

Briefing Note

North Pacific Arctic Community Meeting (NPARC): a platform to develop Asian perspectives of the Arctic by a variety of experts in China, Japan and Korea

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This commentary paper presents a concise history of the North Pacific Arctic Community (NPARC), an initiative born out of the growing interest in Arctic affairs among non-Arctic nations, particularly those from Asian three countries namely, China, Japan, and Korea. Established in 2014, NPARC serves as a platform for interdisciplinary research and collaboration among China, Japan, and Korea, fostering discussions on emerging challenges and opportunities in the Arctic. Over the past decade, NPARC has grown and evolved, adapting to changing circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical shifts. This paper offers an overview of the latest NPARC Meeting held in Japan 2023.

Introduction

In the year 2013, the Arctic Council extended observer status to six non-Arctic nations, including five from the Asian region, notably China, Japan, and Korea. Recognizing the escalating global interest in the Arctic, the Korea Maritime Institute (KMI) proposed the establishment of a platform for discussion and knowledge exchange. This initiative sought to encourage regional interdisciplinary research on emerging challenges and opportunities in the Arctic, to communicate and share regional research outcomes for capacity building, and to enhance cooperation in various levels such as forums, seminars and joint research related to the Arctic among members.

The inaugural NPARC meeting took place in Cheju, Korea, in 2014, hosted by the KMI. Participating institutions included four Korean institutions (KMI, Korea Polar Research Institute,

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Korea Research Institute of Ships and Ocean Engineering, and Korea Maritime and Ocean University), along with the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) and four Chinese institutions (Polar Research Institute of China, Ocean University of China, Dalian Maritime University, and Shanghai Jiaotong University), and the Overseas Coastal Area Development Institute from Japan. During this meeting, member institutions reached several consensuses and agreements, including the recognition of the need for collaborative efforts among academic organizations to address emerging Arctic issues, the establishment of regular seminars emphasizing voluntary participation and non-binding partnerships, and the exploration of possibilities for collaboration with other research organizations both within and outside the region, irrespective of academic affiliations.

Subsequently, NPARC meetings became an annual event, rotating between China, Japan, and Korea. The organizing committee now comprises three prominent research institutions: SIIS (China), Hokkaido University Arctic Research Center (Japan), and KMI (Korea). As of 2023, NPARC has successfully convened nine meetings, with the 2020 and 2021 meetings conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2022 meeting, originally scheduled in Japan, was postponed to 2023. These gatherings have provided a platform for discussions encompassing various disciplines, such as natural sciences, engineering, social sciences, humanities, Arctic policy, and Arctic-related activities undertaken by the three Asian nations.

Thematic Sessions of the 2023 NPARC Meeting:

The 2023 NPARC meeting, coinciding with the 10th anniversary of its inception, convened in Sapporo, Japan, on August 28th. In total, 48 experts joined the session including 13 from China, 14 from Korea and 21 from Japan. This milestone event featured five thematic sessions:

a. "Arctic and Asia":

The opening session, led by three distinguished Arctic Ambassadors from China, Korea, and Japan, namely Mr. Gao Feng (Special Representative for Arctic Affairs, People's Republic of China), Mr. Park Chong-suk (South Korean Arctic Ambassador), and Mr. Takewaka Keizo (Japanese Ambassador for International Economic Affairs and Arctic Affairs), explored the progress and contributions of these observer states to the Arctic Council over the past decade. Key points highlighted included as follows.

- ✓ Through 10 years of experiences as being Arctic Council's observer states, China, Japan, and Korea has been achieving their contribution and cooperation in Arctic Council's activities.
- ✓ Today, Asian nations could have the substantial impact on the Arctic issues in terms of social, economic, scientific, and environmental effects as well as international agreements, exemplified by the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement. Under the current Arctic Council's hiatus, it could be possible for China, Japan, and Korea to achieve meaningful contribution to the Arctic issues.
- ✓ The Trilateral High-Level Dialogue on the Arctic by China, Japan, and Korea, which was started in 2015, was also noted as an important platform for East Asian countries to collectively address Arctic challenges.
- ✓ Not only the Arctic Council related activities, but also the other Arctic related events such as Arctic Circle Assembly and Arctic Circle Forum are also a good opportunity to approach the

Arctic issues, to deliver messages to the Arctic from Asian countries, and to develop more engagement to the Arctic issues.

b. "Arctic Cooperation":

This session featured presentations from six experts who discussed various aspects of Arctic cooperation.

The session also emphasized the importance of Asian countries' involvement in climate change strategies and their active participation in Arctic-related events.

