

BOOK REVIEW

Review of *Asian countries and the Arctic future*, edited by Leiv Lunde, Yang Jian & Iselin Stensdal (2015). London: World Scientific Publishing. 290 pp. ISBN 978-981-4644-17-4.

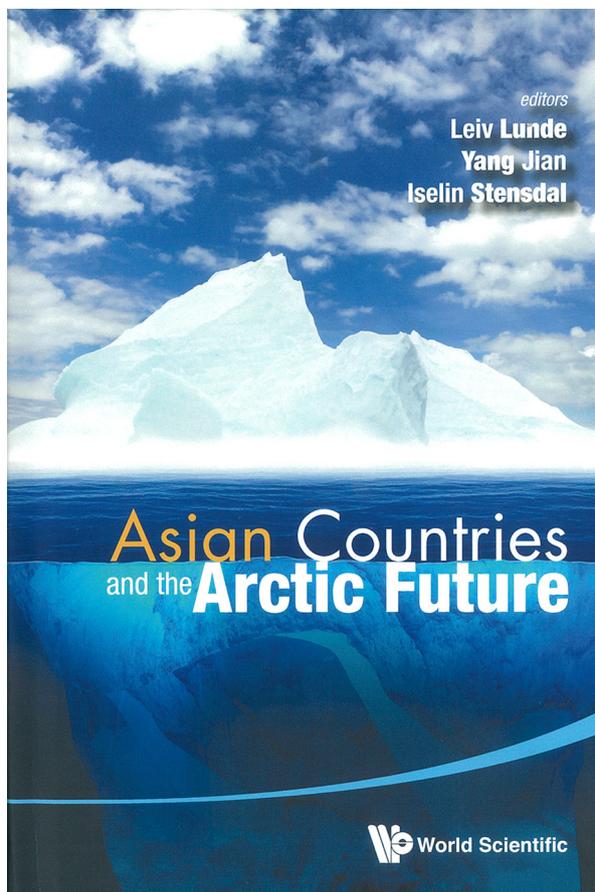
The impetus for this book was the achievement of Arctic Council observer status by five Asian coastal states—China, India, Japan, South Korea and Singapore—in 2013. These countries are interested in the Arctic as a new trade route (safer and thousands of miles shorter than the Suez Canal–Gulf of Aden route), and because of its increasingly accessible natural resources. Major preconditions for the Asian states to join Arctic governance are assumed to be in place today: (1) respect for the Arctic countries' sovereign rights; (2) readiness to invest the best of their scientific and policymaking capacities in the council's various working groups and task forces; and (3) recognition of the Arctic Council's commandments and willingness to contribute to its goals. The Asian countries are motivated not only by commercial instincts but also by broader global issues like climate change, sustainable development, strengthened research efforts and new political alliances.

The book is informative and interesting, well-structured in three parts—(1) governance and cooperation; (2) economic development; and (3) Asia in the Arctic—and covers the topic widely but not fully. As a collection of individually authored articles, rather than a set of complementary contributions carefully curated by the editors, general data about the environmental, economic and political changes occurring in the Arctic are frequently repeated. The book (and its readers) would have benefitted greatly from systematizing the contents into a coherent text.

The reader may well wonder about the reason for the book's distinct bias towards China. It is, regrettably, not until the concluding chapter that it is made clear that the book emerged from presentations given at a conference in Shanghai in April 2014. In parts 1 and 2, whenever a country is selected to illustrate an issue, China is chosen. This may be justified, as China is the most controversial state stretching out its arms into the Arctic. Still, Japan and South Korea—although a chapter solely devoted to South Korea is lacking—are considered sufficiently to leave the impression of serious partners with legitimate

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interest in the Arctic, while even Singapore—treated only in one dedicated chapter—makes its point clear.

There is surprisingly little written about India. The one chapter about this country fails to explain convincingly why it should participate in the Arctic race more than any other non-Arctic country. The reader may come away with the perception that India is not really considered a significant partner in the Arctic race, but rather an appendage that wants to be part of the game.

The book's contributors acknowledge the Asian countries' attraction to the Arctic in relation to new shipping routes, mineral and hydrocarbon resources, important research issues and political alliances being the motives of their interest. Another premise that underlies Asian political interest in, and justification for, involvement in Arctic issues is that the Arctic is causing trouble at home. This is stated, for example, in Chapter 13, like this: "The Arctic sea ice anomaly of less ice-cover than previously is one of the main causes of China's climate disasters in

recent years" (p. 224). What is not mentioned in the book is a recognition of the fact that current environmental and climatic changes in the Arctic are being shaped by, among other factors, greenhouse gas emissions from countries like China. Using the Asian nations' argument, Arctic states should have legitimate interests in interfering in countries like China.

Though the editors claim that the authors do not represent their countries, but their own analytical points of view, China's priorities are characterized by words like peace, stability, sustainability, mutual trust and respect, benefits to international community and cooperation. These phrases have a diplomatic rather than scientific tone and aim obviously at putting China in a better light when compared, in the same chapter, to Japan's priorities (national interest, industry and resource development) and South Korea's (commercial exploitation, research interests and creation of new industries).

The long list, in Chapter 2, of China's possible contributions to Arctic development, terminates in "[to] demonstrate humanitarian ... and environmental concerns in the host countries" (p. 49), two important issues that China is well known for not being good at at home. In Chapter 13, knowing that China and Chinese companies are observed with keener interest and scepticism than others, several pages are used to reassure the reader that China will submit to the existing system of Arctic governance as well as other nations' rights and sovereignty.

Such an assurance is severely needed in light of China's attitude toward, and disrespect for, other countries in international issues like the one in the South China Sea (not mentioned in the book). However, it may be correct that China will play according to the rules with countries like Russia, Canada and the United States in the Arctic, where international respect is strategically more feasible.

We learn from the book that the major obstacles for Asian countries seeking entry into the Arctic community are concerned with governance. Arctic governance is characterized by a mosaic-like framework of (1) global agreements pertinent to the Arctic; (2) the Arctic Council; (3) regional management mechanisms; (4) public-private partnerships; (5) informal venues; and (6) all-hands gatherings. This mosaic seems to work well for the Arctic countries, while Asian countries are concerned that it is inadequate. They call for a more structured, centralized system under the Arctic Council, with a mandate for law enforcement to avoid misinterpretations and conflict when newcomers enter the Arctic scene.

While the influence of Asian countries as observers to the Arctic Council is still very limited, there is no consensus among contributors to the book as to whether increasing Asian influence in the future will undermine the Arctic countries' primacy in the area or if existing laws and regulations are sufficient to maintain it. In general, Asian countries seem to expect more influence than the Arctic states are willing to give them.