

B09-O02

WHAT JAPAN CAN DO AS AN ASIAN PERMANENT OBSERVER STATE IN THE ARCTIC COUNCIL'S FRAMEWORK

Taisaku Ikeshima (*WASEDA UNIVERSITY, Japan*)

tai@waseda.jp

Japan is at a loss for not having a clear and solid Arctic policy or strategy, although it has been recently accepted as a new permanent observer (PO) in the Arctic Council (AC). Japan's pioneering commitment in the Arctic is widely known through its observation and research activities in the region for more than half a century. This modest but consistent Japanese contribution, based on scientific expertise and observation methods, may have been the primary reason why the AC granted Japan PO status.

In the field of the development of energy resources in the Arctic Ocean and of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), however, Japan is a relative newcomer, coming behind other Asian (non-Arctic) PO states like China and South Korea, which have been successful in both demonstrating their achievements in traveling with icebreakers and shipping cargo on the NSR. The 'all Japan' approach led by the government, which has begun recently, seems to be low key. This is partly because Japanese industrial society has less of an economic incentive to choose a route other than the usual southern one due to the risks and considerable uncertainty involved in realising the commercial aspects and partly because the sectionalism in the government has slowed down the decision-making process from within. Moreover, unlike other Asian PO states like China and India, the treatment of indigenous peoples' rights and status in Arctic matters seems to attract little attention from the Japanese people, who have been remiss about them even in a domestic context. On the other hand, those scholars and military experts who plan to relate security in the Arctic to the context of the Japan-US security alliance are prone to paying attention only to the issue of military security in the Arctic; this is because the Arctic sea is part of a global commons, where no coercive and provocative state acts are allowed to change the status quo. However, research on security in the Arctic may be troublesome and misleading in the AC management and for Japan's PO position, since the AC is designed to avoid military security issues.

Against this background, therefore, my presentation has three purposes: (1) to discuss the limits and role of Japan's contribution as a PO in the AC framework; (2) to compare the case of Japan with the cases of other Asian POs (China, South Korea, and India) so that they enjoy better collaborative relationships in Arctic affairs in the future; and (3) to explore a suitable position for Japan in the current framework of the AC and under the relevant international rules.