Responsible International Citizenship and China's Participation in Arctic Regionalization

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This paper analyses the normative underpinnings of China's participation in processes of Arctic regionalization. Building on Gareth Evans' concept of responsible international citizenship, it argues that China's Arctic engagement is chiefly motivated by the government's efforts to promote the wellbeing of Chinese citizens – a state of affairs that the current regime equals with the ideal of social stability. As a responsible international citizen, China should, however, advance this "enlightened self-interest" vis-á-vis other members of the Arctic international society, that is, either internalize the established practices that organize the Arctic region or mold them in peaceful ways. In the empirical parts of the paper, we first identify three concrete aims that drive forward China's participation in Arctic regionalization – creating wealth through more "green" growth, mitigating the effects of climate change on China, and promoting a unifying ideology. We then suggest that China has not directly violated any of the key organizing principles of the Arctic international society, but it has found distinct ways to act out these concrete goals and advance the wellbeing of its citizens. Such means include somewhat challenging the dominant interpretation of these norms and refraining from advocating stricter environmental standards.

Introduction

In line with its rising global power, China has become increasingly interested in partaking in economic, social, and political processes that constitute the Arctic region within and outside the Arctic Council (AC), the principal regional intergovernmental forum. Unsurprisingly, an extensive literature examining China's Arctic interests has emerged (e.g. Kobzeva, 2019; Koivurova & Kopra, 2020; Su & Huntington, 2021). Yet, an ideational basis for China's Arctic activities has not been elaborated. In this paper, we seek to fulfill this gap by analyzing the normative underpinnings of China's participation in processes of regionalization. Since the existing literature indicates that China's rise will alter the future of regions globally (Kavalski, 2009; cf. Dent, 2016; Zhang, 2005), this knowledge is also relevant to broader audiences.

Theoretically, we contribute to constructivist work on regionalism by studying the roles of interests, values and other ideational aspects of social life in processes of regionalization; this is an approach that has gained a prominent place in theories of regionalism in recent years (Söderbaum, 2016: 45–

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48). We define the Arctic as a socially constructed region that is being made and unmade by various "regionalizing actors" (Söderbaum, 2016) within and outside the traditional geopolitical boundaries of the region. We view these processes as working through historically contingent intersubjective meanings, norms and practices; hence they are inherently normative and shaped by states' ideas and values, including notions of responsibility.

Based on the assumption that all states seek to define international rights and responsibilities in a way that supports the realization of their national needs and greeds, we utilize the concept of responsible international citizenship as a lens to study China's involvement in Arctic regionalization. Needless to say, this does not mean that we somehow seek to advocate China's notions of responsibility in the Arctic or elsewhere. Instead, we presume that states' key responsibility is to enable and maintain the wellbeing of their citizens, and their participation in processes of regionalization is also therefore guided by this duty. As there is no universal understanding of what "wellbeing" means in practice, the ways in which states seek – or can – advance their citizens' wellbeing depends on the context. In this article, we ask: what are the ways in which China's participation in Arctic regionalization seeks to advance the wellbeing of Chinese citizens? Obviously, the concept of responsible international citizen does not suggest that states can do whatever they want to advance the needs of their citizens but they must reconcile their policies with those of others. As responsible international citizenship "involves constructive and balanced endeavours" in a regional context (Evans, 1990), we also ask: Does China balance its Arctic policies with the existing norms of Arctic regionalization, or does it seek to somewhat challenge them? If so, does it do it in a peaceful manner?

In the following section, we explain our constructivist approach and argue that states' responsibility to facilitate the wellbeing of their citizens is a principal driver of their participation in global processes of regionalization. In the empirical sections, we demonstrate that three particular notions of wellbeing explain China's willingness to participate in Arctic regionalization: "green" growth, mitigation of climate change related risks in China, and bringing the people together through a unifying ideology. Our data include China's official documents, speeches, state media and journal articles written by Chinese scholars. Finally, we conclude that China has not directly violated any of the key organizing principles of the Arctic region, but it has found distinct ways to interpret them in its urge to advance the wellbeing of its citizens.

