JAPAN AND THE ARCTIC: NOT SO POLES APART

はじめに

この20年間で、北極地帯は冷戦終結以来の“忘れ去られた僻地”から国際的関心が集まる地域へと変貌を遂げた。2013年5月15日、北極評議会は、その設立から17年後に、明らかに北極地帯の国家とは言えないアジア諸国である中国、インド、日本、韓国、シンガポールに対して恒久的オブザーバーとしての参加を認めた。これらの非北極・非西洋諸国からの関心と参加は、この地域の重要性の高まりを裏付け、反映するものとなっている。特に、中国、日本、韓国からの関心は、経済的可能性によって動機付けられている。本稿では、北極評議会参加諸国間の外交的・協調的取り組みとともに、日本独自の取り組みや、炭化水素資源採掘・北極航路に関わる潜在的な角逐あるいは協力可能な分野に関して焦点を当てる。

1. The Arctic Council evolving

Within the last two decades, the Arctic has transformed from a forgotten backwater at the end of the Cold War to becoming a focus of increased international attention. The Arctic Council was set up in Ottawa, Canada in 1996 among the eight Arctic states: Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the U.S. Its own history cites its formation as to serve “as a high-level intergovernmental forum to provide a means for promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, with the involvement of the Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues; in particular, issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.”*1 In short, it had a limited mandate, only to issues pertaining to protection of the environment and the indigenous peoples. In fact, during its formative years, it garnered little attention, and was even ignored by its eight creators. The Arctic Council toiled in the margins of international affairs, its membership described as cozy and club-like. *2

After all the Arctic was a remote and foreboding place, attracting the attention of only “cranks, visionaries and dictators.”*3 U.S. President William Taft (1909-1913) thought ownership of the North Pole to be useless. By the mid-20th century, the region became a major theater of the Cold War. In the former Soviet Union, Stalin (leader of the Soviet Union from 1924 to 1953), in his relentless drive for

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*: Admitted in May 2013
industrialization, created gulags and mines in the Russian Arctic. The 1970s saw the opening up of the North Slope of Alaska to oil development. At the end of the Cold War, the Arctic was relegated as an afterthought on the international stage.

Seemingly, in the blink of an eye, everything changed. In 2006, NASA showed pictures of melting polar ice caps. In 2007, a Russian Arctic scientist laid claim to the North Pole by planting his nation’s flag on the seabed in an election campaign publicity stunt.*4 The geopolitical race was on as accessibility to the Arctic became a tangible reality. The Arctic Council was soon thrust in the international arena. Seventeen years after its founding, the Arctic Council granted permanent observer status to five decidedly non-polar Asian nations: China, India, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea.*5 The Arctic was once the province of the five littoral states (Canada, Greenland, Norway, Russia, and the U.S.). But attention of and participation from non-Arctic European nations and now Asian nations underscore and reflect the growing importance of the region.*6 The Arctic is now global.

The Arctic Council’s visibility has ascended hand-in-hand with the increased changes in the Arctic due to accelerated climate change.*7 In granting non-Arctic nations the status of permanent observers, the Arctic Council has broadened the emphasis of its raison d’être. In addition to its prior emphasis on advancing


Fig1  Political topographic map of the Arctic
sustainable development of the Arctic while preserving and conserving its unique ecosystems, the Arctic Council placed a new emphasis on increased cooperation and interaction with business. This development also reflects how the future of Arctic affairs will more than likely be influenced by Asian nations. The main drivers are economic in nature. New sea routes in the Arctic—the North West Passage (NWP) and the Northern Sea Route (NSR) cut travel time and distance by 30% and offer cheaper transit, compared to the traditional southern route whereby ships pass through the Strait of Malacca and the Suez Canal. (South Korea has dubbed the NSR as the "Silk Road of the Twenty-First Century.") The second economic driver for the nations of East Asia is the Arctic’s abundant resources.

2. The Arctic itself evolving

The effects of climate change on the Arctic means that the Arctic’s geography is changing. One of the more tangible effects of this change is that Arctic waters are open for passage during most of the summer months. The effects of climate change happen more rapidly than anywhere else in the world. Melting sea ice will soon allow extended navigation periods in the Arctic Ocean, with the potential to transform commercial shipping, giving rise to new, shorter sea lanes. Shipping traffic in the Arctic could rise dramatically.

The Arctic also holds 13% of the world’s undiscovered oil, along with 30% of undiscovered natural gas and 20% of undiscovered natural gas liquids. Furthermore, according to the U.S. Geological Survey, 84% of the undiscovered oil and gas occurs offshore of the Arctic littoral states.

