The rise of China in the Arctic? Domestic motives, actors and international context

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Abstract
Over the past decade, China has been steadily increasing its presence in the Arctic region and came to call itself an Arctic stakeholder. However, Beijing still lacks an official Arctic policy and, at present, it seems that such white paper is in the early stages of its drafting. At the same time, there seem to be several actors within China that are interested in the Arctic region and have the capacity to influence China`s Arctic decision-making process. As such, this research explores the motives behind China`s Arctic engagement, identifying the main domestic actors influencing China`s foreign policy in the region and reflects on linkages between China`s proactive diplomacy and the Arctic. As research analyzing Chinese foreign policy, this study also aspires to further develop our understanding of the process of state policy transformation in an era of increasing fragmentation, decentralization and internationalization.

Keywords
China, Arctic region, Chinese foreign policy actors, Neoclassical Realism, Arctic Council, Fen Fa You Wei, 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative, Arctic shipping, energy security

Introduction
The warming of the global climate is unequivocal leading to the increase of temperatures over the Arctic land mass by up to 5°C.1 Arctic summers of the 20th century have been the warmest in the past 400 years.2 As a consequence, the size of the Arctic sea ice has been steadily declining and in September 2012 it reached its "lowest seasonal minimum extent in the satellite record since 1979."3 The Greenlandic ice sheet together with glaciers in Alaska and Northern Canada have been losing mass and thus directly contributing to the global sea

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level rise. In addition, Arctic permafrost is thawing and in the process, releasing greenhouse gases like methane into the atmosphere. All of these changes will have a serious local as well as global environmental impact, including ocean acidification, vegetation changes, coastal erosion and changes to the marine food chain.

Paradoxically, these environmental transformations coupled with the forces of globalization are the main drivers contributing to the opening of the Arctic region and the new economic opportunities stemming from it. The High North holds large deposits of oil and gas, gas hydrates, rare earth elements, coal, iron ore, nickel, cobalt, zinc, lead, copper, gold, silver, platinum and diamonds. The shrinking of the Arctic sea ice also leads to the emergence of new shipping routes in the Arctic Ocean. It is estimated that by using the shorter Northern Sea Route (NSR), running across the northern coast of Russia, between Northern Europe and Asia "one saves about 40% of travel time and subsequent fuel and freight shipping costs." Additionally, some studies have suggested, that there might be a northward migration of fish species into the Arctic Ocean deeming commercial exploitation of these waters more profitable.

The Arctic region has also attracted considerable attention from many states across the Asian continent. Among the non-Arctic Asian states, China occupies a prominent position due to its growing influence in world politics and expanding military capabilities. Over the past decade, Beijing has been steadily increasing its presence and activities in the High North and came to call itself an important Arctic stakeholder and a Near-Arctic state. However, China still has not articulated any official Arctic policy and, at present, it seems that such white paper is in the early stages of its drafting. At the same time, there seem to be several actors

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5 Ibid., 38.
6 For the most comprehensive analysis of Arctic climate change see Hassol, *Impacts of a warming Arctic: Arctic Climate Impact Assessment.*
within China that are interested in the Arctic region and that have the latent capacities to influence China’s Arctic decision-making process. While there is a growing volume of scholarship that is analyzing Asian and Chinese interests in the Arctic region, there seems to be a gap in our understanding of which actors within China have what interests and how they can influence the official decision-making process; what role does the Arctic play in China’s foreign policy and where to place it within the context of China’s emergence as a new global player. Against this background, this research paper will seek to explore the following interrelated questions: What are the motives behind China’s engagement with the Arctic? Who are the main domestic actors influencing China’s foreign policy in the region? How does the Arctic reflect in China’s "new" proactive foreign policy? What kind of Arctic power will China be? The unsure future developments of the Arctic region coupled with the uncertainty about how China will use its growing power and influence create a compelling impulse to examine China’s intentions in the High North.  

This research paper will proceed through six parts. First, it will establish Neoclassical Realism as a theoretical framework with a brief subsection on methodology. A short overview of China’s polar hardware will follow. Part number three will discuss China’s Arctic interests followed by a summary of Chinese domestic actors that could strive to influence China’s foreign policy directions in the Arctic. The fifth part will show some parallels between China’s Arctic engagement and its "new" apparently more proactive foreign policy. The research paper will wrap up by some concluding remarks.