Regionalization and notions of responsibility

No region exists in a vacuum, and regionalization – processes of social, political and economic cooperation, integration and cohesion "by which regions are made and unmade in various fields of activity and at various levels" (Söderbaum, 2016: 54) – is never untouched by "outside" transformation. Acknowledging this, scholars of New Regionalism have studied the relationship between globalization and regionalization, and emphasised that globalization drivers forward processes of regionalization and spawns various kinds of regional forms (e.g. Hettne, Inotai & Sunkel, 1999; Hettne & Söderbaum, 1998; Söderbaum, 2016). Although regionalization is inherently a political process, meaning that it entails discursive struggles over interests, values and norms, New Regionalism pays little attention to the normative dynamics of regionalization. This is rather unsurprising given that International Relations (IR) theory has not traditionally paid much attention to normative aspects of world politics: realists have stated that a state's responsibility

stops at the national border while neorealists and neoliberalists have maintained that states carry responsibilities only if it is in their national interests.

Arguably, an analysis of regionalizing actors' national interests cannot offer us sufficient information of dynamics of processes of regionalization: notions of responsibility matter in the creation of regions. It is widely accepted within IR that organizations such as states, corporations and institutions are moral agents (e.g. Erskine, 2003). Yet, apart from the draft Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts compiled by the International Law Commission in 2001, there is no international agreement on state responsibility. From the constructivist perspective, however, this does not matter: responsibilities of states (or any other agent) are not given or static but they are socially constructed in time and place. Hence, they are contingent on international balance of power, material and ideational changes, unexpected events, etc. While national interests undoubtedly shape the social construction of responsibilities, they should not be understood in narrow terms of self-interests; rather, we must investigate their deeper ideational and normative basis to fully understand a state's notions of legitimate conduct at home and abroad.

From a constructivist perspective, the concept of responsible citizenship offers a fruitful lens to analyze states' notions of responsibility. It was coined by Senator Gareth Evans, Australia's then Minister for Foreign Affairs, in a series of foreign policy speeches in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Evans stated that ethical standards of conduct are essential if states are to practice responsible foreign policy. Yet he noted that "good international citizenship is not an idealistic distraction or a quixotic quest", nor "is it the foreign policy equivalent of boy scout good deeds" (Evans, 1990). Hence, good international citizenship means "no more – and no less – than the pursuit of enlightened self-interest" (ibid.). Evans' concept emphasizes that responsible states do not have to sacrifice their domestic interests (however they are defined) but they must shoulder responsibilities to both their own population and international society as a whole. In modern times, thus, sovereignty can be defined as the "authority to be a member of the international community" (Perrez, 2000: 332), and such authority "inherently includes a duty or responsibility: the duty and the obligation to fulfill the tasks of a state, i.e. to enable and maintain wellbeing of its people, and to participate as a responsible member in the solution of common problems of the international community" (ibid: 335).

In the Arctic, the Chinese government has not traditionally been considered a regionalizing actor because China does not possess sovereignty above the Arctic Circle. Since the end of the Cold War, however, the Arctic has globalized in many ways (e.g. Finger & Heininen, 2019), meaning that the space and time compression (Harvey, 1989) has altered the social construction of the region so radically that it can no longer be defined as a geographic and cultural-historic region exclusively projected by the states in the region. Today, many international standards and treaties, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters (Polar Code), play a role in Arctic governance, while the Arctic Council continues to be the key platform for regional dialogue. Clearly, China, which in June 2017 officially added the *Polar Silk Road* (冰上丝绸之路) to President Xi Jinping's flagship project the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and published its first-ever Arctic strategy in January 2018 (State Council of the PRC, 2018b; Xinhua, 2017; State Council of the PRC, 2021), is not the only external actor that seeks to increase involvement in the Arctic. In addition to China, which was accepted as an observer in the AC in 2013, twelve other

non-Arctic states and a number of international and non-governmental organizations take part in the Council's work. Their growing regional interest has greatly invigorated globalization and informal processes of regionalization in the Arctic, i.e. those activities that take place outside the formal institutional structures.