It is no wonder that industry and government representatives are full of high hopes. But despite large ocean stretches, the Arctic remains inhospitable, with long and dark winters, and areas far from search and rescue facilities. Indeed, the Arctic represents special hazards, such as the danger of icing on installations, long distances between offshore fields and land and lack of infrastructure. And yet, despite the bleakness, the prospect of the Arctic as a resource base has opened new economic potential.

It is against this backdrop that this paper will explore Japan’s increased interest in the Arctic. Having succeeded to permanent observer status in the Arctic Council, Japan has the potential to help shape the challenges emerging as the Arctic changes. Japan brings "considerable financial, scientific and legitimating capacity to the Council." As do its two competing East Asian neighbors, China and South Korea, also newly-minted permanent observers to the Arctic Council. All three countries are deeply dependent on foreign trade. Their aims of establishing partnerships among the Arctic states are understandable.

3. JAPAN IN THE ARCTIC

a) Formative Years in Developing an Arctic Strategy

In August 2012, one of Japan’s top newspapers, the Yomiuri Shimbun, wrote that "Japan has started out late in the game [of Arctic affairs]." The article excoriated Japan’s governance, saying it was at risk of lagging behind, in contrast to China and South Korea. Indeed, of its two neighbors, Japan was the last to file
its application to obtain observer status to the Arctic Council.*\(^{17}\) As recently as four years ago, Japanese policymakers paid scant attention to the Arctic.*\(^{18}\) In reality, Japan has a long history in polar research, acknowledged and encouraged by the Japanese government, predating its two neighbors.*\(^{19}\) Its early focus was on Antarctica in 1957. In the 1990s, the Nippon Foundation and the Ship & Ocean Foundation (now the Ocean Policy Research Foundation), worked with Norway and Russia. Together they formed the International Northern Sea Route Program (INSROP), a six-year project, whose purpose was to study the viability and feasibility of Arctic shipping lanes.*\(^{20}\) INSROP morphed into the Japan Northern Sea Route Program (JANSROP) and JANSROP II. Covering a three-year span (2002-2005), its aim was to study the NSR for the Japanese shipping industry.*\(^{21}\) But due to Japanese companies’ skepticism of Arctic shipping routes, combined with Japan’s economic decline starting in the 1990s, shipping companies concluded the risks far outweighed potential benefits.

Japanese companies backed off, but government efforts on formulation of an Arctic policy continued apace. In 2009, Japan officially submitted its application for Permanent Observer status to the Arctic Council.*\(^{22}\) In 2010, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) established an Arctic Task Force under the Ocean Division, International Legal Affairs Bureau, “in order to make cross-sectoral approach towards the foreign policy on the Arctic including the aspect of international law.”*\(^{23}\) Since November 2012, officials from MOFA have attended Arctic Council meetings. And in 2012, a major think-tank, the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), released a research project entitled, “Arctic Governance and Japan’s Diplomatic Strategy”, bolstering government efforts.*\(^{24}\)

b) Japan’s Movers and Shakers in Arctic Affairs

Japan’s process in formulating public policy has been described as being an “iron triangle,” consisting of the civil service, politicians, and business interests.*\(^{25}\) It can be characterized as symbiotic or parasitic, depending on one’s point of view. Businesses lobby the government. The civil service looks to business for information. Businesses look to the government on trade issues. This process also applies to formulation of Arctic policy.

i) Ministerial Level
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)
- Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (MLIT)
- Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)
- Ministry of Defense (MOD)

ii) Research Organizations, Think-Tanks, Independent Agencies*\(^{26}\)
- The Ocean Policy Research Foundation (OPRF)
- National Institute for Polar Research (NIPR)
- Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA)
- Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation (JOGMEC)
- Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology (JAMSTEC)
- Institute of Low Temperature Science (ILTS)
- Japan Consortium for Arctic Environmental Research (JCAR)
- Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA)

iii) Private Institutions
- Energy and Shipping Companies

c) The Attraction of the Arctic for Japan

As a maritime nation, the Japanese government understandably has a deep interest in the promotion and usage of Arctic passageways. One shipping route, the NSR, passes through the Arctic Ocean connecting the Atlantic Ocean with the Pacific Ocean.*\(^{27}\) With melting sea ice resulting from global climate change, the commercial potential of the route is becoming more tangible. Traffic is certainly increasing. According to Rosatomflot, a Russian state-run corporation that guides ships through the Arctic with nuclear-powered icebreakers, the number of cargo ships taking the NSR has jumped from 4 in 2010 to 34 in 2011, representing a more than eight-fold increase. (In contrast, the Suez Canal handled 17,799 trips in the same year.)*\(^{28}\) But
because the navigation season has now lengthened to four months a year, from July to mid-November, NSR traffic can only grow. As of mid-September 2013, 531 vessels received transit permits.\(^*\)\(^{29}\)

i) Shipping

The NSR has long been viewed as a short-cut linking Asia to Europe via Russia’s Arctic coast. Japanese and South Korean energy companies are already shipping oil products through the ice. Last year, Gazprom shipped liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Japan. In August 2013, Norway sent two shipments of oil products (one of them naphtha) to Japan. Using the NSR on a return trip from Asia to Europe, South Korea sent high-quality diesel to Europe.\(^*\)\(^{30}\)

