Polar Contradictions: China's Dialectical Thinking about the Arctic

Erdem Lamazhapov[a]*

[a]*Fridtjof Nansen Institute, Lysaker, Norway;*

*elamazhapov@fni.no

Fridtjof Nansens vei 17, 1366 Lysaker, Norway

Acknowledgement:

The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Geopolitics*, 07 October 2024, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14650045.2024.2408601

Polar Contradictions: China's Dialectical Thinking about the Arctic

Using China's seemingly contradictory positions on the Arctic as a starting point, this article examines China's official and academic Arctic discourses. This paper proposes that China's apparently contradictory positions in the Arctic region are the result of the dialectical resolution of discursive tensions. Using an original dataset of over one thousand Chinese academic articles and books, together with China's official statements, this article presents China's Arctic policy discourse as a polyphonic landscape where diverse opinions and ideas compete within a discursive field. The research proposes that by utilising dialectical thinking, China is able to seek a middle ground between conflict and cooperation, between the near-Arctic state and stakeholder identities and between resource development and environmental protection. China also aims to preserve the status quo while striving to reform Arctic governance.

Keywords: China's Arctic policy; dialectical thinking; discourse analysis; keyness analysis; China's foreign policy; polyphony

Introduction

Chinese discourse about Arctic policy reflects efforts to find a middle ground between dichotomous proposals: China will 'not be overstepping' (*bu yuewei*) its role as a non-Arctic state, but it will 'not be absent' (*bu quewei*) from the Arctic (Woon 2020, p. 1-2). According to Mia Bennett (2015, p. 646), China puts forward 'two spatially inconsistent but ultimately mutually reinforcing grand regional narratives of the Arctic': one that pertains to regional narratives in which China justifies its 'belonging' to the region, while the other plays on global narratives about the Arctic in which China is an outside participant. Balances in the Chinese Arctic policy discourse converge around themes that seem quite familiar to students of Arctic geopolitics: tensions between the imperatives of economic development and environmental

protection, the roles of Arctic states versus non-Arctic states and the balance between circumpolar governance and global influences. From the perspective of Chinese geopolitical thought, these dichotomies are explained in terms of contradiction and complementarity (*xiangfang xiangcheng*) and continuity through change (*tongbian*) (Qin 2011; Tian 2002). As President Xi Jinping put it in his essay on dialectical materialism, 'the basic principle of the movement of opposites in all things', as expressed in the statement '*yin* and *yang* make up the *Tao*', is universal; knowledge and practice are processes of understanding and resolving contradictions, necessarily involving the use of the 'mutually reinforcing nature' of contradictions (Xi 2018, para. 9). Therefore, dialectical thinking is crucial for understanding China's general foreign policy and Arctic engagement.

For China, the Arctic is one of many strategic but not core interests. As a result, Arctic-specific issues are connected to China's broader foreign policy agenda in China's Arctic discourse. While emphasis is placed on prioritising competing policy considerations in Arctic discourses, in Chinese discourse, social terrain is seen as a domain of balancing acts. By highlighting the importance of these balances in Chinese discourse, this article attempts to contribute to two sets of literature. First, by using the example of China's Arctic discourses, it will highlight the importance of dialectical thinking in understanding Chinese foreign policy endeavours. Second, by demonstrating how dialectical thinking allows China to sustain seemingly contradictory policy lines, this paper will suggest a new way of interpreting China's Arctic policy.

Indeed, China's Arctic policy makes a compelling case for an analysis of balancing acts in China's foreign policy. The 2018 White Paper on China's Arctic policy is a key document that reflects dialectical tensions between competing representations of China's Arctic policy. While the White Paper asserts 'respect' for the Arctic states' 'exclusive jurisdiction' and 'sovereign rights' (China's Arctic Policy 2018, para. 23), it also claims that 'the Arctic situation

now goes beyond its original inter-Arctic States or regional nature' (China's Arctic Policy 2018, para. 1), underlining that 'China is a "Near-Arctic State", one of the continental States that are closest to the Arctic Circle' (China's Arctic Policy 2018, para. 7). In addition to calling for 'protecting the environment of the Arctic and addressing climate change' (China's Arctic Policy 2018, para. 26), the White Paper also advocates 'exploration for and utilisation of Arctic resources' and 'developing the Arctic shipping routes' (China's Arctic Policy 2018, paras. 32–33). While acknowledging that 'China takes an active part in the international governance of the Arctic', especially through the Arctic Council (AC), the White Paper clearly prioritises the United Nations (UN) Charter and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) as the core governance mechanisms of the Arctic. Ultimately, it confirms that China will keep 'pursuing its own interests' (China's Arctic Policy 2018, para. 15) while bearing in mind 'the well-being of non-Arctic States and that of the humanity as a whole' (China's Arctic Policy 2018, para. 47).

