

Four Impacts from the China-Nordic Arctic Research Center

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In December 2013, after China was granted observer status in the Arctic Council together with five other countries, the China-Nordic Arctic Research Center (CNARC) was established with joint efforts by Nordic and Chinese research institutes. Since then, CNARC has evolved from a nascent and immature conception to a real and functioning entity that will eventually develop into a full-fledged platform for academic exchanges between China and Nordic countries. The development and potential of CNARC has attracted attention from other Arctic and non-Arctic countries, marking a highlight of international cooperation on Arctic issues since 2013.

CNARC currently has 14 member institutes: University of Lapland (Finland); Fridtjof Nansen Institute (Norway); Icelandic Center for Research (Iceland); Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (Denmark); Norwegian Polar Institute (Norway); Swedish Polar Research Secretariat (Sweden); The Arctic University of Norway-UiT (Norway); The University of Akureyri (Iceland); Ocean University of China; Polar Research Institute of China; Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (China); Shanghai Jiao Tong University (China); Tongji University (China); and Dalian Maritime University (China). Moreover, a growing number of representatives from non-CNARC members, including scholars from Canada, Russia, South Korea and other countries, also attended CNARC's annual academic symposium.

After five years of development, CNARC has produced four clear results. First, knowledge about governance structures has expanded from Arctic countries to non-Arctic countries. Second, the Chinese government has adopted the concept of "governance" to apply to its Arctic cooperation. Third, Chinese media and businesses have begun taking concrete actions to practice the concept of governance. Fourth, China's positive role in Arctic governance is gradually being acknowledged.

BUILDING EPISTEMIC COMMUNITIES: EXTENDING KNOWLEDGE FROM NORDIC COUNTRIES TO CHINA

China is a non-Arctic country. However, it is closely related to the Arctic region in terms of environment, climate change, economic development, resource utilization, scientific research and more. International cooperation in Arctic research is an important way for China to understand the dynamic Arctic situation.

The Nordic region includes five independent countries: Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, and Sweden. It is a community characterized by “unity with diversities and diversities with unity.” The five countries share interests in Arctic security, economic development, environmental protection, and other issues like the rights of Indigenous Peoples. For China, the Nordic region plays a role as a center of Arctic knowledge and experience. Therefore, China has far-reaching prospects for cooperation with the Nordic countries in Arctic scientific research and sustainable development.

“Epistemic community” includes knowledge authorities and expert members from different disciplines and different academic backgrounds. Its members share a set of common beliefs, ideology, values, norms and principles. Based on scientific evidence and practice, this epistemic community establishes a set of consensus agreements regarding the knowledge base describing the causal relationship of core issues affecting the region. This consensus can help establish a link between governance policies and expected governance outcomes.¹ To realize the goals of governance and promote the welfare of humanity, the epistemic community champions best practices by working to influence society and policymakers.

Arctic countries, especially the Nordic countries, have vast experience in the region and have developed an accumulated body of knowledge about climate change, dynamic ice conditions, and the internal connection of Earth’s systems. Chinese environmental scientists have joined global projects on the Arctic and contributed in some fields. However, in seeking ways to utilize scientific evidence to support policy decisions, there seemed to be a lack of a bridge between Chinese environmental scientists and Chinese policy makers. Chinese environmental scientists felt that government departments in China lacked clarity about how to support Arctic projects. The government thought that some scientists had offered fragmented portrayals regarding the Arctic’s importance.

Under such circumstances, the Polar Research Institute of China (PRIC),

led by Dr. Yang Huigen, established a department for strategic studies inside PRIC. This department plays an important role as a node in a social science network that attracts many social scientists (including international law, international relations, environment politics, global governance, maritime economy, and Indigenous People's studies) into studies on the Arctic and Antarctica.