- ✓ Aniya Satoru (Consular Office of Japan in Anchorage) introduced their activities in Sister Cities between Alaska and Japan, and exchange events of youth and indigenous peoples between Alaska and Japan.
- ✓ Lu Zhibo of Tongji University introduced China's contributions and interests to PAME, one of the Arctic Council's working groups. He also introduced the China's new research vessel "Xuelong 2."
- ✓ Kim Bongchul of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies talked on international laws in polar areas and the domestic laws for their polar activities of northeast Asian countries.
- ✓ Hide Sakaguchi of Sasakawa Peace Foundation reported on Arctic Circle Japan Forum, which was held in Tokyo in March 2023, especially on the significance of the Japan, China, and Korea Sessions. He emphasized that the involvement of Asian countries would be important for the climate change strategy by collaborative and cooperative manner.
- ✓ Takahashi Minori of Hokkai-Gakuen University talked on the historical soil of Greenland, and the Denmark's colonial governance from the viewpoint of self-reliance, conservation, and denial of coequality.
- ✓ Xu Qingchao of University of Chinese Academy of Sciences talked on the role of international science cooperations for promoting the effectiveness of Arctic governance. She also talked on the importance of the science cooperation and science diplomacy.

c. "Arctic Science":

Four experts presented their latest research in this session. Discussions underscored the significance of collaboration among the three nations in scientific research and bridging the gap between scientific knowledge and indigenous wisdom.

- ✓ Yabuki Hironori of National Institute of Polar Research (Japan) introduced Arctic and Antarctic Data archive system, the data management platform for Japan's polar projects, which aims to support for data-driven sciences.
- ✓ Jin Emilia Kyung of Korea Polar Research Institute introduced the Korea's Arctic climate change projects, including modeling and observation, 2nd icebreaking research vessel, etc.
- ✓ Qu Feng of Liaocheng University talked the Traditional Ecological Knowledge of indigenous people, locality, importance and barriers, differences with scientific knowledge.
- ✓ Kimura Hajime of Japan Agency for Marine-Earth Science and Technology introduced the Japan's new icebreaking research vessel, which will be launched in 2026.

d. "Sustainable Arctic":

In this session, four speakers covered a range of topics, including efforts in interdisciplinary Arctic research, international law and governance, and sustainable development. The session highlighted the importance of the complex challenges of sustainability in the Arctic.

- ✓ Kodama Yuji of Hokkaido University talked on Hokkaido University's initiative of the Arctic research in the promotion of "Future Earth" and SDGs based on the needs for interdisciplinary integration and transdisciplinary research of global environmental science.
- ✓ Bai Jiayu of Nankai University talked on the implication of China's Arctic engagement in the international law development and governance for its sustainable development at the regional level.
- ✓ Choi Su-Beom of Incheon National University talked on the state of the art of Russian Arctic shipping activity including LNG, container, and project cargoes.
- ✓ Xia Liping of Tongji University presented about topics from the sixth China-U.S. Arctic Social Science Conference, which was held June 2023 in China, as governance in the Arctic, shipping route development, natural resource export from Alaska to China, and cultural, tourism and educational cooperation.

e. "Youth Session":

This session aimed to strengthen trilateral network among the youth scientists for their future collaboration.

- ✓ Tang Yao of the Polar Research Institute of China introduced the Chinese involvement in IPY1 to 4 and activities of Arctic and Antarctic research.
- ✓ Zhang Yiran of Dalian Maritime University presented the status and role of the Arctic Sea Routes in the perspective of modern logistics development.
- ✓ Shin Euichan of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies focused on geopolitical situation of EU and the Arctic, and EU's arctic policy.
- ✓ Shim Minsub of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, presented a study on the polar activities promotion act in Korea, in conjunction with the international legal basis.
- ✓ Yoshida Yuka of Hokkaido University introduced about her activity of the Arctic Transdisciplinary Community of Practice to improve public's understanding of the Arctic environment, society, and multi-layered problems.
- ✓ Mikhailova Diana of Hokkaido University talked about Russian strategic narratives on the Northern Sea Route development strategy focusing on the emerging effects after Feb. 2022.
- ✓ Osawa Hisato of Hokkaido University talked about building environments in cold climates, and clarified relationship between building environment and duration of life in cold and warm regions.

Conclusion:

The NPARC Meeting has evolved over the past decade, fostering a collaborative platform among China, Japan, and Korea in the context of the Arctic. As the Arctic continues to face dynamic

challenges, NPARC has been a unique initiative for the evolving discourse on the Arctic by the three Asian countries.