Pursuit of domestic wellbeing as a driver of China's participation in Arctic regionalization

By now, it is apparently clear that we do not regard the pursuit for power as a key motivator of China's Arctic engagement. While acknowledging that power struggles cannot be completely dismissed in international politics, we suggest that China's involvement in the Arctic is chiefly motivated by the government's "pursuit of enlightened self-interest" to provide wellbeing for its citizens: a task that the current regime equals, to a large extent, with that of maintaining social stability – a state of affairs that corresponds with the age-old Confucian ideals and the needs of the ruling party (cf. Kallio, 2016). In this section, we identify three concrete means through which the Chinese government pursues to advance the wellbeing of Chinese citizens in the Arctic context: creating wealth through more "green" growth, mitigating the effects of climate change on China and promoting a unifying ideology. Ultimately, all these aspects promote social stability in distinct ways that are further elaborated below.

Before proceeding into the actual analysis, a note should be made on the timespan of China's Arctic visions. Arguably, China's Arctic strategy is based on the high likelihood that the material importance of the region will increase in the future, especially as the last frontier of fossil fuels and a scene of alternative shipping routes. For this reason, China's participation in Arctic regionalization illustrates that future-oriented politics are essential if states want to ensure their capability to fulfil their national responsibilities in the decades to come. What is more, the Arctic case illustrates very well the paradoxical nature of contemporary international politics: states are ready to support extremely costly, ambitious, and risky economic projects in far-away places to provide material wellbeing at home, although such schemes may compromise the wellbeing of others – and even their own people, if the long-term consequences of fossil economy are considered.

Promoting growth and greenifying the Chinese economy

Since the economic reforms started in 1978, China has transformed from a relatively self-sufficient – but poor – economy to a rather open middle-income country that has managed to improve the basic living conditions of its citizens by creating employment, eliminating absolute poverty, and increasing disposable incomes across the country. Generally, this has contributed to the overall satisfaction of the citizens, which is a crucial precondition for social stability and wellbeing. Over the past few decades, the Chinese people have, however, become much more aware of the nexus between growth, pollution and health problems, which has resulted in a growing dissatisfaction (Shapiro, 2012). In a post-totalitarian society, where people are harder to control and order is more challenging to force, these concerns are voiced in numerous protests (Albert & Xu, 2016), which inevitably carries the risk of shaking social stability. Despite the party-state's ability to control such outbursts much more effectively than democratic societies could or would because of their constitutional liberties (e.g. freedom of speech and assembly), the government is compelled to take drastic actions to "greenify" the economy.

Given this two-fold aim to maintain growth and take steady steps towards a low-carbon future in China, it is clear that the state continues to be dependent on overseas resources and partnerships in promoting wellbeing. In practice, the government seeks to make use of imported natural resources and technology transfer in lifting China to the status of an advanced high-income economy that no longer heavily relies on the manufacturing sector but gradually catches up with the West technologically and develops into a "knowledge power" (cf. Mayer, 2012). The overall development of China's science sector is also in a crucial role in this task: science is the key to both enhancing productivity and mitigating emissions of economic activities. All together, these aims constitute the primary rationale for China's global outreach and the current strategy through which it is executed: President Xi's BRI (cf. Kauppila, 2022).

