

# **East Asia – Arctic Relations**

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**Boundary, Security, and International Politics**

**Part II: Policy Workshop**

**March 5, 2013**

**Balsillie School of International Affairs  
Waterloo, Ontario, Canada**

**Workshop Report**



## Preface

This report is a summary of *East Asia – Arctic Relations: Boundary, Security and International Politics, Part II - Policy Workshop* held at the Balsillie School of International Affairs, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, on March 5, 2013.

This project as a whole is designed to launch a focused and detailed conversation about the historic, contemporary and future dimensions of East Asian countries' relationships with and interests in the Arctic. Bringing together leading experts from Japan, China, South Korea, Russia, the United States and Canada, it draws scholarly and policy-making attention to East Asia's growing interests in the Far North and identifies political, economic, legal and security connections between East Asia and the Arctic.

As major phases of the project, two workshops were held in March 2013.

### *Part I: Academic Workshop, Whitehorse, YT, March 2-3, 2013*

The Whitehorse workshop provided an opportunity for 16 scholars to reflect on the issues at hand. Intensive discussions took place over two days on 13 papers submitted and circulated prior to the workshop. Those papers examine East Asian interests on Arctic politics and diplomacy and how developments in the contemporary Arctic influence East Asian affairs. The group also had opportunities to share views with local politicians in Yukon.

### *Part II Policy Workshop, Balsillie School of International Affairs, Waterloo, ON, March 5, 2013*

This policy-focused workshop built on the work concluded in Whitehorse. The participants in this workshop included 9 scholars who attended the Whitehorse workshop, and 12 other Arctic experts, foreign affairs specialists, and government representatives. The day-long workshop consisted of facilitated discussions to further identify Arctic policy alternatives available to Canada, the Arctic Council, and East Asian nations.

Both workshops featured lively exchanges between the participants and inspired new paths for research and policy. Research outputs of this project will include workshop papers, policy briefs, and an edited volume. While this work is in progress, this report serves as *Part II* of an interim output for the project. (There is a separate report of *Part I*).

This workshop was possible thanks to the generous funding of the Centre for International Governance Innovation (CIGI) and the Japan Foundation, as well as the kind support of the Asia-Pacific Foundation of Canada; Yukon College; Balsillie School of International Affairs; the Japan Futures Initiative; Renison University College at the University of Waterloo; and the University of Saskatchewan.

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## **Part II: Policy Workshop, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, March 5, 2013**

### **Opening Session: East Asia and the Arctic**

#### **Introduction**

Part two of the workshop invoked the Chatham House Rule to encourage participants to voice opinions as individuals and to facilitate free and frank discussion. The Chatham House Rule states, “When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.” For this reason this summary will outline the general flow of the conversations without specifically identifying the participants or who said what.

The workshop opened with an overview of the content presented and discussed at Part I of the workshop in Whitehorse, Yukon that took place from March 2-3, 2013. It covered four broad points: 1) East Asian interests in the Arctic, 2) Arctic states’ interests in East Asia, 3) the Arctic Council and Governance, and 4) the shift from Arctic regionalism to Arctic internationalism.

The introduction was followed by brief participant self-introductions.

#### **Session One: Arctic Thaw and East Asia**

Participants were asked to introduce their thoughts on presentations from sessions one and three of the Whitehorse workshop and comment on Asian interests in the Arctic. Various participants made and reiterated the following points:

- East Asian countries respect the sovereignty of Arctic states, want mutual respect, welcome mutual exchange, and seek to enhance and deepen scientific and environmental cooperation
- East Asian countries support peace, stability, and sustainable and socially responsible development in the Arctic
- East Asian countries support the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- East Asian countries, most notably Korea, see the opening of northern sea routes as a significant trade opportunity
- East Asian countries are concerned about climate change in the Arctic and would like to share research on Arctic environments
- East Asian countries hint that the current Arctic governance system is in need of improvement and that there should be recognition that parts of the Arctic Ocean (“the Area” beyond coastal

state jurisdiction) are the “common heritage of mankind”