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, research on Arctic geopolitics has focused on the question of continuity and change, especially whether the age of 'Arctic exceptionalism' – when the Arctic was a unique area of peace and cooperation insulated from international conflicts (Gricius and Fitz 2022; Koivurova and Shibata 2023) – is over, and what policy changes might be expected in Russia and other Arctic countries (Devyatkin 2023; Staun 2023). Significant contributions analysing Chinese language Arctic discourses were made before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Andersson 2021; Brady 2017; Woon 2020; Wright 2011), and the reaction to these geopolitical changes in the Chinese discourse is a significant object of analysis for the field of Arctic geopolitics.

Some explanations interpret inconsistencies in Chinese foreign policy as indicative of the two-faced nature of China's foreign policy: an external one, directed at foreign audiences, and an internal one, reflecting China's grand strategic designs. Some scholars have argued that

these contradictions arise from China's explicit and 'hidden agenda' and differences in the intended audience, whether foreign or domestic, inside or outside (Brady 2017, 248–250). They are evidence that 'China speaks with two voices', an 'external one aimed at foreign audiences and a more cynical internal one emphasising competition and Beijing's Arctic ambitions' (Doshi, Dale-Huang, and Zhang 2021, 20). These explanations generally view China's ingenuity as symptomatic of a strategic culture, as summarised in Deng Xiaoping's policy of keeping a low profile or hiding one's capacities and biding one's time (Doshi, Dale-Huang, and Zhang 2021; Pezard et al. 2022; Wright 2011). Furthermore, these explanations emphasise the political ambiguity in China's foreign policy as a way of managing its external and internal relations. In contrast to the explanations above, dialectical thinking views this ambiguity not in terms of a simple binary between internal and external signalling strategies but as diverse ways of meaning construction in the Chinese public intellectual discourse that are integrated in an internal discourse.

A further set of explanations has focused on the fragmented, conflicted nature of China's foreign policymaking. These explanations indicate that China possesses 'a series of competing international identities that try to satisfy a variety of international (and domestic) constituencies' (Shambaugh and Xiao 2012, p. 37) and that the making of Chinese policy is not a coordinated effort (Kossa 2020; Lanteigne and Ping 2015). These explanations often focus on the fractured nature of China's political decision-making, as Chinese foreign policy is intended to satisfy international and domestic contingencies. Hence, there is a gap between the internal and external narratives. Unlike this model, dialectical thinking provides a structured lens through which competing interests articulated through specific policy positions support and inform official policy.

A third body of literature has focused on contradictions as a natural part of China's discursive practices. This literature analyses Chinese policy as a result of discursive

contestation, highlighting how Chinese official discourse manages to 'harmonise' extreme discourses so that they 'complement each other to better serve the interests of China and the domestic legitimacy of the ruling party' (Yang and Chen 2021, p. 90). This literature posits that Chinese academic discourse has an 'intricate relationship with the public policy realm' and highlights the necessity of enriching the international relations (IR) literature with global perspectives (Woon 2020, p. 8). Such approaches avoid categorising all Chinese IR scholars as realists, instead stressing the eclectic synthesis of different theories. Dialectical thinking can provide an additional account of how the party-state shapes public discourse while mobilising the traditional Chinese ways of thinking and being that are often misinterpreted in the West.

This article aims to illustrate how dialectical thinking facilitates an understanding of the tensions within China's foreign policy and, in doing so, addresses a notable gap in the existing literature on the role of dialectical thinking in IR. Recent works in critical geography have found that Confucian and Daoist understandings of space implicitly structure Chinese geopolitical discourses (N. An 2020, W.-S. Tang 2021) at the same time, as they are 'usually silenced or misunderstood by outside voices' (N. An 2020, 177). This article will utilise Chinese academic publications, books and official statements to analyse the role of dialectical thinking in China's Arctic discourses. Unlike previous literature, it argues that thinking in terms of binary opposition is a feature of the Chinese discursive system, and seeming contradictions in China's official discourse on the Arctic can be seen as vestiges of discursive contestations in academic discourse. In the context of the resurgence of traditional philosophy in China's political thinking (Singh 2022), China's 'unique perspective on change, contradiction, and meaning of events', which perceives the world as ever-changing, accepts that 'seemingly contradicting propositions can coexist in a harmonious manner' and that their contextual framing shapes the meaning of events (Cheng 2009, p. 473). Although contradictions play a pivotal role in driving progressive development, dialectical thinking contends that there is no

imperative to resolve tensions but instead to find 'compromise between two statements, two policies, two institutions, and two values', combining 'strong and reasonable elements of both polarities' and ultimately resulting in a better solution (Qin 2018, 178).

