



The Dragon in the Icy Ocean: China's Growing Interests in the Arctic

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The Arctic in Chinese foreign policy

- Chinese efforts to establish itself as a key player in the Arctic began in the 1990s initially through scientific efforts and then through diplomatic channels from at least 2006.
- The Arctic mentioned in the CCP's 12th FYP in 2011, National Development and Reform Commission (2016), and 13th FYP for Economic and Social Development (2016-2020), and finally in China's Arctic Policy (2018): inclusion of the Arctic in BRI under the label "Polar Silk Road" in 2018.
- The opening of new, more effective trading routes connecting East Asia and the Arctic nations and the ability to exploit an estimated ten percent of the world's known conventional petroleum resources and untapped natural gas.
- Asserts its rights to commercial development and navigation as a non-Arctic state
- Arctic Policy: China wants to play "a constructive part in the making, interpretation, application, and development of international rules regarding the Arctic" mainly through participation in the Arctic Council.
- Seeing itself as a "near-Arctic state" and a "responsible major country" in the region, China argues that the Arctic represents a public good and should belong to the global community.

A Brief History of China's Major Policies on the Arctic

- 1925: The Republic of China signs and ratifies the Svalbard Treaty
- 1981: Establishment of China's Arctic and Antarctic Administration
- 1984: Deng Xiaoping references the Arctic on the inauguration of China's first Antarctic expedition
- 1991: Heilongjiang province becomes a founding member of the Northern Forum
- 1992: China becomes member of the North Pacific Marine Science Organization (PICES)
- 1996: China officially joins the Arctic International Scientific Committee
- 1999: Vice Governor of Heilongjiang province, Wang Xinmin, participates in Senior Arctic Officials Meeting in Washington DC
- 2004: Establishment of the "Yellow River" research station in Ny-Alesund, Svalbard
- 2005: China hosts Arctic Science Summit Week
- 2006: China's first application to obtain Permanent Observer status in the Arctic Council
- 2011: China's 12th Five-Year Plan highlights the polar region, incl. the Arctic, on issues concerning international maritime laws and research
- 2012: 'Xue Long' traverses the Northeast passage