- East Asian countries support and respect Indigenous peoples’ rights

These points formed the basis of group discussion. One participant noted that if science and scientific sharing is important for Japan, China and Korea, then they should think about and advance scientific cooperation in concrete terms. Another participant asked if scientific cooperation is important, how are these three countries sharing scientific research on the Arctic with each other? The general consensus held that there is currently no major inter-East Asian scientific cooperation. Relating to Arctic governance, everyone agreed on the importance of recognizing the fundamental differences between the Arctic and Antarctica. The latter is a continent where sovereign rights have been frozen for more than half a century, while the former is an ocean surrounded by coastal states with sovereignty and sovereign rights in parts of the Arctic basin. Antarctica has no human population whereas peoples have populated the Arctic for millennia. Japan renounced the Antarctica in the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the Antarctic Treaty was concluded during the height of the Cold War because it did not constrain either superpower’s ability to project force. In the Arctic, such an agreement is neither appropriate nor possible. Another person mentioned that the Arctic has relatively few minor maritime disputes, so new international agreements are possible and even desirable in the region. For example, agreements on the rights of Indigenous peoples, the environment, and science could and should involve non-Arctic states and such agreements might be easier to reach before significant development of transportation routes or extraction of resources.

On development it was questioned how there can be sustainable and environmentally friendly development of resources that respects Indigenous rights when development projects occur at state-to-state or company-to-company levels that do not directly include Indigenous peoples. One person responded that Japan can use its experience in dealing with Indigenous peoples in northern Japan to inform its social science research in the Arctic. In response to the above comment on the Arctic as the “common heritage of mankind,” one person clarified that we do not yet know if any area in the Arctic can be classified as such because all of the coastal states have yet to submit continental shelf information. Nonetheless East Asian countries should not be too concerned with this because they are already participating in the Arctic. Although Arctic countries have reached agreements related to search and rescue and oil spill response, this is not because the region is closed.

Participants also raised the question of timelines for developing shipping and trade routes in the Arctic. Is there an awareness of the inherent difficulties and dangers of northern shipping routes? Will plans for scientific cooperation include collaboration in social sciences? The later point intersects with concerns related to respect for northerners. Some participants disagreed over the meaning and limitations of observer states in the Arctic Council. Some remarked that East Asian interest in the Arctic Council, given its limited capacity and power, may represent little more than an attempt at gaining status and prestige.

### **Session Two: Arctic Powers with Gateways to the Pacific on East Asia – Arctic Relations**

The session started with a presentation on Canada's Northern Strategy and its current position, policy and action in the Arctic. This was followed by brief summaries of papers presented at session two at the Whitehorse workshop before the conversation opened up to the group.

Some participants brought up the subject of extended continental shelf claims. Arctic coastal states are likely to make claims beyond the 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ) but their outer limits remain uncertain. Canada, Denmark, Russia, and the US are investing heavily in research to support their submissions to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, but since science can be interpreted differently, especially from the perspective of law, it is hard to predict how such claims will unfold.

Discussion then shifted toward President Putin when one participant openly asked the group how Asian countries and the Russian Far East interpreted Putin's speeches on the Arctic. Responders to this question were sceptical of Putin's rhetoric and popularity. The reality of the Russian north and Far East is different than what Putin says. The Far East is similar to Alaska in that there is still direct control from Moscow, but the distance provides space for independence. The Russian Far East is in a good position to generate economic opportunities that will enable more regional self-sufficiency. How Putin will react to changes in the north and east is yet to be seen because he is a flexible leader that vacillates between the left and right. Another commentator agreed with these general observations and added that Putin becomes more authoritarian when he feels threatened. This could explain his move to suspend RAIPON (Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North) in 2012. Nearly twenty percent of Russian GDP is generated from northern resources but very little comes from secondary industry in the region. This suggests opportunities for East Asian countries to further engage with Russia to develop industry.

Another participant was curious about Canada's position that the Northwest Passage is Canadian internal waters. One commentator emphasized that this is not a unilateral claim but follows international law. Canada, however, has never engaged in serious discussion about whether it even wants to encourage international navigation through its northern waters. The nature of past and current investment suggests that it is not interested in developing it as such. This may mean that Canada will miss out on economic opportunities, but it will not erode Canada's sovereignty.