**Theoretical guidance and Methodology**

This research employs Neoclassical Realism (NCR) as a viable theory of foreign policy that seeks to elucidate foreign policy decisions of states. NCR rejects the strict privileging of systemic factors over the first and second level variables found in Structural Realism. Instead, proponents of NCR assume that systemic effects on policy are somewhat indirect, problematic, complex and subjective. NCR also puts forward a 'top-down' conception of the state, meaning that the systemic pressures need to be filtered through the foreign policy

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executive (the head of the government, ministers, senior civilian and military officials) charged with the conceptualization and implementation of the country's foreign policy or grand strategy.\textsuperscript{14}

Nevertheless, the crucial factor recognized by NCR is that these foreign policy executives exist within a complex set of domestic political relationships that constrain them in implementing foreign policy choices.\textsuperscript{15} The executives do not live in a political vacuum, they can "be influenced in their thinking by the cumulative actions of actors as diverse as policy makers, lobbyists, citizen's groups and businesses, and by the process of bargaining with them."\textsuperscript{16} It is for this reason that NCR "does not see states as simply aggregating the demands of different societal interest groups or economic classes" but rather "leaders define the 'national interest' and conduct foreign policy based upon their assessment of relative power and other state's intentions, but always subject to domestic pressures."\textsuperscript{17} This means, broadly speaking, two things: first, it points out the importance of sub-state actors and, second, it shows that processes like foreign policy implementation can be very difficult, engaging in the bargaining process the state's leadership and a whole variety of other societal actors.\textsuperscript{18} In the context of this research, it is important to consider a particular set of domestic actors that have the power to shape the understanding of international conditions and help shape foreign policy. These are local governments and the business sector as well as research institutions, academia, think tanks and media since it has been reported that Chinese leaders do consult researchers, leading media figures and intellectuals when deliberating foreign policy issues.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{Methodology.} The data for this research paper were collected via open source, primarily university and think tank, document analysis and participant observation at conferences during the year 2015 in Norway - the Arctic Frontiers and the High North Dialogue, in Iceland - the Arctic Circle Assembly and in Singapore - the Arctic Circle Forum. Documents analyzed included official policy documents, peer-reviewed articles and popular media pieces. The Chinese sources were searched for and gathered through Zhongguo Zhiwang - the China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database. Participant observation at the


\textsuperscript{15} Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman, “Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy,” in \textit{Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy}, ed. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 25.


\textsuperscript{17} Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman, “Introduction: Neoclassical realism, the state, and foreign policy,” 25 - 26.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 26.

four aforementioned conferences gave the author access to information and insights provided by foreign and Chinese China-Arctic specialists, high profile delegations and Chinese Arctic stakeholder groups. Additionally, the author benefited from informal discussions during the conference networking events as well as regular plenary and breakout sessions.

China and the changing Arctic

China has been conducting Arctic related scientific research for many years now. In 1999, China organized its first scientific expedition to the Arctic and consequently in July 2004, it set up its first Arctic research station, the Huanghe (Yellow River) station, at Ny-Ålesund in Norway’s Svalbard archipelago.\(^{20}\) As of May 2016, China has conducted 6 Arctic expeditions. Out of the 6 expeditions, the 5\(^{th}\) one in particular gained worldwide attention as it was the first time in history for a Chinese vessel to traverse the NSR from Qingdao to Iceland.\(^{21}\)

China is running a relatively extensive scientific program in the polar regions. Nevertheless, it is important to realize that both in terms of scientific focus and funding, Antarctica is being preferred. The main objective of the Chinese Arctic scientific research is climate change with a special focus on how this will affect China in a warming world.\(^{22}\) Other research fields include meteorology, glaciology, marine biology, atmospheric studies and the Arctic environment.\(^{23}\) To attain its research goals, in addition to the Huanghe Arctic research station, China is also conducting polar exploration and research onboard the research vessel Xuelong (Snow Dragon). It is a floating laboratory with state of the art facilities and equipment for polar research. Moreover, China has an ever-increasing network of research institutes, centers and universities that devote their resources to the understanding of the Arctic region.