CNARC facilitates China-Nordic cooperation in the following ways: 1) carrying out joint research projects in accordance with research themes with respect to Arctic climate change, Arctic resources, shipping and economy, as well as Arctic policy-making and legislation; 2) developing Arctic research networks and frontiers by providing opportunities for Chinese and Nordic scholars to conduct Arctic research through fellowship programs; 3) convening regularly with the China-Nordic Arctic Cooperation Symposium and at other workshops; and 4) facilitating information sharing and cultural exchanges between China and Nordic countries in an Arctic context.²

In its five years of operation, CNARC has worked to develop a long-term mechanism for Arctic governance. It focuses on building a diversified, efficient, and open Arctic academic exchange network by means of academic conferences, economic roundtables, visiting scholars and academic exchange. CNARC connects the two academic networks from the Nordic countries and China, allowing the epistemic community on Arctic governance to rapidly spread from Nordic academia to academia in China. The platform also connects to government agencies through conferences and research reports. In addition, it further connects the media, the shipping industry and the tourism industry through the extension of the CNARC platform, "Economic roundtable."

THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT ADOPTED THE CONCEPT OF "GOVERNANCE" IN ARCTIC COOPERATION

Although some Chinese scholars have discussed the issues for many years, the concepts of "Arctic governance" and "global governance" were not adopted in official Chinese government documents. China's official documents and speeches by Chinese leaders mentioned little about global governance and Arctic governance. With regard to Arctic issues, Chinese government policy for many years has been to place more emphasis on

bilateral cooperation rather than multilateral alliances, and more attention was paid to intergovernmental mechanisms rather than multi-stakeholder approaches.

There is a growing awareness that Arctic governance is inextricably linked to global climate change trends. As such, the Chinese government began to embrace the concept of climate global governance several years ago. At the annual academic symposium at CNARC, scholars from China and Nordic countries discussed many issues of Arctic governance, as well as the path and role of China's participation in Arctic governance. Some scholars also published books and articles on Arctic governance, which contributed to linking the Arctic with climate change, as well as linking Arctic development with Arctic governance.³

In recent years, in some speeches by representatives of the Chinese government, positive attitudes towards global governance and Arctic governance have systematically emerged. In January 2017, President Xi Jinping pointed out in his speech at United Nations Headquarters in Geneva that all nations in the world should actively strengthen global governance. In order to make polar regions and other new spaces a place for cooperation between the parties rather than competing arenas, he suggested following the principles of sovereignty, peace, benefit-to-all and joint governance.⁴

At the third *Arctic Circle* forum in 2015, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming mentioned in particular the need to maintain an Arctic governance system based on existing international law. China supports the promotion of Arctic governance within the framework of existing international law, supports the Arctic Council as an important mechanism in Arctic governance, and supports international maritime organizations and other international platforms to play an active role in Arctic governance.⁵ Mr. Wang Yang, Chinese deputy prime minister, said at the Russian International Arctic forum *Arctic - Territory of Dialogue* that the Chinese government is ready to promote and improve the multilateral governance of the Arctic, and actively carry on international cooperation at multiple levels and within a wide range of issues to achieve mutual benefit and win-win results.⁶

Mr. Xu Hong, director of the Department of Treaty and Law of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, published an article in 2017 entitled, *Arctic Governance and Chinese Participation*.⁷ In his article, he confirmed that Arctic governance has formed a “*global-regional-national*” three-level

pattern with multi-stakeholder participation. According to his view, the main contribution of China's participation in Arctic governance should include: (1) playing a positive role in Arctic governance through constructive participation in global governance; (2) actively contributing to the governance of the Arctic region; (3) steadily deepening bilateral cooperation with Arctic countries; (4) attaching importance to the positive interaction among the Arctic Council, observer countries and stakeholders; and (5) continuously working with other stakeholders to contribute Arctic governance.

It is inseparable from the ongoing communication efforts of CNARC that the Chinese government understands and supports Arctic governance, particularly its commitment to climate change and environmental issues, and its recognition of the important role of multiple stakeholders. Director Xu Hong praised the special contribution of CNARC, saying that CNARC is moving towards to "a long-term mechanism." The Chinese government supports academic exchanges with think tanks from Arctic countries. On May 25, 2017, Vice Foreign Minister Wang Chao met with Mr. Dagfinn Høybråten, Secretary General of the Nordic Council of Ministers. Mr. Wang and Mr. Høybråten clearly put forward five platforms for strengthening bilateral cooperation, one of which is to carry out the Arctic governance based on the CNARC platform.⁸