The next section discusses sources and methods and presents an analytical framework of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse theory to explore dialectical thinking and the official discourse on Arctic policy. The following section will explore the official Arctic discourse and the academic discourses in terms of basic conceptions that structure the dialectical resolution of tensions between conflict and cooperation, Arctic identities, environmental protection and resource development, and the reform and preservation of Arctic governance.

Analytical framework

This paper uses discourse analysis to analyse China's complex, multi-layered Arctic policy discourse. Delimited by party line and state policy, academic discourses play a significant role in interpreting it by giving meaning to official policy (Zeng 2020, 3–4). The relationship between state foreign policy and academic discourse is co-constitutive, as the academic discourse operates within the boundaries set out by the official discourse, which, in turn, is enriched by nuanced academic perspectives.

To reflect this multi-layered nature of Chinese discourse, I analyse two types of data. First, I performed a broad lexical search for social science and international law articles using the keyword *beiji* ('North Pole, Arctic') in the Chinese National Knowledge Infrastructure and National Social Sciences databases, the two most comprehensive academic databases in China. This resulted in 1,148 articles from 2007 to 2022. Only academic articles were used for the quantitative analysis, but qualitative analysis also drew upon selected books, such as the *Blue Book on Arctic Affairs* and *The Science of Military Strategy*. Analysing academic articles will allow me to cover the breadth and depth of China's academic discourse on the Arctic.

Second, I used policy documents and articles published or reposted on the official government and state council ministries' websites. Textually, these reflect the official discourse. They provide general concepts and documents pertaining to China's overall domestic and foreign policy, such as the *Five-Year Plans for National Economic and Social Development*. These documents are specifically directed towards the Arctic, such as the White Paper on China's Arctic Policy, and ideological publications and speeches, such as the Outline for Study of Xi Jinping Thought.

Combining discourse analysis with computer-assisted content analysis

The article employs a combination of computer-assisted content analysis (CCA) and discourse analysis. CCA aids in identifying representative texts for close reading, and discourse analysis contributes to conceptual validity (A. Bennett 2015). I used CCA to gain a preliminary understanding of the categories prevalent within the corpus of academic articles. Automated content analysis serves to guide the research by classifying documents (identifying sets of categories, such as topics, ideas or themes) and scaling them ('estimate the location of the actor in policy space'; Grimmer and Stewart 2013, p. 269). To identify policy positions by analysing keywords, I used AntConc keyness analysis (Anthony 2022) to determine unknown categories and NVivo to inductively code known and unknown categories across all documents. Computerised keyword generation is meant to resolve the problem of representative text selection for further discourse analysis, allowing the researcher to 'squeeze as many concepts out of as many texts as possible' (Tatum 2018, p. 353). I then employed classical discourse analysis, delimiting texts, mapping representations and layering discourses (Neumann 2004).

Keyness analysis in corpus linguistics reveals a corpus's recurring frequency and stylistic features. It compares term frequency in the analysed corpus to a reference corpus (ToRCH2014 Corpus; J.-J. Xu 2014), determining salient lexical items or keywords. The

keyness metric[1] highlights prevalent terms and topics within the corpus. For this article, focusing on Chinese Arctic policy discourses, only academic articles were pre-processed using AntConc 4.2.0 to generate keyword lists (Anthony 2022). Low-range keywords (appearing in fewer than five documents) were filtered out. The resulting list includes Chinese policies (Polar Silk Road and Belt and Road Initiative), geographical names (Russia, Norway and Greenland), international agreements and law concepts (UNCLOS, UN Charter and soft law), actions and policy areas (climate change and joint construction), and international relations concepts (China threat theory, tragedy of the commons and sea-power theory). Because higher frequency does not necessarily indicate importance, this keyword analysis was supplemented with additional keywords identified inductively, all of which were coded in NVivo with the help of a lexical search that demonstrated usage patterns over time and across different sources.

Following quantitative coding, the analysis turns to the discourse analytical method of interpretation, which identifies 'basic discourses' or ideal-typical policy positions that elucidate the internal logic of representations and contextualise them within the larger structure of meaning (Dunn and Neumann 2016, 105–106). Texts were selected for closer reading and used in the empirical sections of this article based on their fit with these stylised representations.