China is also investing in new polar equipment and building new polar bases and observatories. In the Arctic, China is looking into the possibility of building an observatory facility in Canada\(^{24}\) and in Iceland, the China-Iceland Joint Aurora Observatory should be operational in the fall of 2016.\(^{25}\) China is also currently constructing, with an international

partner from Finland, its second US$300 million icebreaker that is expected to be ready in a few years and "It has also bought a high-tech fixed-wing aircraft, outfitted in the United States, for taking sensitive scientific soundings from the ice."\textsuperscript{26}

**Motives behind China`s engagement with the Arctic region**

NCR posits that there are several societal actors within a state that can influence or shape a country`s foreign policy. In the case of China and the Arctic, to identify such actors, we need to first analyze the motives and interests behind China`s engagement with the Arctic. As such, there are multiple motivations that drive China`s ever-increasing presence in the Arctic region. In this research paper, four such motivations will be discussed. First, China has been trying to justify its activities in the High North by the need to study and further understand the Arctic climate change. China believes that "the Arctic has great scientific value as an indicator of global climate change."\textsuperscript{27} China`s scientist are trying to identify the linkages between changes in China`s own climate and the disappearing Arctic sea ice and its potential effects on China`s agricultural production.\textsuperscript{28} Several have attributed some abnormal weather patterns like record rainfalls with massive flooding and harsh winter storms with freezing temperature in Southern China in the past few years to the warming Arctic.\textsuperscript{29} Considerations of the possible impacts of climate change on China loom high in Chinese national security thinking as such impacts could worsen already existing problems like weak political institutions, ineffective crisis management capabilities, poverty, water shortage and environmental degradation potentially leading to social unrests and political instability.\textsuperscript{30}

At the same time Brady argues that in terms of science and technology, the Arctic is crucial to China`s space science program, precise weather forecasting and for the roll out of the Beidou navigational system.\textsuperscript{31} In a similar manner, Yang Jian, the Vice-president of the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) adds that "The Arctic can become an important testing ground for China to become a pioneer in specific fields of science and


\textsuperscript{30} Jakobson, "China`s security and the Arctic," 157-159.

technology. Overall, China’s Arctic scientific activities and climate change research serve as a stepping stone and rationale not only for China’s more visible presence in the High North but also as an opportunity to create new partnerships with Arctic states.

Second, China is very much interested in the commercial development and utilization of the Arctic region. In terms of shipping, China is considering the possibility of expanding trade routes via the Arctic ocean (primarily the NSR) as the disappearing sea ice renders these routes navigable during the summer months. According to Zhang Ming, the Chinese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, "China pays close attention to the potential major impact of those sea routes on global shipping and trade." COSCO, China’s biggest shipping company, has already conducted two shipping trials in 2013 and 2015 to assess the feasibility of the NSR. It has also declared its interest in launching the first regular Asia to Europe sailings via the Arctic ocean and also is "considering to buy secondhand ships or build new ships for the potential routine services." Moreover, China is concerned with maritime transportation security as a large amount of its trade, energy and raw materials flow through Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) that are foreign controlled (the US Navy), traverse choke points (the Strait of Malacca) and are threatened by non-state actors (pirates). The opening of the Arctic sea routes could, to a certain degree, alleviate these concerns.

In terms of natural resources, China has been actively assessing the possibilities the Arctic has to offer as a region that could provide supplies for its economic growth. At present, it seems that the focus of China’s Arctic resource diplomacy is mainly Russia, Iceland and Greenland. In Russia, the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) owns 20% of the Yamal LNG Project and in 2015, China’s Silk Road Fund purchased additional 9.9% of shares in that project. In view of the ‘Western’ sanctions imposed on Russia after its annexation of Crimea in 2014, the Russian government is prepared to grant Chinese companies a key role in

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36 Marc Lanteigne, China’s emerging Arctic strategies: economics and institutions (University of Iceland Press, 2014), 8.
the development of the Russian Arctic shelf so that it can obtain the much needed equipment for its Arctic projects.\textsuperscript{38} In Iceland, the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) created a partnership with a Reykjavik based energy company Eykon and a Norwegian firm Petoro to jointly explore for oil and gas the Dreki region which is located offshore between Iceland and Norway.\textsuperscript{39} However, it seems that Greenland has the biggest potential to become the focus of China’s Arctic resource interests as Chinese companies have been prospecting there for Rare Earth Elements (REEs), uranium and iron ore.\textsuperscript{40} Considering China’s dependency on foreign natural resources and growing energy demands to sustain its economic growth coupled with Beijing’s political legitimacy being reliant on such economic performance makes the Arctic a much needed and welcomed option in China’s global search for resources.

