

Book Review

The Arctic Council: Governance within the Far North

By Douglas C. Nord. London & New York:

Routledge. 2016. Pp. xiv + 110.

ISBN: 978-1-138-79920-2

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In 2013, Japan, along with China, South Korea, and other states concerned, was accepted as an observer at the Kiruna ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council (AC). This status is normally given to a limited number of states that have specific interests in and responsibility for Arctic activities under certain conditions set by the AC, which is a 'high-level forum' to deal with Arctic matters except for military and security ones. It is widely known that the AC was not intended to be a solid traditional international organisation such as the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS). Regardless of its geographical position, for example, Japan has been an original signatory party to the 1959 Antarctic Treaty (AT), because its exploration and other related activities before the Second World War endowed it with the status of non-claimant state upon the negotiation of the AT. The AC's institutional foundation, however, lies in the fact that, geographically, the five coastal states of the Arctic Ocean (Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, the United States, and Russia; or the 'Arctic Five') as well as the three other states in the Arctic region (Finland, Iceland, and Sweden) have direct and actual interests in the matters therein.

As is the case of the Antarctic, Japan has no geographical or direct interest in the Arctic region but has historically and scientifically made a significant contribution in the fields of environmental protection and scientific observation/survey, among others. Therefore, through its admission to the forum as an observer, Japan's involvement in Arctic matters has been upgraded, and it entails a commitment to the sustainable development of the region within the framework of the AC, as the Arctic region is currently acquiring a high profile because of the melting of its sea-ice and the off-shore drilling of energy resources. At the same time, an increasing number of people in Japan will necessarily become interested in the agenda and contents of the sessions and activities of the AC because Japan's diplomatic and scientific contributions have been tested in a globally influential regime in the Far North. This is understandable when one turns to the case of the ATS;

Japan has made a significant contribution within the framework of the ATS since the beginning. Although the AC historically, geographically, and legally shares very little with the ATS, it is now expected that, like the ATS, the AC will inevitably need to be more accountable to the international community, as its function gradually grows wider and its responsibility for this role steadily grows more significant.

Against the background mentioned above, the book under review, *The Arctic Council: Governance within the Far North*, is a handy and up-to-date introduction to the theoretical and actual image of the AC. The author, Douglas C. Nord, is well known for his works in the field of Arctic studies, such as *The Changing Arctic: Creating a Framework for Consensus Building and Governance in the Arctic Council*, published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2016. The book under review is a commendable addition to the 'Global Institutions' series of Routledge (edited by T.G. Weiss and R. Wilkinson), with a special stress on the more specialized aspects of international organizations and global governance in terms of the AC.

The book under review consists of five parts. The first part is the introduction, which concisely explains the reasons for the recent arrival of 'the Age of the Arctic'. In other words, it discusses the reasons for the Arctic, which was marginal for many decades, becoming 'hot' in both meteorological and public discourses, raising the following four regional issues: (1) environment and climate changes, (2) the challenges of human development, (3) the development of major natural resources, and (4) strategic developments. In order to address these challenges, the AC has emerged out of a need for 'providing one of several venues for discussion of relevant concerns to offering *the* arena in which important decisions regarding the future of the Far North will take place' (p. 4). The book under review explores the AC's effort to become an effective and meaningful organization in the face of a number of external and internal barriers and new challenges concerning its membership, including new participants.

In the next part, '1 Creating an Arctic regime', Nord, discusses the history of the initial steps taken toward building international cooperation in the Arctic. He considers in particular the time period following the end of the Cold War by referring to the 1987 Murmansk Speech by Mikhail Gorbachev; a speech in which Gorbachev proposed a prototype of Arctic states' regional cooperation, the so-called Canadian initiative that echoed it, and the U.S. reluctance towards the Canadian proposal to establish the eventual Arctic Council. The tug of war between Canada and the U.S. over the 'very different visions' as to the 'structure and operation of the proposed body' (p. 22) concerned the (1) characters, (2) mandate and goals of the body, (3) agenda, and (4) membership and representation. These conflicting issues gave rise to the Arctic Council with 'a modest success' (p. 24) for Canada in November 1996. Since then, the AC has, for nearly two decades, made efforts to be effective and meaningful despite experiencing 'the challenges of organizational adolescence' (p. 27) such as the character of the body and the search for a common guiding vision. Moreover, the AC's efforts have been facilitated by the following two major developments: (1)

a rise in global concerns over climate change and (2) three successive Scandinavian Chairmanships of the AC by Norway, Denmark, and Sweden. Since 2013, the AC's second round of national chairmanships has started to test its maturity as a deliberative body that is in charge of the region.

The third part, '2 The structure and operation of the Arctic Council', outlines its major organisational structure and operation such as its membership, its chairmanship, the secretariat, task forces and working groups, and ministerial meetings. Nord carefully suggests, at the beginning, that the AC 'appears now to have moved well beyond many of its original parameters as a limited "high-level forum"'. However, his main purpose is to 'portray the present reality of this international body' (p. 36) with special reference to the AC's major internal components and the roles they play, the relations among these units, and the AC's important work, including its chairmanship.

In the fourth part, '3 Governance challenges faced by the Arctic Council', the book under review discusses some continuing organisational challenges such as the AC's representation, mandate, expanding agenda, consensus decision-making process, and funding. In addition to these issues, Nord addresses the significance of the leadership of the chair to 'perform various tasks and responsibilities' in an effective manner, so that the AC will significantly develop its own institutional identity and profile to serve as 'the voice and face' of the organization, and under the chair's 'good offices', the AC will 'facilitate agreement and consensus among members' (p. 77).

The last part of the volume, '4 Looking to the future', examines the future needs and aspirations of the Arctic and the way the AC seeks to address them more directly. These challenges include environmental, economic, social, political and international ones. Nord is of the opinion that, because the AC will apparently 'continue to serve as the leading venue for the discussion and debate of alternative policy options and strategies to be pursued within the circumpolar region' (p. 81), it must also undertake some specific organisational reforms for its strengthened and more decisive role as 'the voice and face' of the region, for a more commonly shared vision. Widening its agenda (by including some military security matters) and securing solid and stable funding (by mandatory subscriptions) will certainly be necessary for greater and enhanced commitment from the AC's members. Nord correctly observes that, despite the remaining hurdles, the AC 'appears now to be moving ever closer to becoming a full and complete international organization' (p. 99).

Nord's *The Arctic Council* is a compact and informative update for those who are academically interested in this field of study as well as those without specialised knowledge of Arctic studies in the social sciences. The detailed endnotes of each chapter and the 'Select bibliography' (with brief annotation to each book mentioned) at the end of the volume are certainly good references for further reading.

Owing to the limited space, the coverage of the topics in the book under review is generally appropriate. It might, however, seem to have a slightly more favourable nuance to the Canadian position, especially in the context of the historical background of the establishment of the AC. The

recent expansion of the observer status in the AC to non-European states such as China, India, Japan, Singapore, and South Korea is also mentioned in terms of the new challenges which the AC faces (pp. 39, 62, and 88, for example). However, the reviewer of this book would desperately wish to know more about the author's opinion on the growing pressure from the outside the AC and the issue of the legitimacy of its *de facto* regional framework in the current international community. This is because these topics remind the reviewer, as a Japanese scholar of Polar studies, of similar past lessons that the member states of the ATS learned, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s, in the process of its expansion and democratisation as a full-fledged international organisation.