science and technology. According to Hu Jintao, China's scientific programmes pursue to serve "our people and the global community by putting science and technology to work for the benefit of all humankind" (as cited in TWAS, 2003). Currently, China is in a process of increasing its capabilities in polar research as well. In 2009, Deputy Secretary of State, Oceanic Administration announced that in line with the promotion of the state's comprehensive national power, *Xuelong* will have "brothers and sisters" (*Xinhua*, 2009). A new vessel is planned to go into operation in 2014, and will be the first domestically built icebreaker in China (*China Daily*, 2012 October 23). Furthermore, China is planning to build two new Antarctic research stations (*Xinhua*, 2013, March 29). As the Antarctic Treaty allows China to establish research stations and do research without any other state's permission, China's polar research continues to focus on the South Pole. To some extent, Antarctic research is a kind of test-platform for China's Arctic activities due to similar environmental conditions (Alexeeva & Lasserre, 2012: 82).

Although the Himalayan mountain glaciers are evidently melting at an accelerated rate, scientific knowledge on climate change impact in the Himalayas and Tibetan plateau is comparatively smaller than in the Polar regions. At first glance, the "two regions are vastly different — one an ocean surrounded by land, the other entirely landlocked; one created by its high latitude, the other by its high altitude; one sparsely populated, with less than four million inhabitants; while 750 million are estimated to live in the Himalayan watershed region (and 2.5 billion rely on water arising in the region as a whole)" (International Cryosphere Climate Initiative, 2013). However, the regions have a lot in common: They both are increasingly affected by climate change, and trans-boundary pollution such as black carbon. Therefore, research in the "third pole" could benefit from scientific findings of polar research, and vice versa.

Economic Interests

As the Chinese government considers economic development the main priority in all policies, China's activities in the Arctic are undoubtedly motivated by economic drivers. Firstly, rapid economic growth causes huge energy demand in China and China is looking for new opportunities for oil imports.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey (2008), the “extensive Arctic continental shelves may constitute the geographically largest unexplored prospective area for petroleum remaining on Earth”. As marine geoscientist Professor Li Sanzhong of the Oceanic University of China in Qingdao (as cited in Chen, 2013) points out, “A substantial area of the Arctic region had not been legally claimed by any country”. According to him, “China has the need and technological ability to explore and mine these resources. It is definitely worth a try.” As China does not have the necessary technology needed to extract oil or gas from the Arctic continental shelf, it is likely they will increase energy cooperation with multinational oil enterprises and the Arctic states. China already has extensive energy ties with Russia and the two countries have pledged to boost their energy cooperation in the future (*Xinhua*, 2013, February 19). China has also invested heavily in Canada’s tar sands (Levitt, 2013). In addition, Norway could provide China with important energy know-how, but diplomatic relations between China and Norway have been frosty after the Oslo-based Nobel Committee awarded Chinese dissident Liu Xiabo the Nobel Peace Prize in 2010.

Secondly, China has an enormous appetite for other natural resources as well, and there are plenty of important, untapped, minerals such as gold, copper, iron, lead, platinum, nickel, zinc, and diamond in the Arctic (Lindholt, 2006). Presently, China is the biggest supplier of rare-earths in the world. Since 2011, it has set quotas to rare-earth exports to reduce environmental degradation and to preserve resources for domestic consumption, and global prices of rare-earths have climbed sharply (Perkowski, 2012). To consolidate China’s monopoly position, Chinese companies have become interested in Greenland’s rare-earth deposits (Jun, 2011). For example, a Chinese company has recently sought permission to establish an iron ore mine in Greenland. If sanctioned, the project would be the biggest industrial project in Greenland (Acher & Fraende, 2012). China’s huge industrial investments would increase Greenland’s economic independence, which “is the path to complete independence from Denmark” (Briscoe, 2013). For China, Greenland’s increasing economic dependency on China would provide a “proxy voice” in Arctic affairs (Ibid.).

Thirdly, international shipping plays a very important role in China’s economic development. The melting Arctic will offer three main shipping routes which all are of interest to China. For example, the use of the Northern Passage, which is most likely to be open for commercial maritime transportation during summertime, would offer a 6 400 km shorter route to Europe and alleviate China’s “Malacca dilemma”.¹¹ *Xuelong* was the first Chinese icebreaker to cross the Arctic Ocean in 2012. According to a statement of the Polar Research Institute of China (as cited in *The Huffington Post*, 2012), the trip gained “first-hand information about navigation in Arctic sea lanes as well as the oceanic environment, and carried out useful exploration and practice for our nation's ships that use Arctic passages in the future.” Recently, Huigen Yang, Director General of the Polar Research Institute of China, has optimistically estimated that 5 - 15% of China’s international trade would use an Arctic shipping route by 2020 (as cited in Doyle, 2013).