Third, with such scientific and commercial interests in the region, China is consequently looking into ways how to increase its influence in Arctic governance. China is already represented in a number of governance mechanisms that directly or indirectly pertain to the Arctic such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the Svalbard Treaty or the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and regards them as the basic legal framework for addressing Arctic issues.\textsuperscript{41} Nevertheless, when it comes to the Arctic Council (AC)\textsuperscript{42}, China remains on the sidelines. China was admitted as an observer to the AC in May 2013 (together with India, Italy, Japan Singapore and South Korea), however only after several years of waiting, a few unsuccessful bids and most importantly, after accepting the so-called 'Nuuk Criteria'.\textsuperscript{43} Yet, even as an observer, China still has only limited influence and power in shaping the policies regarding the region as "the primary role of observers is to observe the work of the Arctic Council"\textsuperscript{44} and the voting rights retain in the hands of the Arctic states. While this situation might not be optimal for China, at present,
Beijing has reassured to "uphold the Arctic governance system based on existing international law" and "recognizes the important status of the Arctic Council in Arctic governance." At the same time, China has stated that the rights of non-Arctic countries and the overall interest of the international community in the Arctic should be respected as well.

Fourth, as a country that is quickly catching up with the other Great Powers of the present international system, China seeks to gradually increase its international influence, status and prestige. The Arctic region is yet another region where China is realizing these ambitions. To use Wegge’s words, "As polar research generally demands specialized capabilities, and potentially has a high profile domestically as well as on the global stage, the status dimension should not be ignored when seeking to understand why China engages in Arctic research." Moreover, as China’s Asian rivals - Japan and India - have also stated their interest in the Arctic region, China’s increased visibility in the Arctic could be perceived as a 'status competition' with these countries. As for the role the Arctic is playing in the strategic planning of the Chinese Navy, such considerations remain in the sphere of speculations. Nevertheless, even in this area, China is 'breaking new ground'. In September 2015, five Chinese navy ships entered US territorial waters off the coast of Alaska just as President Obama was wrapping up his visit there, and a month later, three Chinese navy vessels made goodwill visits to three Arctic states - Denmark, Finland and Sweden.

**Domestic actors influencing Chinese foreign policy in the Arctic**

The foreign and security policy decision making process in China is notoriously known for its non-transparency and opaqueness, however, research in recent years has shown that because of pluralization, decentralization and fragmentation in that foreign policy making process, there seems to be a growing number of new actors that have the power to influence decisions being made at the top. These 'foreign policy actors on the margins' or 'outer circles actors' include

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45 Zhang, "China in the Arctic: Practices and Policies."
46 Ibid.
48 Ibid, 87-88.
economic and business entities such as China’s large state owned enterprises (SOEs), financial institutions and investment funds; local governments, especially the coastal provinces and cities; research institutions and universities such as China Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), Fudan University etc. and other societal actors like the media and netizens.\(^5\) Such a flurry of new foreign policy actors can also be identified with regards to China and the Arctic region. However, while considering the emergence of these new players in the Chinese foreign policy making process, we need to keep in mind that Chinese foreign policy decisions are made by the traditional actors such as the core leader, the Politburo and its Standing Committee, the State Council and the Central Military Commission (CMC), while the new - nontraditional - actors seek to influence these decisions.\(^5\)

At the official - traditional - level, China’s Arctic policies are handled by several bodies. The key governmental agency for handling China’s Arctic affairs is the State Oceanic Administration (SOA) which administratively reports to the Ministry of Land and Resources.\(^5\) Under the SAO, the Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration (CAA) "performs the function of organizing Arctic and Antarctic expeditions and administering the related Arctic and Antarctic affairs on behalf of SOA."\(^5\) The SOA also heads the Chinese Advisory Committee for Polar Research (CACPR), which is an important coordinating body for polar affairs within the Chinese government.\(^5\) There are also other agencies and ministries within China’s State Council - the highest governmental entity responsible for day-to-day management of the country - that support and fund China’s polar activities, such as the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Commerce, the National Natural Science Administration.\(^5\) Within the Council, the Ministry

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\(^5\) The term 'foreign policy actors on the margins' is used by Jakobson and Knox, see Jakobson and Knox, "New Foreign Policy Actors in China," 1-5. Shambaugh is using a conceptualization of five concentric circles, the outer three circles being the 'new foreign policy actors.' Also Shambaugh is putting SOEs and local governments into one circle, here, they are treated as separate entities. See Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power*, 61-72.