Discourse analysis and dialectical thinking

This article seeks to enrich the insights generated by Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) discourse analysis by supplementing it with the concept of Chinese dialectical thinking. Discourse is a 'system of meaning-production that fixes meaning, however temporarily, and enables actors to make sense of the world and to act within it' (Neumann 2004, 17–8), while the struggle between political actors to define phenomena that constitute the social world is a dialectical process. Modern Chinese dialectical thinking has a dual heritage involving two distinct dialectical logics:

[1] Calculated as $keyness = 2 \times (log(observed\ frequency) - log(expected\ frequency)$

the Western Hegelian–Marxian tradition and the Chinese dialectical tradition. The two disagree precisely on what constitutes the dialectical process. Daoism argues that constant change is circular in nature, reflecting no development, and Hegel and Marx argue that it is a synthesis that reflects 'an advance on the thesis and antithesis' (Freiberg 1977). Xi's (2018) essay agrees with the Hegelian–Marxian conception that contradictions lead to a synthesis that represents a 'breakthrough' over previous stages. At the same time, Xi emphasises the harmonious unity of opposites, which posits a continuous transformation of the paired aspects, where the process preserves elements of the old while integrating both into a mutually embedded dynamic, rather than resolving them through external logical imposition (W.-S. Tang 2021). Accordingly, Chinese dialectical thinking does not consider contradiction as illogical (Peng et al. 2006) but views the dialectical process as cyclical, with quantitative and qualitative transformations of elements.

This article draws on Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) conception of discursive contestation as the main organising principle of social relations. Dialectical thinking manifests when different discourses intersect and compete for hegemony in points of articulation (Laclau 1990), becoming contradictions. These contradictions do not always refer to the impossibility of two characteristics co-existing but are socially constituted as contradictive. It is precisely due to 'antagonisms', or incompatibilities of different social demands and aspirations, that a society can never exist as an objective, whole and complete system. Laclau (1990) argued that antagonisms are never fully resolved but constantly rearticulated and transformed through discursive struggles. The insight of Chinese dialectics thus lies in 'presenting the terrain of social struggles as a proliferation of contradictions' (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, 64). The utility of this theory for the analysis of dialectical thinking lies in the insight that dialectical thinking is a way to deal with discursive contestation and deeper contradictions within the social order.

Dialectics has been proposed as a characteristic Chinese method in IR (Acharya 2019). In Chinese dialectics, the middle ground (*zhongyong*) is conceived as a dynamic complementation of two extremes, where 'the strength of one pole implies simultaneously its weakness, which is necessarily made up for by the strength of the other pole, and vice versa' (Qin 2018, 176). The Hegelian lord-bondsman dialectic in Chinese dialectical terms means that these roles are not simply mutually defining; they are also co-implicated, where the lord contains elements of the bondsman within himself, and vice versa (Ling 2013). This article will identify how the Chinese discourse seeks to find middle ground between competing considerations while emphasising that contradictions are never fully resolved, with 'opposites interacting in an immanently inclusive way, depending on and complementing each other…, and co-evolving into a new synthesis through dynamic processes which keep maintaining, adjusting, and managing complex and fluid human relations so as to reach the ideal as well as the basic state of harmony' (Qin 2018, 170). As Chinese philosopher Lin (1956) observes, 'a typically Chinese judgment is: "A is right, and B is not wrong either"' (104).

Few studies have explicitly addressed how dialectical thinking guides the formation of China's foreign policy. Keith (2009) demonstrates how Chinese leadership from Mao to Hu employed a 'learning dialectic' in order to create an open-ended foreign policy that could lead China through changing and contradictory domestic and foreign realities. Chang (2007) believes that the function of dialectics in Chinese policy formation is heuristic, presupposing or identifying contradictions and providing clues to possible solutions instead of supplying ready-made answers to perceived problems. Ultimately, policy should uphold and facilitate dialectical co-theses. This literature focuses on dialectical relationships between specific positions like 'one country – two systems' (Bushi 2014; Chang 2007).

This article's analytical framework relies on CCA to discern relevant keywords and integrates discourse analysis with an analysis of Chinese dialectical thought. By examining the

co-constitutive relationship between official and academic discourses, it pinpoints contradictions as points of discursive contestation, revealing how – by identifying contradictions and supplying solutions to them – dialectical thinking structures China's discourse on the Arctic.