Utilizing the NSR has obvious advantages than the traditional southern route through the Strait of Malacca and Suez Canal. The first advantage is distance. The NSR is 3,900 nautical miles (7,223 km) shorter than the southern route which is over 11,000 nautical miles (20,372 km). Along with shaving distance, the second advantage is that voyage time is also saved. Cargoes transiting through the Suez Canal can take approximately 35 days. The NSR cuts the travel time by up to 20 days.\(^*\)\(^{31}\)

The NSR’s third advantage lies in saving money.
and lives by avoiding security risks. By transiting through the NSR, ships can effectively lower the possibility of pirate encounters. The Strait of Malacca and the Gulf of Aden are notorious havens for pirates, who board ships and kidnap their crews for ransom. This translates into higher insurance premiums for carriers and the risk of losing lives. Rounding the Africa’s Cape of Good Hope is available, but this route would be longer in terms of distance and time, and again, would add to shipping costs.*32

To sum up the costs and benefits of the NSR for commercial shipping, the time and distance saved transiting through the NSR is offset by higher costs. Despite saving fuel, carriers still have to pay higher transit fees to Russia, along with ensuring the use of icebreakers. Foreign ships are also required to notify the Russian government three months in advance. Some Japanese observers see Russian bureaucracy as more formidable than Arctic ice.*33 One CEO predicts that the NSR will take another 10 to 20 years to become truly viable for container ships.*34 The Secretary-General of the International Maritime Organization, Koji Sekimizu states that icebreaker support is more than necessary, as ice will remain a big issue even during summer. Safety protocols and mitigation of oil spills and accidents will also grow as the volume of traffic increases.*35 The most likely scenario for the NSR is that it will be dominated by transport of oil and gas instead of cargo ships. Indeed the energy sector stands to profit from use of the NSR, as Asian LNG markets are best positioned for European exporters. Japan can take advantage of being a hub port due to its close proximity to the Bering Strait.*36

II) Energy

Japan’s energy imports surged in the wake of the Fukushima crisis in March 2011. The nuclear plant meltdown led to the shutdown of the nation’s 48 reactors.*37 Japan’s nuclear industry once supplied one-third of the nation’s power, with plans to increase it up to 50% by 2030.*38 Implementation of these plans is doubtful, as nuclear power supplied only 2% of electric generation in 2012.*39 Nuclear energy will remain a key source of base-load power, as a December 2013 draft of the new Basic Energy Plan states.*40 Once Asia’s largest nuclear power producer, Japan recorded its first trade deficit since 1980 due to increased reliance on imported LNG to offset the loss of its nuclear capacity. The 2011 trade deficit totaled ¥2.49 trillion (US$32 billion).*41 Japan imported 794 million tons of LNG from January to November 2013.*42 Japan has diversified its energy mix, importing crude from Iran. But this entails political risk, with U.S. sanctions ever-looming on banks companies conducting business with Iran. In May 2013, crude imports from Iran more than doubled compared to the previous year. The U.S. extended Japan’s exemption for another six months.*43

Japan lacks sufficient domestic hydrocarbon resources, meeting less than 15% of its primary energy usage from domestic resources. It is the world’s largest LNG importer, ranking second behind China in coal imports, and third in oil imports behind the U.S. and China.*44 It is thus in Japan’s best interest to “cultivate a diversity of resource exporting partners.”*45 For Japan, then, the NSR could spell a boon in terms of diversifying its energy mix, in part, due to its large northern ports in Hokkaido. The business community is finally seeing the potential of the Arctic. Indeed, Japan received its first tranche of LNG via the Arctic from Norway’s Snohvit LNG project in Hammerfest. It arrived in Kitakyushu City on December 5, 2012.*46 Thus, Japan’s domestic energy security is a major driver in its attraction to the Arctic as it seeks to diversify its supplies and suppliers.

With this aim in mind, Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation (JOGMEC), an independent administrative agency tendered a bid in 2011 for the right to develop an oil field off the coast of Greenland. On December 24, 2013, JOGMEC was awarded this right.*47 JOGMEC has teamed up
with INPEX, JX, JAPEX and Mitsui Oil Exploration to explore two blocks of total 5,000 square kilometers. It is a joint project with Chevron and Shell. In addition, JOGMEC and ConocoPhillips and the U.S. Department of Energy conducted successful tests off Alaska’s North Slope for the extraction of natural gas from methane hydrates.