CNARC ROUNDTABLE: GOVERNANCE RESPONSIBILITY EXPANDING FROM THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT TO THE BROADER SOCIETY

The China-Nordic Arctic Research Center (CNARC) Roundtable is a series of meetings for invited scholars, scientists, business leaders and policymakers to focus on an Arctic topic of economic and/or cultural significance. The aim of the CNARC Roundtable is to promote Chinese-Nordic social, economic and cultural Arctic cooperation. It has been hosted on five previous occasions in conjunction with the China-Nordic Arctic Cooperation Symposium: in June 2013 in Shanghai at the establishment of CNARC; in June 2014 in Reykjavik, Iceland, regarding China-Iceland Arctic economic cooperation; in May 2015, on Arctic Shipping in Shanghai; in May 2016, on Arctic Sustainable Tourism in Rovaniemi, Finland; and in May 2017, on Arctic Shipping and Port Cities in Dalian. After five years'

practice, the CNARC Roundtable mechanism is maturing. High-level influencers on Arctic affairs have attended all Roundtable events, including those from industry, media, government and academia—from the Nordic countries, China, Russia, South Korea, and other stakeholders.

These kinds of exchanges help participants to understand Chinese and Nordic countries' Arctic policy to promote sustainable social, economic, and cultural activities, but also ensures successful cooperation. Fruitful outcomes have been accomplished, such as in the summer of 2016, when the CNARC Roundtable was held in Rovaniemi, Finland with a theme of "Arctic Sustainable Tourism." Since the Roundtable, there has been frequent and substantial tourism cooperation between Chinese and Finnish tourism companies, who were also participants in the roundtable.⁹ In November the same year, "Baidu.com, Inc" announced the establishment of a strategic partnership with tourism bureaus from four Nordic countries. Through the sharing of resources to carry out operational activities to promote joint data exchange, Baidu Maps have also greatly enhanced Chinese tourists' travel experience in Nordic countries. This also promotes the sustainable development of the local tourism industry in Nordic countries.

On the occasion of the 40th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting held in Beijing, echoing China's endeavor in sustainability, China's industry leaders in polar tourism launched the *Initiative for Responsible Travel in the Polar Regions*, which unites various relevant players to promote sustainable development in China's tourism industry and sustainable consumption among Chinese citizens.¹⁰ The core initiator, Mr. Gao Jie from Shanghai China Travel International Co., Ltd has contributed to CNARC roundtables three times and bears substantial credit for ensuring and instilling a sense of environmental protection in the discussions. Mr. Gao hopes to improve Chinese travelers' understanding of global climate change, increase environmental awareness, change consumer habits, and promote sustainable development.

BUILDING UP CHINA'S POSITIVE IMAGE IN ARCTIC AFFAIRS

One of the aims of CNARC is to build a pluralistic, multilateral, pragmatic and open platform for cooperation in the field of Arctic social science research, as well as a network of scholars to promote awareness,

understanding and knowledge of the Arctic and its global impact. CNARC was built to explore the frontiers of Arctic research, to carry out joint research on major international Arctic issues, to promote sustainable Arctic development in the global sense, as well as enhancing cooperation between China and the Nordic countries.

Before a CNARC cooperation mechanism was formed, some Arctic scholars, including Nordic scholars and local public opinion, expressed great concern about China's participation in Arctic affairs. Some studies tended to take China's rise as evidence that China was not content with the status quo and described China as a force trying to change the existing Arctic system.

Some studies suggested that cooperation between China and Arctic countries is only a cover for China's geopolitical purposes and for acquiring energy resources. Some media also published articles saying that China's investment in Greenland and other places was an attempt to control Greenland's rare earth resources. Some articles stated that China's investment in the Arctic economic activities would inevitably bring about negative impacts, such as environmental degradation and an influx of foreign labor. This kind of negative public opinion is not conducive to China's participation in Arctic cooperation.

CNARC, based on the linkage between Chinese and Nordic think tanks, tries to make the two sides aware of the great potential of China-Nordic cooperation through symposia, academic visits and dialogue. From the point of view of Chinese scholars, we hope that the Nordic institutions and their researchers can understand more about China's positive role in Arctic affairs, as well as the opportunities accessible to all sides for thoughtful Arctic development.