China's official Arctic discourse

As part of the broader official foreign policy discourse, China's official Arctic policy discourse is the voice of the state and the party and seeks to safeguard China's interests in the international arena. Finding the middle ground allows for the reconciling of several competing important interests to find the best policy outcome. The plan for the Arctic, presented by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming at the third Arctic Circle Assembly in October 2015, revolved around four points, where China is pursuing a middle ground featuring competing yet complementary proposals: (i) incorporating mutually beneficial economic and scientific cooperation based on respecting rights of the Arctic and non-Arctic countries alike, (ii) asserting China's liminal position as both an outsider and an insider as a 'near-Arctic state' (*jin beiji guojia*) and a major stakeholder in the Arctic (*liyi xiangguanfang*), (iii) protecting and utilising the Arctic and (iv) calling for inclusive and cooperative Arctic governance at the global, regional and national levels on the basis of the UN Charter, UNCLOS and the Svalbard Treaty while underlining China's exceptional status in Arctic and global affairs (M. Zhang 2015). These four points mirror broader foreign policy debates, in which China also seeks to establish a middle ground.

First, the official discourse belabours the dialectical relationship between conflict and cooperation on an international level. Following the conclusion of the debate on the 'theme of the times' (*shidai zhuti*) in 1985, the traditional Maoist doctrine that saw international politics as a proliferation of war and revolution was replaced by the view that peace and development

are the hallmarks of the modern era (Jin 2016; Yan 2018, 7). China postulates that, in the post-Ukraine war era, peace and development still characterise international relations, even if 'instability and uncertainty of the international situation have increased significantly' and 'the world is undergoing major changes unseen in a century' (Xi 2022, para. 6).

Second, China's understanding of its international role involves finding a middle ground between competing identities. On the one hand, China identifies itself as the 'world's largest developing country' and the leader of global South–South cooperation (*Nannan hezuo*). On the other hand, China has continued to insist on its status as a 'responsible great power' (*fuzeren de daguo*) or even as a 'maritime great power' (*haiyang qiangguo*). China's posturing as a great power is ever more important in the 'new strategic frontiers' (*zhanlüe xin jiangyu*) or areas at the fringes of international law, such as the polar regions and outer space (Andersson 2021). Dialectical thinking allows the combination of elements of contradictory identities, such as being an internal and an external actor, both a challenger and an established power or – in dialectical terms – both a lord and a bondsman, emphasising the two figures' mutual dependence and the idea that each carries crucial aspects of the other within themselves (Ling 2013).

Third, China seeks the middle ground between development and environmental protection. Growth is important for China's domestic legitimacy (Cook and Dimitrov 2017; Holbig 2014; Rolland 2017) and for international goodwill and cooperation (Nordtveit 2009). China sees its responsibilities as a global economic power in promoting high-quality development (*gaozhiliang fazhan*) and constructing an 'ecological civilisation' (*shengtai wenming*). These goals are exemplified in the Belt and Road Initiative (*yidai yilu*) proposed by Xi Jinping in 2013, which is seen as China's contribution to global development and aimed at increasing its global power and influence by linking the Asia-Pacific region with Europe and

which came to encompass the Arctic through initiatives like the Polar Silk Road proposed in 2017.

Fourth, China tries to find the middle ground between its simultaneous desire to reshape the existing global order and a contentment with the very same global order that has facilitated the country's remarkable rise. China can make certain contributions to global governance, such as sharing its traditional wisdom (*Zhongguo zhihui*). China's ultimate vision for global governance entails constructing a 'Community of Shared Future for Mankind' (*renlei mingyun gongtongti*) launched in 2012 (Zeng 2020, 111). In September 2023, China's foreign ministry published a new proposal for the reform and development of global governance in which China once again reiterated its desire to reform global governance at the same time as it declared a commitment to the UN and cooperation within the existing international system.

These debates are ever more significant in the context of the Arctic, where tensions within the official discourse become accentuated as China seeks to create a connection between its official discourse and the Arctic. In a speech at the UN Office in Geneva, Xi (2017) linked the Arctic to China's goal of constructing a 'community of common destiny'. He called on the international community to 'turn the deep sea, the polar regions, the outer space and the Internet into new frontiers for cooperation rather than a wrestling ground for competition' (Xi 2017, para. 21) Similarly, the Arctic is linked with security through Xi Jinping's Comprehensive National Security Concept (*zongti guojia anquan guan*) and becomes problematised as an area for the 'reform of global governance system' (Party School 2020, 334, 373). The following section will analyse the academic discourse sources of these tensions within China's official Arctic policy, sustained with the help of dialectical thinking. Four major debates are prevalent within the Chinese social science literature on Arctic affairs: whether the international relations in the Arctic are competitive or cooperative, what Arctic identity best serves China's interests,

the balance between environment and development and how to approach the problem of Arctic governance.