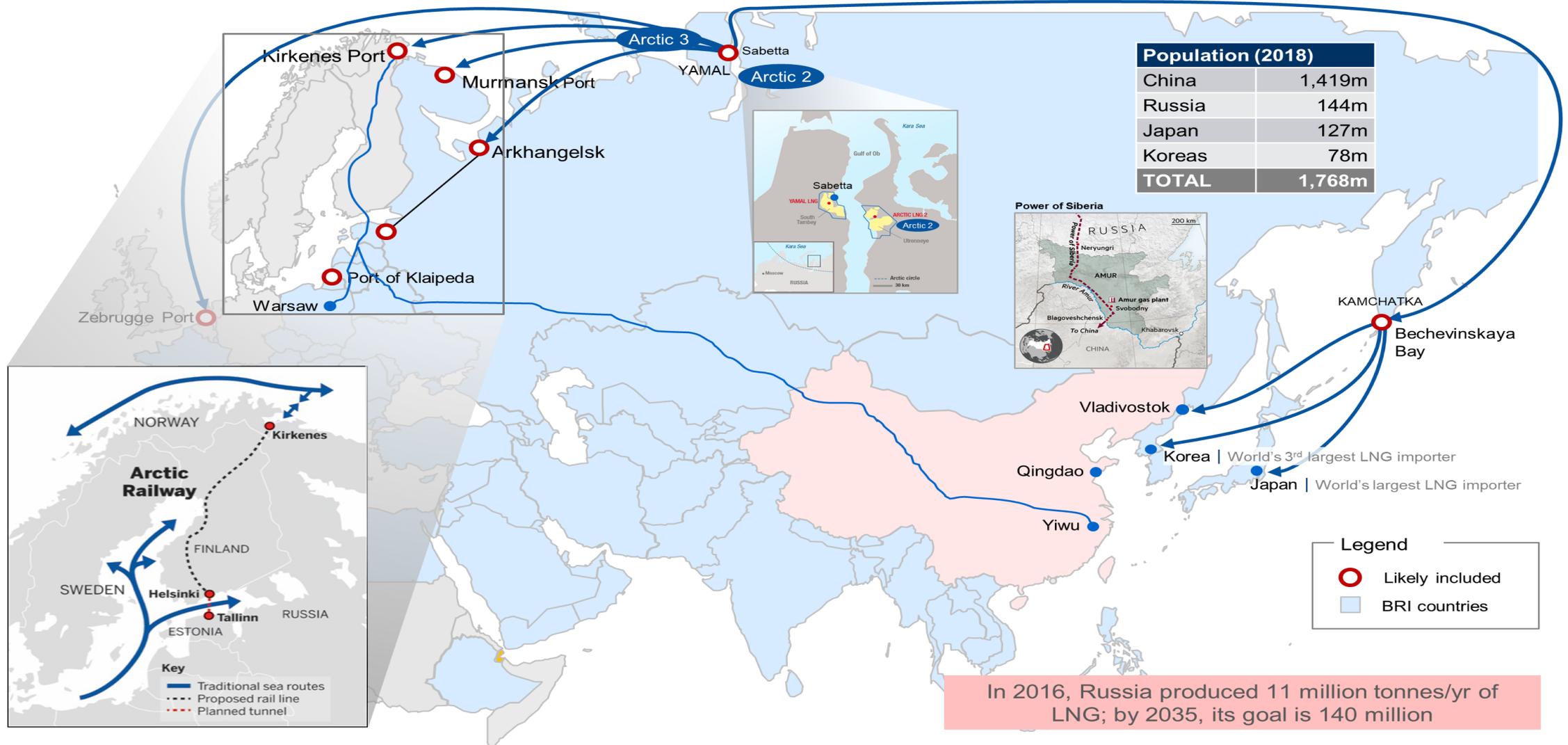
A Brief History of China's Major Policies on the Arctic

- 2013: --China is admitted to the Arctic Council as a permanent observer
 - the cargo vessel “Yong Sheng” completes the first Chinese commercial transit through the Northeast Passage
- 2014: China's Ministry of Transportation issues navigation guide for the Northeast Passage
- 2015: -- China's Ministry of Transportation issues navigation guide for the Northwest Passage.
 - Five Chinese warships from PLAN travel through US territorial waters off the coast of Alaska
 - China publishes its National Security Law, which explicitly mentions exploration of the Arctic
- 2016: -- The 13th Five-Year Plan reiterates and strengthens Beijing's focus on the polar region
 - China, Japan, and South Korea launch high-level dialogue on Arctic affairs
 - China appoints its first Special Representative for Arctic Affairs in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with a portfolio including the Arctic Council
- 2018: -- China releases the White Paper on its Arctic Policy
 - China launches its first domestically build ice-breaker ‘Xue Long 2’ to be deployed in 2019.

Official BRI map – Blue Economic Passages (June 2017)



Polar Silk Road (2018)



Four Areas of China's Interests in the Arctic:

Commercial and Energy

- The foremost interest at present. China has deepened trade and investment relationships with Arctic countries, bolstering its economic foothold in the region. It has a clear interest in navigating the shipping routes opening up in the Arctic, believing that it is part of its rights as a near-Arctic state.
- Considering its current and future energy needs, Beijing wants access to the vast natural resources in the Arctic. China's state owned enterprises (SOEs), shipping sectors, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are all part of this endeavour to secure cleaner and cheaper energy sources, esp. LNG.
- In 2015 one of China's largest national oil companies, China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC), entered into an agreement with numerous Arctic-country oil companies and research institutions to jointly develop oil drilling support solutions. Chinese involvement includes work in the Bohai Sea. In addition, several avenues of Sino-Russian cooperation on this issue have been developed.
- Part of BRI: In 2017 China states that "Arctic countries, especially Russia and the Nordic countries, will be the key extension of China's 'Maritime Silk Road'"