Pursuit of International Status

China is attempting to become a more influential player in international politics, yet its increasing international status is often referred to as a negative phenomenon – the “China threat”. For this reason, the Chinese government has given a lot of attention to this perception in attempts to lessen global fear and improve the state’s international image. For instance, Deng (2008: 8) argues that since the mid-1990s, the Chinese government has actively projected the state’s international status “as if it were the most desirable value, the one that leads to power, security, and respect”. In addition, Gries (2005: 103 -

105) states that nationalism, which he defines as “any behaviour designed to restore, maintain, or advance public images of the nation”, is “a key – if not *the* key – motivator of Chinese foreign policy”.

In his report to the 18th national congress of the CPC in November 2012, then Chinese President Hu Jintao (2012) called for China to “resolutely safeguard China's maritime rights and interests, and build China into a maritime power”. As Hu’s announcement raised significantly the profile of maritime issues on China’s political agenda, it was greeted with alarm amongst its neighbours and the US.¹² Certainly, China’s pursuit of maritime power is mostly a regional issue,¹³ but we can also draw a conclusion that China seeks to safeguard its maritime rights and interests in the Arctic Ocean in a more determinate manner. According to Hu (2012), China “should enhance our capacity for exploiting marine resources, develop the marine economy, [and] protect the marine ecological environment”, which can also be seen as instructions for China’s Arctic activities. In early 2013, China’s newly elected President Xi Jinping announced that “We will stick to the road of peaceful development, but will never give up our legitimate rights and will never sacrifice our national core interests” (as cited in *Xinhua*, 2013, January 29). Hence, Xi continues to follow the mantra of peaceful development, which has been a central guideline for the party-state since 2004, but he seems to take a more hard-line posture than his predecessors by adding “legitimate rights” and “core interests”. He makes assurances that China will not harm the interests of other countries but will “maintain the multilateral trade system and participate in global economic governance”. However, he also warned that “[n]o country should presume that we will engage in trade involving our core interests or that we will swallow the 'bitter fruit' of harming our sovereignty, security or development interests” (Ibid.). Naturally, the Arctic is not included amongst China’s core interests, yet it is possible that in the future it will play a more important role in the global economy, and thus, influence China’s core interests, particularly that of economic development.

In line with China’s other efforts to have its voice better heard in global affairs, many Chinese scholars have encouraged China to take a more active role in Arctic affairs. In 2008, Guo Peiqing, professor of the Law and Politics School, Ocean University of China, suggested that China should abandon its policy of neutralism because “being distant from the polar region is not a reason for us to be indifferent” (as cited in *Cankao Xiaoxi*, 2008, author’s translation). According to Guo, as “China is now moving on from a regional major power to a global major power, happenings in the polar regions are of interest to China” (Ibid.). In addition, Chinese Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo argues that “China must play an indispensable role in Arctic exploration as we have one-fifth of the world’s population” (as cited in Jakobson & Peng, 2012: 15).

Conclusions

From the Chinese perspective, China should have a legitimate right to participate in Arctic governance as the melting Arctic has global security impacts and offers opportunities for non-Arctic states as well. However, the Arctic does not represent a top priority for the Chinese government. Presently, the government emphasizes that Chinese Arctic interests are scientific in nature. No doubt, unexploited oil, gas, and mining reservoirs under the Arctic ice shelves and the forthcoming Arctic shipping routes are also of interest to China as they would be important to the continuation of China’s economic growth. For the time being, the Chinese government pursues cautious Arctic policies in order to lessen the international fear of China’s rising status. But as Wright warns, “this reticence and restraint on China’s part will not likely last indefinitely” (2011: 38). He argues that “China is very heavily dependent on international shipping (energy imports and finished goods exports) for its economic, social, and political stability; if and when the Arctic proves to be truly valuable for its natural resources and sea

routes, Beijing will likely become much more assertive” (Ibid.). Furthermore, Jakobson (2013: 15) points out that Xi Jinping has to take the “strong nationalist sentiments amongst Chinese elites” into consideration and he cannot take the risk of “being perceived as a leader who allows China to be humiliated by foreigners”. Therefore, we can expect that the new generation of Chinese leadership will assert its rights and interests globally, including China’s “right to speak up” in Arctic affairs.