Layering the discourse

Discourse analysis relies on the 'pursuit of commotion' as a methodological necessity (Neumann 2008, p. 66), and the apparent absence of commotion, or disputation, in the Chinese official Arctic discourse conceals contestations about what China's Arctic policy should look like. The academic discourse informs the official discourse through dialectical thinking, which acknowledges the validity of multiple scholarly vantage points.

Indeed, China's academic discourse has a 'complex and often intricate relationship to the institutional and policy machinery' (Woon 2020, p. 2), both through institutionalised and informal channels of expert involvement (Zhu 2018). Academic circles are directly involved in Chinese Arctic policymaking by contributing research that informs the government's and ministries' decisions (Kossa 2020). Thus, the relationship between official and academic discourse is co-constitutive. The official foreign policy discourse delimits the academic discourse, yet the latter plays a significant role in interpreting the former by giving meaning to slogans and signature concepts (Zeng 2020, 3–4). As outlined by prominent Chinese Arctic scholar Yang (2023), the role of academic discourse is not only to pursue scientific truths but also to present a wide range of policy options, which may result in more adaptive and innovative policymaking. In China, peer-review processes are considered an effective meritocratic mechanism for identifying policy proposals (Zhu 2018), but academics must stay within the scope of meaning negotiation, or the 'red lines' (Brady 2017, 36; Lanteigne 2020, 21) while non-mainstream proposals may be marginalised (Jin 2016). Additionally, the state determines how, in what terms and by whom meaning may be expressed in a process of hegemonic intervention (Yang and Tang 2018).

Driven by a circle of highly productive and empirically informed Arctic specialists – in addition to generalists specialising in other areas – the Chinese Arctic policy community can be roughly divided into realists, institutionalists and constructivists. China's realists are inclined to adopt a pragmatic, geopolitical and national-interest driven outlook on international affairs (S.-P. Tang 2017). Institutionalists argue for China to take a greater role in global governance to address issues of global significance, and constructivists 'emphasise normative behaviour' and creativity in solving governance issues (Shambaugh 2011; Qin 2011). Other similar typologies of these intellectually distinct but not organisationally rigid 'tendencies of analysis' exist (Byun 2016; Hou 2020; Jin 2016).

China's identity: Between the near-Arctic state and major stakeholders

China's Arctic identity construction has been characterised as an 'attempt to boost China's authority to speak on Arctic affairs' (Brady 2017, 226), 'to earn legitimacy as a regional stakeholder' (M. Bennett 2015, p. 646) and to compensate for the lack of a 'historical legacy' (Lanteigne 2017, p. 90). Indeed, China's identity construction in the Arctic is a site of contestation between its desire to be recognised as connected to the region and its wish to draw attention to its status as a global power. The debate concerning China's Arctic identity mirrors its broader identity complexities, such as its commonly-designated status as 'the largest developing country' as a 'responsible great power' or as 'home to 1/5th of the human population'. Exploratory keyness analysis of academic articles yielded the identity keywords 'near-Arctic state' (*jinbeiji guojia*) and major Arctic stakeholders (*beiji liyishouguan zhe/fang/guo*). As seen in Figure 2, which shows the percentage of articles mentioning these identities, the debate about how these contradictory elements of China's contingencies come to be resolved has become increasingly important, with the 'near-Arctic state' identity gaining significantly since 2013 and the 'stakeholder' identity as a popular representation of China's

role present for many years. The following discussion will focus on articles that substantially discuss the mentioned topics or the problem of identity (*shenfen*).

<Figure 1>

Realist geopolitics scholars Zhang Xia and Lu Junyuan were the first to propose the 'near-Arctic state' identity as a way of escaping the dichotomy between non-Arctic and Arctic states (S.-S. Liu 2012; Lu 2010; Lu and Zhang 2016). This geopolitical near-Arctic identity is dialectical, as it was designed to allow China to bridge the gap between China's (and several other states') geographic remoteness from the Arctic and the perceived proximity of its interests. Although near-Arcticness follows geopolitical logic (J. Yang 2018), some constructivist scholars have praised this identity construction (He and Song 2013; Y. Xiao 2019), and the near-Arctic identity was swiftly integrated into the official discourse (Jia and Shi 2014), eventually becoming central in China's Arctic policy White Paper (China's Arctic Policy 2018, para. 7).