\(^5\) Jakobson and Peng, "China’s Arctic Aspirations," 3.

of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is the main organization that represents China internationally and is responsible for China’s international Arctic cooperation. At the unofficial level, **economic and business entities** are China’s most visible actors in the Arctic region. In areas and with states where China has predominantly economic ties and interests, the activities of China’s SOEs need to be taken into consideration as their motives have a growing influence on policies. Moreover, in instances like decisions over China’s energy security policy, "SOEs can exert a limited influence on foreign policy because SOE leaders are members of official decision-making bodies." In the case of China’s commercial activities in the Arctic, the composition of China’s delegation at the 2015 Arctic Circle conference in Iceland provides clues as to which companies are trying to exert some influence over China’s Arctic directions as COSCO and CNPC representatives were in attendance and also presented their companies’ Arctic views and projects at the official China Country session. Only recently, the China Insurance Investment Ltd comprising of more than 40 Chinese insurance companies and asset managers (both state and private) have decided to make yet another Chinese investment in the Russian Arctic at Yamal, thus becoming another actor form the business sphere with stakes in the Arctic. In the same manner, China’s mining companies could try to shape Beijing’s Greenland strategy.

**Local governments.** Since 1978, China’s provinces have become increasingly important political and economic actors in Beijing’s foreign relations. Chinese local governments, border and coastal provinces in particular, have had a tendency to push Chinese foreign policy in the direction of international integration as they "have an interest in economic liberalization, including lowering of trade barriers and promotion of foreign direct investment." With regards to China’s provinces and the opening of the Arctic region, the most enthusiastic is the North-East region, especially Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces which are seeking new export markets and shorter trading routes. Jilin, a land locked province, has

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60 Ibid.
61 The program of the 2015 Arctic Circle Conference is available here: http://arcticcircle.org/sites/arcticcircle/files/2015ArcticCircleProgram01.pdf.
64 Jakobson and Dean Knox, "New Foreign Policy Actors in China," 33.
always been very eager to get access to sea as its Fangchuan village in the Yanbian Prefecture, in the east of the province, is just 15 km from the Sea of Japan, moreover, the province is positioned well geographically to develop a modern logistics. The provincial leaders realize this situation as Jilin is planning to work with ports in Russia (Zarubino) or Rajin in North Korea to develop shorter trading routes to Europe via the NSR. It has been reported that China was building a bridge across the Tumen River at the Quanhe border crossing with North Korea and a road to Rajin. This could have implications for the whole North-East Asia as Jilin might try to push the Central Government in Beijing to promote economic liberalization in North Korea.

Research Institutions and universities. With China’s global diplomatic network and the increasingly complex nature of international relations, Chinese leaders, the government and even the military need more information, analysis and advice to correctly assess, advance and safeguard China’s interests. In many instances, the decision-making institutions lack the appropriate expertise. As a consequence, when deliberating policies, they turn to research institutions, universities or academics for consultations. There are numerous ways in which these institutions or universities can influence Chinese foreign policy decision making such as participation in government meetings, inclusion in meetings with leaders, personal connections, briefings to politburo study sessions, participation in document drafting etc.