Against this backdrop, it is unsurprising that the Chinese government advances its idea of the Polar Silk Road, and thus takes increasingly part in economic processes that seek to utilize Arctic natural resources – and which greatly contribute to the social construction of the Arctic region itself. In addition to the exploration and extraction of natural gas and oil – fossil fuels that are hard to replace with renewables in some critical functions of Chinese society (e.g. air travel) – the government has already supported the development of the Arctic shipping lanes, whose gradual emergence for wider-scale utilization makes it possible to manage energy transportation-related risks (e.g. Beveridge et al., 2016). More specifically, the Sino-Arctic economic activities that already stand to shape the dynamics of the Arctic region on a more frequent basis include sailings on the Northeast Passage (NEP) and liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects in the Russian Arctic. The NEP, which is the most prospective of the three Arctic sea routes known to the Chinese as the Polar Silk Road[1], runs through waters north of Russia and offers Chinese stakeholders a shorter route to the European markets and helps the government to alleviate its "Malacca dilemma". LNG is the least environmentally harmful fossil fuel that offers a chance to diversify China's energy portfolio and reduce its dependence on coal, which accounts for 58 percent of China's energy consumption (BP, 2019). What is more, the two Arctic LNG projects in which China takes part, the Yamal LNG Project and the Arctic LNG 2, are not only schemes that add on to the Russia-China flows of LNG but also scenes on which state-of-the-art technology and knowledge are needed, providing a fruitful chance for Chinese companies to gain insights from leading global actors, especially on engineering, energy production and transportation in challenging Arctic conditions (Kauppila, 2022).

In addition, Chinese actors have expressed their strong intent to gain a foothold in the extraction of Arctic minerals and rare earth elements as well as in Arctic fisheries. Minerals and rare earth elements have several uses in both energy (e.g. nuclear electricity generation) and technology (e.g. clean tech) sectors in China, whereas the fishing industry contributes significantly to China's GDP and constitutes an important element of Chinese traditions. The polar science projects, in turn, offer a fruitful chance to develop China's science sector in a highly international environment.

Mitigation of the effects of climate change on China

Wellbeing in China is also threatened by climate change, whose effects culminate in the Arctic. According to recent studies, the Arctic climatic changes are linked to extreme weather events, winter cold weather in East Asia (Kim & Kim, 2018), air pollution and flooding in Eastern China (Wang, Chen & Liu, 2015), and problems in China's agricultural production. All the above-mentioned issues are potential sources of general citizen dissatisfaction and triggers for protests and social unrest. For these reasons, the government funds scientific research on Arctic climate

change, which is, for example, conducted together with the Russians on polar expeditions and under the auspices of a joint research institute, and partakes in Arctic governance – and this way contributes to those social and political processes that reconstruct the Arctic region.

Promoting a unifying ideology

In addition to the two above-mentioned material acts, bringing the people together through spiritual means is an effective way to enhance social stability. A unifying ideology can instil a sense of belonging and mental affinity towards a collective in a multiethnic and multicultural country. In recent decades, however, finding such a shared system of ideals has become a challenge for the leadership because economic and political reforms have eroded the role of socialism as the guideline of the Chinese society. As a response to this "spiritual and ideological vacuum" (Kallio, 2016: 52), state-nationalism (爱国主义) has emerged as an officially accepted, pragmatic belief system that instills a sense of collective pride by emphasizing the glorious performance of the party in China's return to the great power status – instead of hailing shared attributes that not all Chinese can relate to (Zhao, 2004).

In President Xi's national rejuvenation (**民族复**兴), national prowess in such fields as science and technology have emerged as a core theme of the nationalist story. Over the past two decades, the Arctic science collaboration, expeditions and ambitious economic projects have served to fuel nationalist sentiments by constructing an image of a "polar great power", a militarily, economically and scientifically capable modern country whose influence extends over both poles (Brady, 2017). For example, the National Museum of China portrays pictures of the ice-breaker *Xuelong* and the *Arctic Yellow River Station* magnificently in line with the country's space program; in a similar vein, the museum at the Polar Research Institute of China emphasizes China's task to become a "great polar expedition country" ("**成**为极地考察大国"). Although China's Arctic science engagement is definitely not only motivated by these nationalist aspirations, it is important to recognize them in analyzing China's role in processes of Arctic regionalization.