An alternative to the near-Arctic identity is the dialectic between 'rights and interests' (*quanyi*), mostly proposed by institutionalist scholars as a 'concerned party' or an 'important stakeholder' identity. Unlike the geopolitical near-Arctic argument, this 'important stakeholder' identity refers to all parties with interests in the Arctic as stakeholders, recognising that both state and non-state actors participate in global governance. China's position as a stakeholder is perhaps even more widely accepted in academia than its near-Arctic identity. Scholars have criticised the 'near-Arctic' identity for being subordinated to the Arctic/non-Arctic dichotomy and the insider–outsider dichotomy (Deng 2020, 197; Dong 2017; X.-H. Wang 2013) and have deemed the stakeholder identity better suited for persuading the international community to recognise China's participation in Arctic governance (Ruan 2016). The co-theses in the word *quanyi*, rights and interests, refer both to China's right (*quan*) to participate in Arctic affairs

under international law and to the benefits (*yi*), both to the Arctic and to China itself, of China as a responsible partner.

In fact, whereas China's near-Arctic state identity of being an insider and an outsider to the Arctic was perceived as self-contradictory and generated considerable suspicion of Chinese intentions, the stakeholder identity remained largely unchallenged, as China became an AC observer in 2013, which represented a compromise between China's internal understanding of its position and external perceptions of its role in the Arctic. However, as AC observer status must be regularly confirmed and is subject to the approval of the Arctic countries (Liu and Chen 2014), scholars have insisted that China should accept this 'identity upgrade' (*shenfen shengji*) with a grain of salt (Y. Xiao 2014). Although Arctic observer status can help establish a stable relationship between the Arctic states and China, China will need to find its own identity in the Arctic (Guo and Sun 2013) because the observer status puts China 'in a very disadvantageous position' without allowing China 'to obtain what they wish as Arctic permanent observers' (Guo 2012, 334).

The Arctic Policy White Paper identifies China as a 'responsible great power' (*fuzeren de daguo*) – an identity that some scholars think China should also assume in the Arctic (Sun and Wang 2014a; J. Yang 2018; Y. Xiao 2019). The underlying implication is that in dealing with its Arctic partners, China not only acts out of its own self-interest but also considers common or even global interests, especially in contributing to Arctic governance. Indeed, this sentiment is apparent when some scholars describe China as the 'international public goods provider' (*guoji gongongpin tigongzhe*) by sharing costs for public goods like environmental protection – which could increase the trust of Arctic countries and indigenous peoples in the short term, ease or even eliminate suspicion of China and improve China's influence on governance in the Arctic in the long run (Ding and Zhao 2014). China's responsibleness also implies that the country is not a revisionist force; this is made explicit by its self-identifying as

a 'constructive status quo state' (*jianshexing de xianzhuangxing guojia*); dialectically uniting several binary opposing roles as a participator and a constructor, as a law-abider and law-maker, and as a responder and leader; and setting the example of a responsible power.

Both academics and policymakers have recognised China's agency in forming its Arctic identity (Ding and Zhang 2016, 51–58). Possessing several regional identities is seen as a strength because 'identity appears based on similar interests, and in practice changes with interaction, and the change of identity, in turn, reflecting on the interests' (Guo and Sun 2013, 136). In contrast to previous scholarship that viewed identity construction merely as China's policy instrument (Brady 2017; Kossa 2024), it can be said that China's identities are the result of an academic debate on the country's role in the Arctic. Both the near-Arctic state and Arctic stakeholder identities – which were selected to become official policy – reflect China's dialectical thinking seeking to simultaneously pursue different logics of Arctic belonging – determined on the one hand by obtaining geographical facts and, on the other hand, by underscoring China's interests and even the interests of humanity as a whole.

International relations in the Arctic: Between cooperation and competition

Academic discussions of China's Arctic policy privilege the study of China's strategy and intentions in the Arctic, so the literature has focused on explaining the discrepancy between China's use of cooperative and competitive frames regarding the Arctic. China's Arctic policy (2018) is notably silent on competition and conflicts in the Arctic. Some explanations characterise this discrepancy as a 'tactic' and China's engagement as 'cautious', with the country trying to 'build partnerships and neutralise hostile forces' (Brady 2017, 226). Other explanations attribute this contrast to differences in strategic assessments of China's interests by various actors, such as state and non-state actors (Kossa 2020). However, this section argues that China's scholars and policymakers view international relations dialectically – as a balance

between cooperation and competition. From the outset, Chinese scholars focused on identifying constantly changing sources of cooperation and competition, and this trend was reinforced only by shocks, such as the war in Ukraine.

Exploratory keyness analysis of the academic articles revealed keywords that refer to ideas of cooperation (*guoji hezuo*) and win–win (*hezuo gongying)*, as well as ideas of competition (*beiji zhengduozhan*) and solving disagreements (*gezhi zhengyi*). Having parsed the keywords of *hezuo, gongying, zhengduo* and *zhengyi* as terms for further study, lexical search yielded the following results, summarised in Figure 1, as the percentage of articles that mention these terms by year. Seen together, both cooperation and competition are in a dialectical relationship, with up to 90% of all documents mentioning cooperation and up to 70% mentioning competition in recent years. Despite some fluctuations, consistently more documents mention cooperation than competition – a trend that has remained unchanged in the face of geopolitical crises like the Ukraine War.