Travel Distance between Asia and Europe

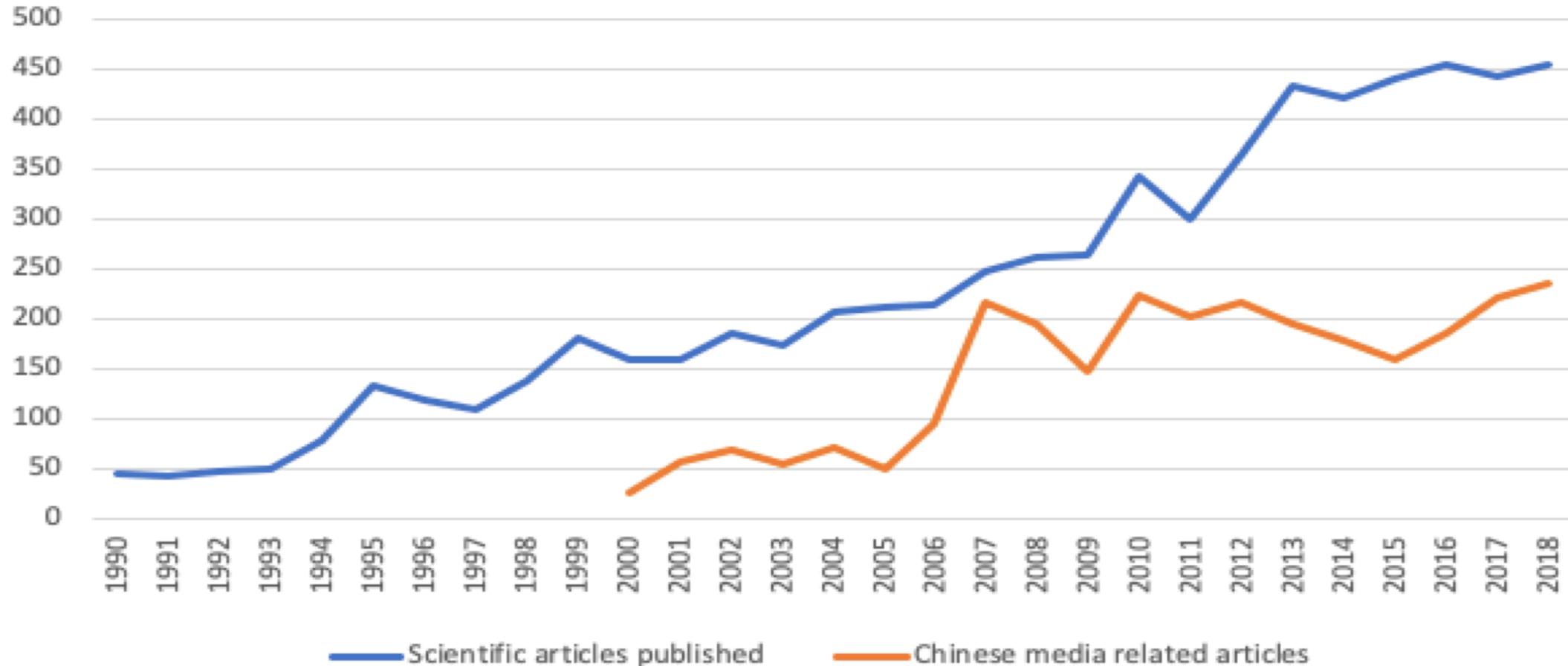
From	To Rotterdam via (in nautical miles)		
	Suez Canal	Northeast Passage	Difference
Shanghai, China	10,500	8,000	- 24%
Hong Kong, China	9,700	8,600	- 11%
Yokohama, Japan	11,100	7,000	- 37%
Busan, South Korea	10,700	7,700	- 29%