One commentator stated that the Arctic Council has an important role but it is not likely that it will turn into something more institutionalized that creates laws. Rather, it will continue to be an informal forum for high-level dialogue on Arctic issues. Another person agreed and expanded on this comment. The Arctic Council will not likely change significantly and it is not in need of reform. Instead, there is room for small changes that could improve it. Some recent advances have already been made. For example, the recent establishment of a permanent secretariat in Norway makes the Council look like a more formal institution but it does not fundamentally alter it or mean that it aspires to be an international organization. In terms of supporting new observers, Canada's position remains unclear but one person anticipated that Canada will accept East Asian bids. In contrast to this, one participant reminded the group that the original intention of the Arctic Council was to build an international organization. Another person asked why Japan attended the initial Arctic Council meeting but never followed up until recently, to which another answered that at that time Japan saw it as a regional organization.

During these discussions, it was argued that we cannot forget that Russia is the biggest and most important player. It is the Arctic state with the largest Arctic territory, population, economic development, and icebreaking capacity. Accordingly, Russia is the major player in all serious Arctic discussions. Transpolar shipping through the Northern Sea Route is generally discussed as a Russian issue, but it also involves the United States because of the Bering Strait -- a potential choke point. In practice, however, Russian and US coast guards get along quite well in this area (perhaps reflective of the distance between Moscow and Washington and the Bering Strait). Finally, it was discussed that the US has had struck a better strategic balance between the Pacific and Atlantic and that Canada has historically focused more on the Atlantic. This is likely to change in the twenty-first century.

### **Session Three: Indigenous Peoples, East Asian Engagement, and Global International Relations in the Arctic**

Before brief summaries of the presentations from Session Four at the Whitehorse workshop, two main points were set up to spur further debate. First, it was suggested that the topic of Indigenous peoples should be the first or second most important item for conversation when we discuss East Asia and the Arctic. Second, the assertion was made that East Asian countries should be granted observer status in



the Arctic Council. On the first point it was noted that there is a general fear in non-Indigenous sectors of the Arctic that they lack competence and expertise to deal with East Asia; that Indigenous peoples fear that they will be pitted against each other; and that Indigenous peoples do not exist in the literature on East Asia's Arctic interest apart from passing mention in policy papers and political statements indicating that they should be engaged. A participant asked if East Asian countries have a research agenda for engaging Indigenous peoples and whether they can provide a deeper explanation of how they respect indigenous rights. One person responded that in China the study of Indigenous peoples is still limited but there are a few scholars studying the issue. This interest would likely increase – or *should* increase. One participant was sceptical of the competency behind Japanese, Chinese and Korean statements that they will respect Indigenous peoples rights. Such a position sounds positive because it is a hot topic and that these countries will have to engage Indigenous peoples in the Arctic as they move forward, but national histories of Indigenous peoples in East Asia or East Asian corporate relations with Indigenous peoples outside their countries have historically indicated disregard and disrespect. For example, when Japan says that they can use their experience of dealing with the Ainu in Japan to support Indigenous rights in the Arctic, we should not forget that Ainu–Japanese state historical relations are complicated and not overtly positive especially in terms of respect for rights and culture. If East Asian states are serious about Indigenous rights and Indigenous research they will need to expand on what they mean by Indigenous rights and demonstrate domestic respect for these rights before they can seriously and positively engage with Indigenous peoples internationally. Other people observed that positive relations could be practically implemented by investing in or collaborating with Indigenous research initiatives and programs that would support the interests of Indigenous peoples, all the while remembering that Indigenous peoples in the north are not a homogenous group.

A participant raised the point that some Indigenous peoples feel that their voices will be diluted with the addition of more states into the Arctic Council. In response, various participants noted that historically observers have had very little voice in the Arctic Council. While observers have been asked to make statements in meetings in the past they are usually not perceived as significant players at the Council. There is the possibility that, like Germany, future observers may become unsatisfied with their position as an observer and seek a greater degree of participation. This could increase concerns about East Asian countries' motivations for observer status. Another person disagreed with this and said that observers do have a voice and that they are not ignored. One person supported East Asian countries' push to gain observer status because 1) they will gain little more than prestige, 2) the Arctic Council is not the most important organization in the Arctic, especially when it comes to maritime transportation, 3) ignoring or alienating East Asia is not good politics, and 4) including them could undermine the Arctic Council's position as a premier organization.

