



Retreating ice. The allure of energy riches. A swift route across the top of the world.

From traditional northern powers to new actors in energy-challenged East Asia, countries are casting their eyes toward the Arctic. In the following pages, we examine how the Arctic looks from where they stand as they look to the Far North in a different light, wondering what it might hold for them.

Recul des glaces. Promesse de richesses énergétiques. Une voie maritime rapide au sommet du globe.

Qu'il s'agisse de puissances côtières de l'Arctique ou de nouveaux acteurs, notamment d'États pauvres en énergie de l'Asie de l'Est, de nombreux pays tournent leurs regards vers la région circumpolaire. Nous examinons dans ces pages comment ces protagonistes perçoivent le Grand Nord à leur manière en se demandant s'ils pourront s'y faire une place.

PARK THE PARANOIA

KEN COATES and KIMIE HARA

South Korea and Japan bring technological and scientific advantages to help the Arctic develop in a sustainable way. Canada and the Arctic states should welcome that involvement.

La Corée du Sud et le Japon disposent d'atouts technologiques et scientifiques susceptibles de favoriser le développement durable de l'Arctique. Le Canada et les États arctiques devraient s'en réjouir.



Canada and the world should welcome Japanese and South Korean interests in the Far North. The rapid transformation of the Arctic from ice-entrapped frontier into an area of promising resource development has turned a once neglected region into a focus of international diplomacy and intrigue. Countries not normally thought of as Arctic states have suddenly awakened to the potential to drill for oil and gas, an opening to shortcut shipping routes and a new theatre of strategic interests.

Much of the discussion and speculation swirls around Chinese motives — and whether this emerging global power should be welcomed as a player in the Arctic or kept at arm's length. But this obsession with China overlooks an opportunity to engage East Asia's other powers in the new North. Opening the door to greater Japanese and South Korean involvement in the developing international architecture for the region will help draw Asian nations into Arctic affairs in ways that benefit this fragile region and its communities.

The level of interest in the Arctic in Japan and South Korea may be lower than that in China (and certainly less than in the circumpolar states), but both have made their interest in deeper involvement clear. They regard the Arctic as an important area for scientific inquiry into issues that have global impact, such as climate change. Both are energy-challenged countries that see opportunities for resource extrac-

tion, though they are unlikely to engage in a rapacious war for resources. And as the levels of Arctic ice recede to leave more navigable open waters, they want to be a part of any expansion of shipping across the circumpolar region to their markets in Europe and the eastern United States.

The Far North stands to benefit substantially from the engagement of these two high-technology, research-intensive and innovative nations. As Fujio Ohnishi of the Ocean Policy Research Institute said of Japan's options at a March 2013 workshop on East Asia and the Arctic, held in Whitehorse, "The first approach is to maintain the current posture of involvement, namely to engage the Arctic in the field of science. The governmental effort should be dedicated to supporting the research community actively conducting research in the Arctic. The second approach is to play a bridge-building role between the Arctic states and the non-Arctic states."

Far from being worried about South Korean and Japanese designs on the North, the Arctic states should be looking to greater means of engaging both nations in the region's affairs.

The Arctic is not a big topic of discussion in the coffee shops of Tokyo or the bars of Seoul. The Arctic does not play a prominent role in domestic politics in either country, and public opinion is decidedly disengaged from Arctic questions. The environmental movements have greatest interest, particularly that in Japan, which joins activists and organizations around the world in citing Arctic ecological change as a driver of climate change and therefore of concern to all humanity. Both nations have small but active scientific communities with active interests in Arctic matters, and they lobby their governments to expand their Arctic presence.

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But the romantic fascination with the Arctic that pricked the adventuring spirit of people across northern Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada has no real counterpart in South Korea or Japan. Only a small number of tourists from both countries make their way into the Arctic each year, and there is no simmering groundswell of enthusiasm for massive increases in visits. The Incheon-Inuvik shuttle is not needed yet.

Instead, the national interests of Japan and South Korea divide into several major reasons for expanding their political, commercial and scientific footprint in the Arctic.

First, they share concerns about the future of humanity in the context of global climate change and the unique vulnerabilities of Arctic regions. As Keun-Gwan Lee of Seoul National University puts it: “For Korea to grow into a genuine global player, it is advised to combine its formidable industrial prowess with a heightened sense of responsibility for the issues of general concern such as the environment and the rights of indigenous peoples.”

Announcing the appointment of Masuo Nishibayashi, appointed Japan’s Arctic ambassador in March 2013, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs noted, “Japan is located outside the Arctic region, but as a maritime state and one that attaches much importance to global environmental issues, it needs to be appropriately involved in international discussions regarding the Arctic.” These East Asian countries appreciate the need to better understand how pollution is affecting Arctic ecosystems as an important component of global ecological systems and the natural world. Both are deeply engaged in Antarctic science, and Japan in particular is expanding its involvement in Arctic research.

Second, the two countries are aware that the thawing ice cap means there may be retrievable natural resources in the area. Part of their scientific curiosity is connected to learning more about how to extract commercial resources from the Far North; Japan’s very substantial research commitment to the

study of methane hydrates, which are locked in large quantities in the permafrost, is a case in point.

Neither of these Pacific Rim countries is blessed with natural energy resources, and in recent years competition for foreign sources has had to contend with the voracious energy appetites of China and India. South Korea and Japan have always had to import vast quantities of oil and natural gas and are constantly seeking new energy partnerships abroad. The troubles at the Fukushima nuclear plant have set the Japanese nuclear industry — a significant provider of electrical power — back on its heels. And both are watching the revolutions in the Middle East with a wary eye.