In the area of China’s Arctic research, several research institutions and universities, with a potential to influence Beijing’s policies towards the High North, exist. The Polar Research Institute of China (PRIC) is China’s primary research center in dealings with the polar regions. It also conducts Chinese Arctic social science research and according to Jakobson and Peng, "the PRIC links Chinese policymakers with academia." The SIIS, one of the seven most influential research organizations in China, runs a Center for Maritime and Polar Studies which conducts research in fields of maritime and Arctic affairs, Chinese Arctic

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70 Jakobson and Peng, "China’s Arctic Aspirations," 5.
policies and the cooperation between China and Arctic countries. University affiliated research organizations include the Center for Polar and Oceanic Studies at Tongji University, the Research Institute of Polar Law and Politics at Ocean University of China and the Shanghai Jiao Tong Center for Polar and Deep Ocean Development. These organizations together with PRIC, SIIS and six other Nordic institutions constitute the China-Nordic Arctic Research Center (CNARC) which main research themes include: (1) Arctic climate change and its impacts, (2) Arctic resources, shipping and economic cooperation, and (3) Arctic policy-making and legislation.

Because Chinese university researchers are engaged both in publishing their Arctic related research and producing confidential policy recommendations for internal purposes, it would be meaningful to analyze their writings to see what notions might be included in such recommendations. There are many topics present in the writings of Chinese Arctic scholars, such as the potential impact Arctic oil and gas development on China, analysis of non-Arctic states’ participation in Arctic affairs, criticisms of the ‘Nuuk criteria,’ displeasures with the present Arctic governance structure, but also the Arctic in the context of China’s One Belt, One Road Initiative etc. However, one of the most persistent themes in these academic writings are the criticism of the Arctic governance as not being beneficial to China, the need for China to publish an official Arctic policy paper and to increase its ‘hua yu quan-right to speak’ in Arctic affairs. Such themes give us a clear indication as to in which direction would the academics influence Chinese Arctic policies.

Media and netizens. Despite being at the very end of the line of ‘foreign policy actors on the margins' and seemingly having the least clout to influence Chinese foreign policy, it is becoming increasingly apparent that at certain occasions the 'public sphere' can affect policy.

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Moreover, according to Jakobson and Knox, "it is increasingly apparent that within the Chinese media and online community there are groups that strive to influence the formulation of foreign policy."\(^{79}\) If this is also the case of Chinese Arctic policy requires further research that, for the moment, the author has not undertaken. Nevertheless, the Arctic makes recurring appearances throughout Chinese media. The Global Times (Huanqiu Shibao) or the China Daily (Zhongguo Ribao) inform about Arctic affairs, magazines like the China Economic Weekly (Zhongguo Jingji Zhoukan) bring interviews with Chinese Arctic scholars, TV shows about the Arctic region are being shot and broadcasted to millions of Chinese viewers and both Arctic and Antarctic expeditions undertaken by China’s icebreaker Xuelong make national news. A quick search on China’s most popular internet search engine - Baidu - shows 76 000 000 hits for the word Beiji (Arctic), suggesting that the High North has reached China’s public sphere.

**The Arctic and contemporary Chinese foreign policy**

In November 2014, Xi gave a speech at the Central Conference on Work Relating to Foreign Affairs held in Beijing which is being regarded "as the most authoritative, comprehensive statement on China’s foreign relations and diplomacy under the current administration."\(^{80}\) Several comments in the speech stand out. Xi presented China’s definition of its external environment as well as China’s place in the changing world and "the unprecedented role Chinese foreign policy must play in advancing and protecting China’s most vital interests at home and abroad."\(^{81}\) Xi highlighted the growing trend toward a multipolar and development oriented world, the ongoing process of economic globalization and the general trend of prosperity and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.\(^{82}\)

Another important feature put forth is China’s growing interdependence with the world as "its interactions with the international community have become closer than ever before. China's dependence on the world and its involvement in international affairs are deepening, so are the world's dependence on China and its impact on China."\(^{83}\) Swaine suggests that this is a


\(^{81}\) Ibid.


\(^{83}\) Ibid.
clear indication that "China is developing the ability to appreciably influence the world." Other important features of the speech include, among many others, "the importance of pursuing win-win cooperation and promoting a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation," "work hard to form a network of high interdependence and mutual benefit through extensive and mutually beneficial business and technological cooperation," "advance multilateral diplomacy, work to reform the international system and global governance, and increase the representation and say of China and other developing countries," and "step up results-oriented cooperation, actively advance the building of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road." It seems that the underlying notion of his speech is China’s movement away from its longstanding strategy of keeping a low profile internationally, usually referred to as Tao Guang Yang Hui. As a matter of fact, some Chinese scholars have already argued that China is replacing the Tao Guang Yang Hui strategy for a new one - Fen Fa You Wei - striving for achievement - as the underlying principle behind China’s diplomacy. Such a strategy "aims at making more friend by letting others benefit from China’s growth" and "increasing China’s strategic credibility, which includes providing security protection for neighbors." Going forward, China’s 'One Belt, One Road' initiative should be regarded as an important part of this China’s "new" foreign policy strategy.