In relation to perceived fear of China in Canada, one person reminded the group that China is still a developing country with serious internal challenges of poverty in its rural areas. Despite popular misconceptions to the contrary, China devotes little interest to the Arctic compared to other foreign policy priorities. Nonetheless, China does have a direct interest in the region because if sea levels rise one metre this will translate into massive problems for Chinese coastal areas. Since China thinks Indigenous peoples are the most important participants in the Arctic and that the Arctic environment is important for China's future, it seeks participation with the Arctic Council because it is the most important organization for environmental development that respects Indigenous peoples. As for Korea's submission for observer status, one person said that although it is likely that the Arctic may become a high priority for future Korean shipping and trade, more thought is required on what Korea will gain from further participation. This person indicated that it should more clearly state why it wants to be an observer and that it should look more into the issue of the well being of Indigenous peoples. If Korea wants to take part in the making of the future Arctic regime to help prevent inherent risks of shipping and infrastructure in advance, the policy details need further elaboration. Some participants thought that these interests in the Arctic could simply be part of a trend that will fade away in several years. They questioned why East Asian countries are interested in the Arctic but not the Mediterranean. After all, if they are truly interested in the environment and climate change, then being in the Arctic Council will not help. After all, the forces of climate change originate outside the region. Although the Arctic will remain an important barometer of climate change and its impacts on local ecosystems and peoples, mitigation efforts will have to come from – and be dedicated to practises - outside the region. For these reasons, some participants found it difficult to take East Asian countries seriously when they indicate that they place a high priority on the environment and Indigenous rights.

The discussion of session three concluded with a few final thoughts. From a traditional security perspective, the Arctic is a relatively calm region and is likely to remain so. There are no significant outstanding territorial disputes that are likely to lead to military conflict, and the region's geostrategic significance declined with the end of the Cold War. The Arctic continues to attract attention from non-traditional security perspectives, however, such as environmental security and human security. Participants noted that even though the Arctic Council may not have traditional power, it is a creative organization with significant moral authority. This helps to explain why East Asian states are interested in observer status, even if the Arctic Council may not develop quickly enough to meet the interests and expectations of all concerned parties and more attention should be devoted to the evolving *political* role of science in that forum.

## **Concluding Session: Asia's Future in the Arctic – Practical Steps and Real Barriers**

The workshop concluded with each participant voicing their impression of the day's conversations. Some participants used the opportunity to summarize their arguments and recommendations, while others expressed the need for further work on the topic to inform future policy making.

## **Appendix A: Part II Participants – Held under the Chatham House Rule so Participant names cannot be published**

## **Appendix B: Part II Agenda**

Venue: Balsillie School of International Affairs  
57 Erb Street West, Waterloo, ON N2L 6C2 Canada

### **MARCH 5, 2013 (Tuesday)**

**9:30 OPENING SESSION: East Asia and the Arctic**  
Introduction

**9:45 SESSION ONE: Arctic Thaw and East Asia**

- Asian Interests and involvement in the Arctic
- The Changing Arctic and Its Implications to East Asia

Q: What are emerging/possible policy implications and/or your policy recommendations to the concerned governments/parties?

\* Participants from the foreign ministries of Japan, China and Korea, and the presenters from Sessions One and Three of the Whitehorse workshop will be given chances to speak briefly first.

**11:00 Coffee Break**

**11:15 SESSION TWO: Arctic Powers with Gateways to the Pacific on East Asia-Arctic Relations**

- Concerns and interests of USA, Canada & Russia on the East Asian nations' involvement in the Arctic affairs

Q: What are emerging/possible policy implications and/or your policy recommendations to the concerned governments/parties?

\* Participants with government affiliation and presenters from Session Two of the Whitehorse workshop will be given chances to speak briefly first.

**12:30 Lunch**

**13:30 SESSION THREE: Indigenous Peoples, East Asian Engagement, and Global International Relations in the Arctic**

- Concerns and interests of Indigenous peoples on the East Asian nations' involvement in the Arctic affairs
- East Asian Engagement in the Arctic Council, Global Geo-Politics of the Arctic

Q: What are emerging/possible policy implications and/or your policy recommendations to the concerned governments/parties?

\* Participants with government affiliation and presenters from Session Four of the Whitehorse workshop will be given chances to speak briefly first.

**15:00 Coffee Break**

**15:15 Concluding Session: Asia's Future in the Arctic -- Practical Steps and Real Barriers**

**16:00 Depart for the Airport/Hotel**

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***- Workshop Report***

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