China’s observer status in the Arctic Council not only brings privileges but also responsibilities. Hopefully it will encourage China to contribute more on polar research, pay more attention to the protection of the fragile Arctic nature, better respect indigenous people’s rights, and shoulder more global responsibility. Besides, as Heininen (2011) puts it, “together with the rapid, and partly man-made, climate change, ice as a natural phenomenon is becoming a concept of global politics”. We may even understand ice as a common heritage of humankind, and “a ‘World Without Ice’ would not only look different, but would bring environmental, economic, cultural and political consequences which have more problems and challenges than possibilities” (Ibid.). It is important to not deny China a seat at the table when discussing any global problems. To use Nye’s (2013) piece of advice, the world should “work with China”, not just “contain it”. Thus, China’s voice should be given more attention in global and regional forums, including Arctic affairs, in order to fully engage them with international society.

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Notes

1. See, for example, *The Economist*. (2012, September 1). Snow Dragons.
2. For a comprehensive review of the evolution of the “China threat theory”, the Chinese interpretations of it and China’s political and rhetorical responses to it, see Deng, Y. (2006: 186-214). Reputation and the Security Dilemma: China Reacts to the China Threat Theory. In: Johnston, A. I. & R. S. Ross (Eds.). (2006). *New Directions in the Study of China’s Foreign Policy*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
3. The concept of responsible stakeholder was introduced to international politics by Robert B. Zoellick, US Deputy Secretary of State during the George W. Bush administration, in 2005. He defined a responsible stakeholder as the following: “All nations conduct diplomacy to promote their national interests. Responsible stakeholders go further: They recognize that the international system sustains their peaceful prosperity, so they work to sustain that system.” See Zoellick, R. B. (2005). *Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility? Remarks to National Committee on U.S.-China Relations*.

Retrieved (4.23.13) from

http://www.ncusr.org/files/2005Gala_RobertZoellick_Whither_China1.pdf.

For more information on China's pursuit to cultivate an international image of responsible stakeholder in different policy areas, see, for example, Brady, A-M. (2012). The Beijing Olympics as a campaign of mass distraction. In Brady, A-M. (Ed.). *China's Thought Management*. (pp. 11-35). New York, NY: Routledge; Deng, Y. (2008). *China's Struggle for Status. The Realignment of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Kopra, S. (2012). Is China a Responsible Developing Country? Climate Change Diplomacy and National Image Building. *Social and Cultural Research Occasional Paper*, no. 13 (pp.1-28); and Wang, H. (2005). National Image Building and Chinese Foreign Policy. In Deng, Y. and F-L. Wang (Eds.). *China Rising. Power and Motivation in Chinese Foreign Policy* (pp. 73-102). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

4. According to the article 136 of UNCLOS, the area and its resources beyond Arctic states' economic zones are the common heritage of mankind.
5. Since 1954, China has followed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as the most important guidelines for its international cooperation. The Five Principles include: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence.
6. The author is grateful to an anonymous reviewer for bringing up this point and for providing the original Chinese source.
7. For comparison, see Chang, G. G (2010, March 9). China's Arctic Play. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2010/03/09/china%E2%80%99s-arctic-play/>. Chang translated Yin Zhuo's statement as following: "The Arctic belongs to all the people around the world as no nation has sovereignty over it".
8. For an interesting debate over China's assertiveness, see also Johnston, A.I. (Spring, 2013). How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness? *International Security*. 37(4), (pp. 7-48).
9. See also the Proceedings from the 6th NRF Open Assembly in Hveragerði, Iceland. (2011). http://www.nrf.is/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=206&Itemid=118
10. Great Wall Station, located at King George Island, West Antarctica, was established in 1985; Zhongshan Station, located in Larsemann Hills, East Antarctica, was established in 1989; and Kunlun, located at Dome A (the summit of the East Antarctic Ice Sheet), was established in 2009.
11. "Malacca dilemma" refers to China's dependency upon the Malacca Strait for seaborne energy imports. As a solution, it is suggested that China should decrease its dependency upon energy imports by investing in alternative energy sources and energy efficiency, find alternative routes to import energy, and build credible naval forces to protect its sea lines. For more information, see, for example, Storey, I. (2006). China's "Malacca Dilemma". *China Brief*. 6 (8). [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=31575&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=196&no_cache=1#.UimbrPXYCnI](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=31575&tx_ttnews[backPid]=196&no_cache=1#.UimbrPXYCnI)
12. See, for example, Hille, K. (2012, November 8). Hu calls for China to be "maritime power". *The Financial Times*, & *The Telegraph*. (2012, November 8). China congress: Hu's plan to transform China into a maritime power.
13. Currently, China has disputes with Japan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, and Taiwan over maritime territory in the South China Sea. In November 2012, a Southeast Asia's top diplomat warned that the South China Sea "could evolve into another Palestine". See Bland, B. (2012, November 28). Asean chief warns on South China Sea spats. *The Financial Times*.

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