The 'One Belt, One Road' Initiative (yidai, yilu) consists of two separate policies, the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. They were both introduced in 2013 and picture a form of a highly integrated, mutually beneficial and cooperative economic corridors, maritime and land based, that would link China with the developed markets of Europe. China portrayed this initiative as a focal point of its diplomacy in 2014 and 2015 and "as an essential element of Beijing’s attempt to deepen economic reform within

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85 "Xi eyes more enabling intl environment for China’s peaceful development," Xinhuanet.
88 Yan, "From Keeping a Low Profile to Striving for Achievement," 160 and 182.
China and stimulate development in China’s western regions." The initiative is also regarded as a tool for China to strengthen its political and economic influence over its strategic neighborhood.

How does this "new", more proactive Chinese foreign policy reflect itself in China’s Arctic engagement? The most important links between the Arctic region and China’s ‘new’ foreign policy can be found in the three principles China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi laid out when addressing the 2015 Arctic Circle Assembly through a video message: respect, cooperation and win-win. China respects the Arctic countries’ sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction in the Arctic, however, it also demands to the rights of non-Arctic states, including China, and the overall interest of the international community in the Arctic such as navigation and scientific research. Such demands could be seen in the light of China’s concept of building "a new type of international relations" (xinxing guoji guanxi), which heavily draws on its earlier concept of "a new type of great power relations" (xinxing daguo guanxi) which in turn is stressing the need for ‘mutual respect’. As for cooperation and win-win, both concepts are the underlying themes, if not the most prominently proclaimed ones, in China’s Arctic approach and overall Chinese foreign policy.

China also declared its willingness to further advance its multilateral diplomacy. Such advancements are clearly visible in the Arctic region, especially but not exclusively, in Arctic scientific research. Much attention is being paid to the state of Sino-Nordic relations as materialized in the China Iceland free trade agreement, the opening of the CNARC or the construction of the aurora observatory in Karholl, Iceland. On the other hand, the Sino-Russian Arctic cooperation seems to be focusing more on economic opportunities as Russian has much to offer to China in terms of natural resources and shipping.

Also, while acknowledging the important role the Arctic Council is playing in the Arctic region, China is proposing that all Arctic stakeholders, including non-Arctic states "further strengthen communication and coordination to build a cooperation framework at global, regional and national levels, expand channels for governmental and nongovernmental..."
cooperation.’’ Such statement carriers a subtle hint that China might not be overly satisfied with its current position in the Arctic Council and that current governance system in the Arctic might be reformed which, again, is in line with Xi’s call to “work to reform the international system and global governance, and increase the representation and say of China.”

However, the Arctic’s potential to play a more substantial role in Chinese foreign policy lies in the possibility of turning the NSR into a third road of the ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative. Such a possibility is not as farfetched as it might seem. As noted earlier, China’s Northeast provinces, especially Jilin, are enthusiastic about the possible commercial development of the NSR and the benefits it would bring to their economies. When China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Commerce and the National Development and Reform Commission jointly published the "Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road" in March 2015, a section of that plan was specially devoted to the provinces of Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning and their connections to Russia’s Far East. As a matter of fact, the Port of Dalian in Liaoning province has published its own vision of the 'Northeast New Silk Road' which is proposing the development of the NSR under the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative.

**Concluding remarks**

Over the past decade, as the physical changes taking place in the Arctic region have secured it a more visible place in international affairs, the High North has also been attracting some attention in China. Beijing is now being regarded as a polar capable state with a history of polar activities, a considerable and growing polar research program, modern facilities and polar equipment, research stations and a well-established network of research institutions on the mainland devoting their resources to the Polar Regions.