As a result, both countries have signalled their intentions to monitor the resource development in the Arctic. Top Korean business officials met in early 2013 with senior business leaders regarding off-shore Arctic energy resource development. In 2012 Japan collaborated with the Norwegians to do test delivery of liquefied natural gas from Norway to Japan via the North-east Passage.

Yet neither is as active as China in pursuing direct investment in Arctic mines. Japanese and South Korean interests must be kept in perspective. The Arctic, with its harsh and challenging environment for extraction, is not going to meet their demand. At best, it could be a small part of an energy mix that will have to be heavily sourced elsewhere.

Finally, South Korea and Japan join China in their enthusiasm for greater Arctic navigation. More open Arctic waters offer a faster shipping route to markets in Europe and the eastern seaboard of North America. South Korea has major shipbuilding capabilities and sees the possibility of a new era in commercial shipping across the top of the globe as a boon for its shipyards. Samsung Heavy Industries, Hyundai Heavy Industries, DSME and STX Onshore and Shipbuilding have all joined the Arctic ship-building race.

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“ THE WORLD’S MOST POWERFUL COMPANIES AND GOVERNMENTS ARE NOT TRYING TO SLOW THIS MELTING. INSTEAD THEY WANT TO EXPLOIT THE PLACE WHERE WE STAND TODAY. WE’RE HERE TO SAY THIS SPECIAL AREA OF THE ARCTIC BELONGS TO NO PERSON OR NATION, BUT IS THE COMMON HERITAGE OF EVERYONE ON EARTH. ”

Josefina Skerk, a Sami activist from Sweden, in a blog post from the Pole, April 2013.



Greenpeace activists in the Arctic in April 2013 planting a “flag for the future” under the North Pole ice. They called for world leaders to make the region a sanctuary, protected from resource extraction, fishing and conflict.

PHOTO: CHRISTIAN ÅSLUND / GREENPEACE

These factors reveal that Japanese and South Korean Arctic interests are similar to those of the coastal Arctic states and other relative newcomers like France. They see new commercial opportunities appearing and environmental changes developing that have global implications, and want to be a part of the action.

The current debate over the place of Japan and South Korea in shaping the Arctic future is focused narrowly on whether the Arctic Council should

approve their applications for observer status. While the decision would be symbolically important, the circumscribed role of the organization itself gives it little practical significance. The expansion of the roster of nations engaged with the Arctic Council will, if it proceeds, change a relatively minor international forum.

While the Chinese spend much of their Arctic energy fending off warnings of great power competition and strategic machinations, neither Japan nor South Korea makes a rhetorical or nationalistic

Over the past 40 years, North Americans have been susceptible to paranoia about Asian economic power. But it would be misguided for Canada to see Japanese and South Korean agendas in a suspicious light. What the Arctic has on offer, and will offer in the foreseeable future, is a small part of East Asia's resource puzzle, an equally small part of the global shipping alternatives and a strategic zone of comparatively minor significance to South Korea and Japan.

Instead, Canada should see Japanese and South Korean engagement in the circumpolar region as an opportunity. It is time to park the paranoia and seek the kind of scientific and technological partnerships that could revolutionize life in the North. Connecting with Japan and South Korea is particularly crucial in two areas: the development of environmentally responsible means of extracting Arctic resources, and producing a greater understanding of the implications of — and ways to alleviate — the problem of climate change.

In both fields, Japanese and South Korean researchers and corporations have a great deal to offer the circumpolar region. Both are prepared to invest heavily in Arctic science. They spend considerable money on Arctic and Antarctic questions, such as those related to Arctic climate change and technological interventions to improve the quality of life for indigenous and non-indigenous residents in the North.

They have also shown themselves open to scientific and commercial collaboration with other nations, as the Japanese have been doing with methane hydrate research and potential development. Japan and South Korea have extremely advanced research and commercialization initiatives related to a wide range of products and services relevant for the Arctic, including digital media, telehealth, energy systems, transportation and environmental remediation.

Given the surprisingly small amount of effort the Arctic states are

spending on scientific and technological innovation specifically targeted at northern questions and opportunities, the region would do well to engage East Asian scientists and companies in developing practical Arctic solutions.

In this spirit, welcoming — not just begrudgingly admitting — Japan and South Korea to the Arctic Council would be a great step. Calling a summit of academic researchers from Canada and East Asia would be an excellent way of expanding the prospects for collaboration. Combining research talent, major facilities and resources, all of which are currently in short supply relative to the

Japan and South Korea bring advanced research and commerce that can help solve Arctic problems.

need and opportunity for Arctic scientific activity, could help build a common cause on Arctic issues and generate more and sustained interest in Arctic affairs.

On the commercial side, putting South Korean and Japanese firms together with Arctic governments, companies and indigenous organizations could identify opportunities for collaboration. The Arctic states would do well to work with Japanese and South Korean media to share stories about the Far North and to generate greater and well-informed public interest in the Arctic. To date, few such connections have been made, with the logical result that Japanese and South Korean people generally have little knowledge of or interest in the Arctic.

Welcoming these two friendly states inside the tent offers a better chance to understand the Arctic's environmental puzzle and improve the chances that any development is done in sustainable ways. That is a step toward shaping an Arctic future that serves the local indigenous — and global — interests. ■

fuss over the Far North. As Shuji Kira, a former senior foreign policy official from Japan, commented, "As a State who has always valued the 'rule of law,' let us reiterate our support to the view expressed in the Ilulissat Declaration that an extensive international legal framework, including the law of the sea, applies to the Arctic Ocean. In committing to this legal framework, it is needless to say that Japan recognizes and respects sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction of the Members of the Arctic Council."