Three Areas of China's Interests in the Arctic: Scientific

- China started its Arctic scientific programme in earnest beginning in the 1990s, carrying out two marine scientific research projects, and establishing one Arctic research station in Spitsbergen. It has also held an Arctic science summit week and takes an active part in International Polar Year programs
- Substantial investment in knowledge accumulation, technical capacity, and equipment: At least 13 Chinese universities are taking part in Arctic research as part of international Arctic academic networks such as “UArctic” and “Nordatanet”.
- Arctic expeditions: China's first Arctic expedition in 1999 featured international research staff. Expeditions have increased since then and China announced in 2017, twelve months before the publication of its first Arctic White Paper, that expedition frequency would increase to once a year.
- Scientific research is the key to increasing voice in the Arctic Council.

Chinese academic and media articles containing the Arctic (北极) as a keyword

Source: the Arctic Institute: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/increasing-security-focus-china-arctic-policy/>



The 11th South China Sea International Conference
@ DAV, Hanoi, 6-7 Nov 2019

Three Areas of China's Interests in the Arctic:

Multilateral Diplomacy

- China conducts its Arctic diplomacy within the multilateral setting of the Arctic Council as well as based on international law, incl. UNCLOS, viewing the Arctic as a common good for the humankind.
- Chinese activities in the Arctic Council started in 2006 with an ad hoc-observer status. In 2009 China expressed its wish to become a permanent observer in the Arctic Council. Between the years of 2012 and 2014, China took part in establishing coordinated monitoring mechanisms in the Arctic.
- The appointment of its first 'Special Representative for Arctic Affairs', Gao Feng, in 2016. Feng would "act as the senior Arctic official of China to the Council to further enhance China's contribution to the Council".
- The Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) of the Arctic Council: China took part in a conference hosted by the group in 2016, indicating Chinese openness to discuss indigenous peoples and minorities' rights, gaining another avenue of involvement in the Arctic Council.
- In the International Maritime Organization China has worked on an Arctic pollution report and contributed to the Arctic shipping code, showing its intent to be actively present in multilateral governance issues related to the Arctic.

Three Areas of China's Interests in the Arctic:

Security

- China's objectives and claim for a stake in the Arctic are described as “an inevitable manifestation of the continuous expansion of the connections of interests between China and other countries of the world and the development of (...) national strength”.
- In 2015 China published its National Security Law, which explicitly mentions exploration of the Arctic. Article 32 of the law is similar to the arguments presented in the White Paper, of the right to exploration and usage of the Arctic:
“The State adheres to the peaceful exploration and use of outer space, the international seabed region, and the polar regions, enhances the ability of safe access, scientific investigation, development and utilization, strengthens international cooperation and safeguards our activities in outer space, the international seabed region and the polar regions.”
- China's legal instruments expound “China's interests in new territories like the Arctic areas” and define five areas of interest: geostrategy and military security, channel security, asset and personnel security, climate and environment security and resource and energy security. It is also proposed China should deploy its military in the Arctic.
- 2017 National Security Law: the polar region is an important part of China's security concern and underscores the necessity of enhancing China's ability to protect its interests in the Arctic. It takes a comprehensive security perspective – military security, economic security, resource security as well as environmental security, scientific and technological advantages, and soft power. China believes that its goal will be achieved through "strategic interaction" with both the US and Russia.

Conclusions

- China's interest in the Arctic is multi-dimensional, and has grown significantly, with the Polar Silk Road as part of its BRI.
- Its interest is mainly commercial and energy, with reduced travel time and new, cheaper and cleaner source of energy such as LNG. It wants to increase its voice and influence in the Arctic Council through scientific research and multilateral diplomacy.
- China's influence is limited due to its status as a non-Arctic state. Its emphasis on the freedom of navigation in the Arctic, treating it as a common good for the humankind.
- China's activities take place within the multilateral setting of the Arctic Council, and China wants to play by the rules.
- China's military role is a concern but will likely be focused the protection of its commercial interests for the foreseeable future. Also, potential Sino-Russian security cooperation will likely be limited because of their differing status on the Arctic, which make their interests diverge, not converge.

Thank You!