In view of the potential impact the changing Arctic might have on China’s socio-economic developments and because of its proximity to the region, China has declared itself an important Arctic stakeholder and a 'near-Arctic' state. However, despite such statements, China still has not published any official Arctic policy paper. Therefore, this research paper has identified foreign policy actors within China that could seek to influence the decision-

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96 Zhang, "China in the Arctic: Practices and Policies."
97 "Xi eyes more enabling int'l environment for China's peaceful development," Xinhuanet.
99 Haiqing Yu, "Dalian gang jiji mouhua "Dongbei xin silu" [The port of Dalian actively plans the Northeast New Silk Road], Dalian gang [The port of Dalian], accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.portdalian.com/rdxw/2015/325/153258371755ha6498096937a6g052.html.
100 Zhang, "China in the Arctic: Practices and Policies."
making process over Arctic policies. Besides the traditional actors within China’s State Council like the State Oceanic Administration, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce, there seems to be a whole flurry of ‘actors on the margins’ like China’s large SOEs, local governments, research institutions and academia as well as the ‘public sphere’. It is important to acknowledge that the decisions are made by the traditional actors while the non-traditional entities seek to influence those decisions. Such distinction is in line with the theoretical framework of this research - Neoclassical Realism. This theory of foreign policy claims, amongst other things, that foreign policy is made by actual leaders who are not making decisions in a vacuum but need to consider interests of other societal actors within the state. These actors have the biggest opportunity to influence foreign policy when a relative stable and a low threat environment prevails which, under current conditions, the Arctic region is. Moreover, the research at hand supports the body of literature claiming that the Chinese state is transforming - not being a monolithic, unified 'Westphalian' state but becoming increasingly fragmented, decentralized and internationalized.

There certainly exist direct links between China’s 'new' foreign policy and its conduct in the Arctic region which this research paper has identified primarily in its references to respect, cooperation and win-win. However, it seems that China is looking at its foreign policy goals in a more long-term and strategic manner. As such, it would be optimal to look at China’s Arctic engagement in the context of its overall foreign policy objectives: a) political stability, b) sovereign security, territorial integrity and national unification and c) sustainable economic and social development.101 Considering the effects Arctic climate change has on weather in China, there are concerns that such effects might do damage to China’s agriculture thus directly endangering its food security. Moreover, because of sea-level rise large numbers of people would be forced to leave their homes. All of these developments could have an impact on China’s political stability therefore Beijing needs to understand the changes taking place in the Arctic. Another point for consideration is China’s need to sustain its economic growth. The Arctic region has the potential to ease China’s energy and transportation insecurities in the form of access to much needed natural resources and relatively safe transportation routes. Thus the Arctic could be regarded as a prospective region that could help China secure two of its most important foreign policy objectives. Also, China, by engaging with the Arctic and as a country that is striving for a global great power status, seeks respect such a country deserves.102

101 Jakobson and Peng, "China’s Arctic Aspirations,” 20.
102 Ibid.
Since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012, he has been advancing the notion that China, despite being a developing country, has now the power and influence to conduct a great power foreign policy. The question in order would be if China will be satisfied with its current position within the Arctic governance system, to be treated like other "ordinary" observers and leave the decision making on others. NCR predicts, that it is inevitable for emerging powers to exercise their growing influence in regions far off their borders. Will this be the case in the Arctic? In the short turn, China is expected to follow the principles it laid out at the 2015 Arctic Circle conference in Iceland, which are largely based on its past conduct: 1. further explore and understand the Arctic, 2. protect and properly utilize the Arctic, 3. respect the right of Arctic states and Arctic indigenous peoples, 4. respect the right of non-Arctic states and the international community, 5. build a multtier Arctic cooperation network and 6. uphold the Arctic governance system based on existing international law.

Therefore, for the time being, China will not make any significant changes to its Arctic approach. Moreover, the Arctic region is not poised to become China’s top foreign policy priority. As such, it is hard to imagine that China would want to subvert the existing order there. Instead, it will continue to work within that order and it will seek to increase its political influence and status through active participation as it will look for ways to increase its 'right to speak' (hua yu quan) in Arctic affairs - a popular and wide spread theme amongst Chinese Arctic commentators. In view of the predictions outlined in this paragraph, China in the Arctic is likely to be, to use Mikael Weissmann’s words, "a responsible reformer striving for achievements."

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104 Zhang, "China in the Arctic: Practices and Policies."
105 Jakobson and Peng, "China’s Arctic Aspirations," 23.