China's enlightened self-interest and the (re)organization of the Arctic region

Apparently, the contemporary liberal international order may constrain the Chinese government's efforts to maintain social stability at domestic level. Therefore, not only China's capability but also its motivation to reform the building blocks of international order may increase in line with its rise to great power status. To be a responsible international citizen, however, China has to refrain from posing a threat or using force in rewriting international rules and norms so that they correspond with its own values and interests. As Evans (1990) underlines, responsible international citizens pursue "*enlightened* self-interest" (italics added by the authors), meaning that China should exercise its growing power prudently by reconciling its policies and actions with the established international rules to maintain international peace and order. In this section, we ponder the extent to which China has, so far, conformed to and sought to mold international practices that organize the Arctic region in acting out its responsibility to provide wellbeing to its citizens. While acknowledging unique characteristics of the Arctic, we do not subscribe to the idea about the Arctic as an exceptional region. Hence, we build on a premise that the Arctic is organised by the same set of practices – territoriality and sovereignty, diplomacy, harm prevention and environmental

stewardship, international law, and nationalism (e.g. Buzan, 2004) – as the contemporary international society at large, and study China's contribution to those practices.

Territoriality and sovereignty

To a large extent, the minimum requirement for China to participate in processes of Arctic regionalization would be that it accepts two norms constitutive of Arctic regional society: sovereignty and territoriality. Although these two international practices substantially hinder China's attempts to utilize Arctic natural resources for creating growth and greenifying the Chinese economy, it cannot take actions that violate them for two reasons. First, as a non-Arctic country, China is dependent on partnerships in utilizing the region's resources. For example, around 84 percent of Arctic fossil fuel deposits are located offshore north of Siberia, Alaska, Canada and Greenland (U.S. Geological Survey, 2008), in locations belonging to the Arctic states or their exclusive economic zones (EEZ), that is, sea areas over which they have jurisdiction according to the UNCLOS. Second, China can only benefit from Arctic resources if the region is a conflict-free and stable scene of coexistence.

Insofar as direct violations of territorial integrity or making of sovereignty claims count as ultimate infringements of these norms, China has certainly refrained from breaching territoriality and sovereignty in the Arctic. It has not used force against the political independence of the Arctic states or made any sovereignty claims over the Arctic land and waters. Although four Chinese navy vessels reportedly entered the US EEZ near Alaska's Aleutian islands in late August 2021, they did remain in international waters and cannot be seen to have violated the US sovereignty (e.g. Schreiber, 2021). Moreover, China has relied on cooperation and established partnerships that allow Chinese companies to participate in Arctic energy and mineral extraction. For example, the government's investment vehicle Silk Road Fund became directly engaged in a pioneering Arctic LNG project in Russia's Yamal Peninsula in 2016. Through this move, the government supported a Russo-French-Chinese joint venture in which the state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation is a 20 percent shareholder (Yamal LNG Project, n.d.). Chinese participation in the mega project has not only provided the country's economy with notable volumes of LNG since July 2018, when the first shipment to China took place (Novatek, 2018), but also given Chinese companies a chance to develop skills needed in future projects in the region, including possible oil drilling schemes. A similar project with equal benefits to the Chinese economy is currently launched in Gydan Peninsula, as Novatek's second LNG project, Arctic LNG 2, is gradually starting its operations.

Yet, at the same time, China does somewhat seek to shape the organization of regional order by *challenging* the norms of territoriality and sovereignty through more subtle methods. Notably, China promotes an idea of the Arctic region that somewhat downplays territoriality as its constitutive practice. As China's Arctic strategy puts it, "The Arctic situation now goes beyond its original inter-Arctic States or regional nature, having a vital bearing on the interests of States outside the region and the interests of the international community as a whole, as well as on the survival, the development, and the shared future for mankind" (State Council of the PRC, 2018b). In a similar vein, China has adopted a self-identification as a "near-Arctic state" (近北极国家). Unsurprisingly, this discourse has been interpreted as a hawkish claim in more realist (mostly American) analyses – despite the fact that many other non-Arctic states, such as France and India, view and portray their position in a similar manner (cf. Heininen et al., 2019).