4. CONCLUSION

In a nexus of business interests combining with government aims, MOFA appointed Masuo Nishibayashi as Ambassador to the Arctic in March 2013. Amb. Nishibayashi is only one of two specially appointed from Asia. The second is Kemal Siddique from Singapore. The Japanese position is a newly-created post, which speaks to Japan’s attempts to demonstrate its commitment to the Arctic. Amb. Nishibayashi states that it is necessary for Japan to be “appropriately involved” in Arctic discussions. He continues: “The ice is melting and this means ships will be able to pass through. We have to see if this is commercially viable.”

Japan will need this engagement with the Arctic Council as it strives to secure diverse energy resources. The Arctic can provide that for Japan. Its diplomatic contacts with Nordic and Baltic nations will ensure its involvement in developing the riches of the Arctic. Japan has also established bilateral relations with Finland to promote development of the Arctic.

Japan’s open relations with the Arctic nations will put it in good stead in terms of energy resource development. In particular, talks with Russia could result in ameliorating tensions over the Kuril Island, which have prevented Russia and Japan from signing a peace treaty formally ending WW II hostilities. Another reason for their cooperation is to compete with China.

China’s assertive policies in the Arctic notwithstanding, Japan and Russia are moving closer to one another in earnest. In early February 2014 Russian President Vladimir Putin and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met. This was the fifth high-level meeting between the two countries in less than a year. Russia’s foray into Asia is for diplomatic purposes and for securing a diversified energy client base. Closer ties to Japan would ensure Russia leverage in Asian relations before China’s ascendency is cemented. As for energy, China is Russia’s biggest Asian customer. Should Japan also become a Russian customer, Russia could use energy both as a diplomatic and commodity bargaining chip. Russia’s East Asian customer base would be solidified.

The advantages for Japan lie in resources, shipping routes, and diplomacy. Japan has already scored a plus in resources. In May 2013, INPEX Corporation secured a partnership with Rosneft to explore two Arctic oil fields. In terms of diplomacy and alliances, Russia lent its weight to support Japan’s bid to become a permanent observer in the Arctic Council, ignoring China. Moscow also supported Tokyo’s application to hold the 2020 Olympic Games.

Although China and Japan are currently involved in escalating spats in the East China Sea, it should be noted that while Moscow and Tokyo are warming to each other, neither would overtly do something to mar their relations with Beijing. In spite of recent heated rhetoric in Sino-Japanese relations, Prime Minister Abe reiterated that “the two countries could never clash. We must not let that happen.”
<注・解説>
*5: http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/arctic-council/observers. The European Union also applied as a permanent observer, but its application is being upheld due to the EU’s dispute with Canada over an EU ban on trade in seal products.
*12: The subject of the Arctic’ s oil and gas potential was explored in an earlier paper. The numbers are based upon USGS, July 23, 2008, http://www.usgs.gov/newsroom/article.asp?ID=1980&from=rss_home
*17: The article was cited by Jakobson, Linda and Syong-Hong Lee,”The Northeast Asian States’ Interests in the Arctic and Possible Cooperation with the Kingdom of Denmark,” SIPRI, April 2013, accessed at http://www.sipri.org/research/security/arctic/arcticpublications/NEAsia-Arctic%2020130415%20full.pdf, p. 19
*18: Ibid.
*20: Tulupov, Dmitry, “Towards The Arctic Ocean through the Kuril Islands,” Russian International Affairs Council,
*21: Tonami, A. and Watters, S., p. 95
*22: Tonami, A. and Watters, S., p. 96
*24: Tulupov, C.
*25: Tonami, A. and Watters, S., p. 94
*26: Jakobson, L. and Lee, S., pp. 20-23
*31: Rodova, N. and Yep, E.
*32: Toriumi, S.
*33: Jakobson, L. and Lee, S.
*35: Chernov, Vitaly and Nadezhda Malysheva, "IMO Secretary-General Koji Sekimizu : “In the forthcoming five years, the Northern Sea Route will be the main shipping lane for navigation in the Arctic”", Portnews IAA, October 18, 2013, accessed at http://en.portnews.ru/comments/1691/
*36: Toriumi, S.
*44: See No. 39.
*45: Toriumi, S
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JET プログラム（The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program）で来日し、鹿児島県で 3 年間英語教育に携わる。帰米後、在米国日本大使館（ワシントン）勤務を経て、2001 年 1 月に JNOC（石油公団）ワシントン事務所の調査員として任用、現在に至る。休日は家族とともに、写真と映画鑑賞。その他の趣味は料理。