Of course, these Arctic countries' concerns cannot be completely eliminated in the short term. Therefore, it is crucial to continue the ongoing exchange in the process of growing trust and cooperation. Indeed, in the last two years, governments and scholars from the Nordic countries have viewed China more objectively and gently. The importance attached to China's participation in the Arctic Circle in Iceland, the Arctic frontier in Norway, and Arctic-Territory of dialogue in Russia can be demonstrated. In addition, Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks with the leaders of Denmark, Norway, and Finland in 2017, and the leaders of all sides spoke very positively about bilateral cooperation in Arctic governance.

Besides China and the Nordic countries, the CNARC symposia have

also drawn wide attention from other Arctic countries and countries outside the arctic. CNARC has attracted scholars and diplomats from Russia, Canada, the United States, Singapore, and South Korea, to name a few. The operation of CNARC has encouraged other Arctic countries to seek contacts with China with regard to Arctic affairs, and has facilitated policy coordination with Japan, South Korea and other Asia and Pacific countries on Arctic affairs.

Table V.5 The China-Nordic Arctic Cooperation Symposia

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| 1 | June 2013 | Shanghai, China | Chinese-Nordic Cooperation for Sustainable Development in the Arctic: Human Activity and Environmental Change |
| Sessions | 1. Arctic Shipping and Resource Exploration 2. Arctic Policies and Governance 3. Climate Change and the Arctic in the Anthropocene | | |
| 2 | 2-5 June 2014 | Akureyri, Iceland | North meets East |
| Sessions | 1. Arctic Policies and Governance 2. Arctic Policies and Economy 3. Arctic Policies and Maritime Cooperation | | |
| 3 | May 2015 | Shanghai, China | Arctic Synergies: Policies and Best Practices |
| Sessions | 1. Impact of Scientific Developments on Arctic Strategies 2. The Framing and Implementation of Arctic Policies 3. Legal Aspects in the Arctic Governance 4. Arctic Geopolitics and Security 5. Trans-Arctic Synergies in Economic Development | | |
| 4 | 6-9 June 2016 | Rovaniemi, Finland | The Sustainable Arctic - Opportunities and Challenges of Globalization |
| Sessions | 1. Arctic sustainability 2. The Global Arctic: Globalization and the Arctic 3. China, Nordic countries and the Arctic 4. Arctic tourism | | |
| 5 | May 26, 2017 | Dalian, China | Towards the Future: Trans-regional Cooperation in the Arctic: Development and Protection |
| Sessions | 1. Europe-Asia Connectivity: Promoting the Potential Utilization of Arctic Sea Route 2. Arctic Shipping: Safety and Synergy 3. Trans-Arctic Interactions and Compatibility of Arctic Strategies and Policies 4. Geopolitical Development of the Arctic in the Changing World 5. Arctic Sustainability: Climate Change, Indigenous Communities and Eco-tourism 6. Exploring the Way forward in Arctic Ocean: Scientific Cooperation and Fishery Governance | | |

Source: the website of the CNARC. <https://www.cnarc.info/>

Notes

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2. <https://www.cnarc.info/index.php/organization>.
3. Yang Jian. *New Perspectives on the Arctic Governance*, Beijing: Current Affairs Press, 2014. And Zhao Long. *On the Norms of Arctic Governance*. Beijing: Current Affairs Press, 2015.
4. Xi Jinping. *Working Together to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind* Speech delivered at the United Nations Office at Geneva, Geneva, 18 January 2017. http://www.china.org.cn/chinese/2017-01/25/content_40175608.htm.
5. Zhang Ming. Keynote Speech by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming at the China Country Session of the Third Arctic Circle Assembly. http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1306858.shtml.
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7. Xu Hong. "The Arctic governance and Chinese participation." *Journal of Boundary and Ocean Studies* Vol.2, 2017.
8. http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjbxw_673019/t1465214.shtml.
9. http://news.xinhuanet.com/2016-06/11/c_1119021423.htm.
10. *The Chinese Initiative of Responsible Travel in the Polar Regions*. <http://www.polaroceanportal.com/article/1525>.