To support the non-territorial definition of the Arctic region, China also highlights the global nature of the region's governance structure – a viewpoint that somewhat downplays the role of the AC. For example, it has emphasized the importance of international law as an instrument of responsible Arctic governance in major Arctic-related statements over the past few years. The government has repeatedly emphasized the stipulations of the UNCLOS, which outline that external actors possess certain rights to conduct research, navigate and explore resources in the world's oceans (State Council of the PRC, 2018b). Chinese scholars have also sought to frame some of the natural resources of the Arctic as global commons (e.g. Yan & Li, 2009; Yang et al., 2015). Moreover, some Chinese researchers have expressed their dissatisfaction with the exclusiveness of the existing Arctic governance structure by stating that it does not allow non-Arctic countries to take part in its decision-making, even when it deals with "global issues" (Guo & Yao, 2015). Despite the lively debate in Chinese academia, the government, however, refrains from outright criticism of the Arctic Council in official contexts. In this way, it avoids spurring speculation as to whether the country is truly committed to acting out its pledge not to intervene in the Arctic countries' internal issues, that is, to respect the organizing principle of sovereignty.

International law

International law directly enables China to participate in those processes of Arctic regionalization that allow the country to create economic growth and conduct science activities to mitigate climate change related risks in China. The UNCLOS, in particular, not only guarantees China the right to ship in the Arctic waters but also provides the right to practice scientific research in certain parts of the Arctic. In a similar vein, the Treaty of Svalbard, which China signed in 1925, has enabled China to set its own research station, Yellow River Research Station (黄河站) in Norway's Svalbard. Recently, China has also contributed to the development of new regulations concerning the Arctic. In 2015, China was invited by the Arctic Ocean coastal states, together with other major fishing nations (Japan, South Korea, and Iceland) and the EU to take part in negotiations on a legally binding agreement on preventing unregulated fishing in the high seas portion of the Central Arctic Ocean until sustainability of such activities can be guaranteed. As a result, the 2018 Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean was adopted. After China ratified the agreement in May 2021, it entered into force. In addition, China took part in the formulation of the IMO's Polar Code, a standard that sets tightened regulations for shipping in the Arctic (and Antarctic) waters.

Although it has become common to almost "expect" China to behave in a manner that violates the stipulations of the UNCLOS based on the quarrels in the South China Sea (cf. Lanteigne, 2021), China has, so far, largely internalized the norms of international law in the Arctic context. As mentioned above, Chinese navy vessels did not break international law in late August 2021 as they did not enter the US territorial waters. Only on one occasion has China – *possibly* – interpreted international law in a manner that has been questioned by the Arctic states. In 2017, *Xuelong* sailed through the Northwest Passage under a research permit issued by the Canadian authorities, but based on the stipulations of the UNCLOS. According to the Chinese state media, the test sailing was also utilized for gaining insights for commercial sailings (cf. Fife & Chase, 2017) – something that the research permit does not allow one to do. However, there is no concrete evidence of such actions being taken; in fact, it may well be that Xinhua's interpretation of the expedition was rather a nationalist show targeted at the domestic audience than a report of its true nature.

Diplomacy

Adhering to the norms of diplomacy has been crucial for China to be able to participate in Arctic regionalization and thus advance its enlightened self-interests. While China's Arctic strategy does not pay much attention to the role of the AC in regional governance, it confirms that "China is committed to improving and complementing the Arctic governance regime" (State Council of the PRC, 2018b). Currently, bilateral interaction between China and the Arctic countries constitutes one of the most concrete domains of the country's Arctic diplomacy. China has, for example, strengthened its "bilateral" relations with the Nordic countries under the model of 5+1 diplomacy, on issues ranging from science and technology to transport and energy extraction (cf. Sverdrup-Thygeson et al., 2018). Diplomacy has also facilitated the above-mentioned energy projects in Russia and advanced Chinese economic visions in the Arctic more generally: without strong diplomatic ties, managed by the highest leadership, Sino-Russian business collaboration in developing energy resources and shipping lanes would not be possible. In addition to allocating funding to the actual projects, the governments and leaders of the two countries have eased informal barriers to investments, participated in the negotiations of both new and older deals, made field visits, signed Memorandums of Understanding etc. in the spirit of state capitalism. Notably, the Western economic sanctions, imposed on Russia in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 strengthened the Sino-Russian Arctic partnership: they created a diplomatic and economic vacuum which China could fill (cf. Gabuev, 2016).

