

The past few years Asian governments, companies and organizations, have showcased increased interest towards the Arctic region in terms of policy, science, climate, culture and economy. The most notable evidence was the acceptance of China, India, Japan, Singapore and South Korea as observers to the Arctic Council at its 2013 Ministerial Meeting in Kiruna, while Asian economic activity in the Arctic region is also on the rise in fields such as transportation and natural resource development. Asian stakeholders have a keen interest in climate change in the Arctic region, and its interlinks with middle/low-latitude areas, as well as running scientific programmes in the Arctic with explorations and research stations. The book, *Asian Countries and the Arctic Future* (2015), is a groundbreaking publication for dealing comprehensively with the rising importance of the Arctic within global affairs, in context with Asian perspectives.

AsiArctic

The book includes interesting analysis on Arctic governance, showcasing some differences in Western and Asian ideas, with input from leading scholars on Arctic affairs from three continents (Asia, Europe and North America). However, Professor Oran R. Young (University of California, Santa Barbara) is the only non-Asian/Nordic contributor, while the Nordic authors are all Norwegian and the majority of the Asian contributors are Chinese scholars. This comes as no surprise given that the book is a fruit of Norwegian-Chinese Arctic research collaboration, and edited by Norwegian and Chinese scholars: Mr. Leiv Lunde, former Director of the Fridtjof Nansen Institute (FNI) and currently Director of Strategy at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Dr. Yang Jian, Vice President of Shanghai Institutes of International Studies (SIIS); and Mrs. Iselin Stensdal, Research fellow at FNI.

Asian Countries and the Arctic Future (2015) is more specifically an output from a three-year research project on [*Asia in the Arctic*](#), originally initiated in 2012 by FNI in cooperation with the Norwegian Institute for Defense Studies (IFS) covering the following topics: (1) Asian states, Arctic international governance, and Norwegian interests, (2) Security challenges, (3) New Arctic shipping lanes, (4) Energy and other natural resources, and (5) Polar and climate research, all with an Asian focus. The programme also included Asian partners and the focus of the book draws from material presented at a conference in

Shanghai, 24-25 April 2014 hosted by SIIS, in cooperation with FNI, and supported by China-Nordic Arctic Research Center ([CNARC](#)). *The AsiArctic Programme* has delivered important research contributions in regards to Asia and the Arctic. The book *Asian Countries and the Arctic Future*, with 16 chapters full of cutting-edge research divided into three parts, (1) Governance and Cooperation, (2) Economic development and (3) Asia in the Arctic, is arguably the most comprehensive book publication on Asia and the Arctic to-date.

North meets East

The book, which was first published in Chinese (July 2015) and then in English (September 2015), provides a comprehensive overview of policy-related issues when it comes to Asian interests in the Arctic. It has potential to reach a wide-ranging readership due to its dual language publication and provides diverse voices to the debate. The analysis on Arctic governance and cooperation (*Part 1*) is especially rich. With interesting perspectives put forward by Chinese scholars who, as Iselin Stensdal notes in her excellent *concluding remarks*, call for a more formalized Arctic Council, while Oran Young, in *Chapter 1: Adaptive Governance for a Changing Arctic*, argues that a flexible multifaceted governance system is well suited at this time of changing circumstances facing the region. Such a viewpoint still includes strengthening the Arctic Council over time, which is a common goal in all Nordic Arctic Strategies, as Cheng Baozhi points out in *Chapter 5: Analysis of International Cooperation Mechanisms among the Nordic Countries*. The Norwegian scholars underline that increased Asian engagement can strengthen the region's governance, on key issues such as "sustainable developments, safety at sea, an environmental protection", as Olav Schram Stokke explains in *Chapter 3: Can Asian Involvement Strengthen Arctic Governance?*, and the Arctic's global significance, as the "Arctic Council becomes a more relevant and future-oriented oriented forum" with Asian participation, according to Leiv Lunde's *introduction*.

Many valuable insights are also found in *Part 3: Asia in the Arctic*, including the chapters from the non-Chinese Asian contributors on Japan, India, Singapore and South Korea, as well as the North Pacific Arctic Conference. The East Asian countries, namely China, Japan and South Korea, have been covered more extensively in regards to Arctic affairs, especially on potential gains from Arctic shipping and natural resource development, then their Southern neighbors and observatory partners to the Arctic Council. *Chapter 12: Asian*

Economic Interests in the Arctic - Singapore's Perspective is especially informative, as Chen Gang explains how this city-state located by the equator has developed interest in the Arctic due to its potential impact on world shipping and energy markets. This is of high relevance for Singapore, a global hub for finance, trade, shipping, aviation, and science & technology, as well as a regional petrochemical base. Chen does not believe that Arctic shipping or energy production will provide significant competition to Singapore for now, while cooperation in fields such as sustainable development and finance would be complementary to the goals of both Singapore and its Arctic partners. *Chapter 11: India's Arctic Attention*, however, has a completely different focus, as Uttam Sinha puts forward challenging question in regards to governance of the Arctic with the ideas of "global commons" and "common heritage of mankind", drawing parallels to the Himalaya area as the "Third Pole". Such ideas would certainly be contested by the Arctic states on the basis of UNCLOS sovereignty and territorial jurisdiction, as Sinha notes himself. However, the mere differences in approach from scholars analyzing either India's or Singapore's Arctic approaches are extremely interesting in themselves.

Must read

The book's main objective is well summed-up in the last sentence of Iselin Stensdal's concluding remarks: "An appreciation and understanding of each other's objectives and policies allows to detect common interests and identify future win-win opportunities". The book is full of valuable insights and interesting perspectives from Western and Asian scholars on Arctic affairs, but it also has its shortcomings. *Part 2: Economic Development* is severely lacking in content of relevant economy-related research, which is in many ways the main argument for Asian interest in the Arctic. Out of the four chapters in *Part 2*, only two of them directly engage with economic issues, *Chapter 9: Arctic Mining: Asian Interests and Opportunities*, and *Chapter 6: International Use of the Northern Sea Route - Trends and Prospects*, which both provide good overviews of their given topics, while chapters 7 and 8 would fit better under *Part 1: Arctic Governance and Cooperation*. The mutual benefits of economic cooperation between Asia and the Arctic based on global trends such as higher purchasing power, climate change, technological advantages, demography (rising), natural resources (scarcity), and globalization (increasing) are essential for understanding Asian interest and policy initiatives in the Arctic, and the book would have gained from a more comprehensive *Part 2 on Economic Development*. Providing deeper analysis on

transportation, tourism, trade, infrastructure and resource development, where Asian and Arctic partners have complimentary advantages.

Asian Countries and the Arctic Future is a must-read for anyone working on Arctic Affairs and a valuable source of information for readers interested in current World affairs. Most chapters are not layered with academic jargon and although some fundamental Arctic knowledge is needed, it can appeal to a diverse readership. Unfortunately, given the pricing of the English-language version at \$98 (hardcover) and \$62 (e-book) it is unlikely to go beyond the circle of academics and governmental professional whose workplace is likely to purchase the book. FNI and SIIS have delivered a landmark publication on Asia and the Arctic, which showcases why the Arctic region is of global significance and underline the legitimacy of Asian interest in the Arctic when approached through cooperation.