The practice of diplomacy is, however, sometimes at odds with China's urge to access Arctic resources. In 2010, China froze its diplomatic ties with Norway as a response to the decision to award the Nobel Peace Prize to a Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo. Economic sanctions with Chinese characteristics soon followed: new veterinary inspections were introduced to control the Norwegian exporters' access to the Chinese market. As a recent gravity model study evaluates, during the period of 2011-2016 this resulted in a 92% drop in the value of Chinese imports of fresh and chilled salmon from Norway – as compared with a non-sanction environment that would have given the Norwegians a chance to expand their business in China (Blomfeldt Mathisrud, 2018). It is, however, unsurprising that the Chinese desire for presumably safe and clean Arctic salmon was soon satisfied with imports from other Northern areas (e.g. Faroe Islands) – some of which traded salmon of Norwegian-origin (Chen & Garcia, 2016). Another related example is the case of Sweden: the Swedish reaction to the captivity of Gui Minhai, a Swedish dissident of Chinese origin, has resulted in diplomatic tensions that have, for example, indirectly led to China setting official warnings against travelling to Sweden and imposing sanctions on a Swedish researcher. Although numerical estimations on the actual economic impact of these diplomatic frictions are not yet available, it is fair to say that Sweden has, overall, become less of a potential destination for Polar Silk Road related investments. These cases illustrate that although overseas resources contribute to growth and wellbeing, most Arctic opportunities are not vitally important for Chinese economic development and business certainly does not continue "as usual" if the *social conditions* for wellbeing are at risk. Put differently, glorifying the work of dissidents poses a more pressing risk to social stability than freezing or cooling diplomatic relations with small Arctic countries.

China has also adhered to the norm of diplomacy in seeking to mitigate the domestic risks of climate change as a member of the Arctic regional society. It has sought to utilize both formal and informal forums of Arctic governance to advance its own agendas and voice its concerns. Despite

the rather restricted scope of action of the Arctic Council observers, and the fact that China is not committed to the Council's work to reduce black carbon emissions, it is important for China to be able to participate in the climate discussions that are held under its auspices. Interestingly, the Chinese government also partakes in another, yet emerging setting focusing on mitigating the effects of Arctic climatic changes. Three East Asian observer members of the Arctic Council (China, Japan and South Korea) have organized trilateral meetings on Arctic collaboration since April 2016 – a rare move in the historically tricky context of East Asia. Through this arrangement China seeks to make its voice better heard in the growing mass of Arctic Council observer states and enhance research collaboration among its neighbors (Second Trilateral High-Level Dialogue on the Arctic, 2017). In a similar vein, China has become an active participant in large annual meetings located between track II and track I diplomacy. Particularly, the Arctic Circle Assembly has become an important forum for China to influence the Arctic community. In May 2019, China organized the first-ever Arctic Circle China Forum in Shanghai, giving an opportunity for the Chinese officials to build trust among the Arctic community – a key purpose of the practice of diplomacy.

Harm prevention and environmental stewardship

Despite the wide-spread criticism that China has faced with regard to its environmental practices globally, China has refrained from violating the key norms of harm prevention and environmental stewardship in the Arctic. From China's perspective, adhering to these norms has both allowed China to mitigate the effects of climate change on China and build trust within and outside the AC, which is needed to advance its economic visions in the future. Yet, this is not to say that China would have, in any way, sought to advance their more ambitious implementation – although taking such an initiative could greatly strengthen its status as a legitimate member of the region and truly allow it to take a driver's seat in processes of Arctic regionalization.

As mentioned above, China has been favorable towards two legal standards that seek to prevent harm and protect the environment in the region. As for the Polar Code, China participated in the initial correspondence group and gave its own proposals calling for less strict stipulations (Eiterjord, 2020), but in the end did not oppose the final draft. Although the fisheries agreement hinders the Chinese fishing industry from gaining access to the Arctic high sea fisheries, being part of the agreement can be seen as an investment in the future: aligning with the Arctic states builds trust, which is needed for more important schemes, such as energy deals.

It should, however, be noted that Arctic climatic changes largely result from global greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, if China, the largest carbon dioxide emitter in the world, is truly to tackle the domestic risks created by Arctic climatic changes, the first and foremost way of doing so would be to mitigate its own emissions. In September 2020, China indeed announced an ambitious goal of reaching carbon neutrality by 2060 (Xi, 2020). Although China has neither managed to halt the growth of its emissions nor taken part in the Arctic Council's work to reduce black carbon emissions, recent developments regarding China's overseas investments have been promising. In July 2021, Guidelines for Greening Overseas Investment and Cooperation were issued by the Ministry of Commerce and the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, and in September 2021, at the UN General Assembly, President Xi announced that China would no longer invest in building coal power abroad. At the same time, especially the lack of concrete environmental engagement in the work of the Arctic Council stands as a clear contradiction of the fact that China's pursuit of

wealth through Arctic fossil fuels itself is a significant source of pollutants causing Arctic environmental change.

Nationalism

The organizing practice of nationalism carries a great potential to both hinder and advance China's participation in those processes of Arctic regionalization that allow China to promote wellbeing through Arctic resources.

Particularly, the highly controversial case of Greenland illustrates both the constraints and potential of nationalism from China's perspective. Some Greenlandic politicians have welcomed Chinese investments in rare earth and uranium resources because it gives the autonomous country economic freedom from Denmark. For the Danish government, however, Chinese involvement poses risks, not least because Greenland's new economic development opens the door for the island's independence (e.g. Gad et al., 2018). Furthermore, Greenland's northwest coast hosts a US Air Force military base, Thule Air Base, which makes Sino-Greenlandic collaboration a matter of concern for the US. These reasons have already affected China's ability to do business in Greenland.

The establishment of China's science and satellite stations in the Arctic has also fueled "China threat theories" (cf. Broomfield, 2003) and nationalist sentiments in Arctic countries. Currently, China has these outposts in three Arctic countries: Norway's Svalbard, Iceland and Sweden. In addition, it has expressed interest in establishing an establishment in Greenland (Cui, 2017) – though so far without success. Several key reports, including those produced by the US and Danish governments (e.g. Office of the Secretary of Defence, 2019; Reuters, 2019), have recently noted that these stations could be used for military purposes, i.e. collecting satellite data for the armed forces and monitoring more than just northern lights and indicators related to climate change. These sentiments may possibly become a major hindrance in China's urge to utilize Arctic resources to promote wellbeing in China – even if no actual dual-use would be detected.

Conclusions

This paper took a departure from the mainstream approaches to IR, which presume that states' regional conduct is par excellence motivated by struggles for power. We sought to demonstrate that China's participation in Arctic regionalization is guided by its notions of responsibility. By investigating the normative underpinnings of China's Arctic policy, we also hope to increase intercultural understanding, which is necessary to secure a resilient future – both in the Arctic and globally.

Our purpose was not to assess China's regional engagement in moral terms. If one wants to evaluate whether or not China's notions of responsibility are ethically acceptable, it is useful to look at whether China is doing something that could be viewed as irresponsible. In other words, we may gain a better understanding of Chinese practices, perceptions and objectives by highlighting what China does not do in the Arctic. Our analysis demonstrates, for example, that China has not violated the sovereignty of Arctic states or questioned their economic rights. In addition, it has not sought to establish an alternative regional governance model to the AC, although it has, in general, taken a more global approach to regional affairs. Conversely, peaceful socio-economic development of the Arctic is a precondition for China's goals to promote wellbeing of its citizens. Yet, the purpose of this paper was not to compile a list on what China, or any other state, should

do to be recognized as a responsible international citizen. This would be a difficult task to do: at the age of increased uncertainty and manufactured risks – or a risk society, as Ulrich Beck puts it – it is increasingly difficult to define what it means to be a responsible international citizen. What is clear, however, is that responsibilities and risks go hand in hand: responsible international citizens forecast and manage risks that may prevent them from acting out their duties.

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Notes

1. The other two are the Northwest Passage and the Transpolar Passage.

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