<Figure 2>

As the qualitative assessment of these themes reveals, the logic of conflict and cooperation in the Arctic is a point of discursive contestation. On the one hand, there is competition between Arctic and non-Arctic states, where the former attempt to preserve their stewardship over the Arctic, while the latter attempt to achieve a say in Arctic affairs. On the other hand, scholars highlight competition between Arctic states, especially between Russia and the other Arctic states, but also disagreements over other issues, such as the maritime dispute over the Svalbard Fisheries Protection Zone or the now-resolved territorial dispute between Canada and Denmark over Hans Island. Similarly, cooperation is conceptualised as either a process between Arctic states or between the Arctic states and China. Thus, reconciling

the contradiction between cooperation and competition requires finding a balance that is not fixed and depends on the actors in question.

First, representations of competition introduced a scramble, a semi-organised competitive division of exclusive and finite resources overseen by the exclusive circle of Arctic states. Cooperation was thus subjugated to competitive logic – a compromise necessary to achieve a more desirable distribution of resources. This representation was in line with realist literature, which emphasised the role of great power politics and geopolitics in the Arctic and held that nation-states prioritise their national interests, pursuing common or global interests only if these align with national interests. Furthermore, it was argued that China is competing with great powers like the United States, Russia, Europe and Japan, and in the specific context of the Arctic, 'great powers fully use their strategic advantage of their Arctic position, conducting a layered, three-dimensional scramble from ground, air, and ice' (Lu 2010, 22). At the same time, the goal of cooperation between Arctic states was seen as excluding (*paichi*) non-Arctic states.

Geopolitical analyses have emphasised the region's importance in the 'fight for hegemony' between great powers, underscoring that 'controlling the region allows effectively restraining other great powers' (Xu and Wu 2007, 21) and that many countries are already paying more attention to it (Lu 2010, 21). Some authors have considered the potential for armed conflict in the Arctic, especially between Russia and NATO (Q. Cheng 2010; Lu 2010; Lu and Zhang 2016; Z.-R. Yang 2015; Zhang and Yang 2013). Some even claim that, having lost its European sphere of influence, Russia's new geopolitical strategy is to 'occupy' a part of the Arctic Ocean (Q. Cheng 2010) and that there is a high possibility of armed conflict between Russia and NATO (Q. Wang 2018). More cautious pessimists have noted that Arctic geopolitics is a complex issue, leaving some room for cooperation, even though military considerations will ultimately determine whether a conflict erupts (Lu 2010).

In contrast, the institutionalist outlook presented the cooperative element with an optimistic vision of the international situation in the Arctic. The 2010 Delimitation Treaty between Norway and Russia weakened the argument that the disputes in the Arctic were poised to escalate into armed conflict and supported the argument that the Arctic can be an 'area of peace and stability', maintaining 'peace and cooperation in the Northern hemisphere, benefitting all humanity' (Kuang 2011, p. 52). Some have emphasised that the Arctic countries are in no position to dominate Arctic affairs completely, and that there is generally more cooperation than conflict, as the globalisation of Arctic affairs is unfolding on many levels (government, non-governmental organizations and indigenous peoples) and China should take part in all of them (An and Chen 2011). China's role in the Arctic is seen not simply as furthering national interest but as a moral obligation, with the responsibility to ensure environmental protection in the region (Pan and Xia 2011) and to represent developing countries as a whole (An and Chen 2011). Some held that China's position as a latecomer to Arctic governance would be greatly improved by multi-level international diplomacy and that respecting the legitimate rights and interests of the Arctic countries could help fulfill China's strategic interests in the Arctic (Ding and Zhang 2016; He and Song 2013). Some analysts have introduced a distinction between the areas where cooperation is likely and possible and those domains where cooperation is not possible, arguing that there is a difference between non-zero-sum games, such as the development of natural resources, and zero-sum games, such as military security (Xia and Su 2013).

The Ukrainian crisis of 2014 (*Wukelan weiji*) began a round of discussions about the synthesis of conflict and cooperation in the Arctic. Chinese realist scholars have posited that the Ukrainian crisis would lead to the deterioration of the international situation in the Arctic. In contrast, institutionalists and constructivists noted how Arctic cooperation had demonstrated resilience to external crises, 'developing in the direction of peace and cooperation', as the 2014

crisis had not changed 'the interests and policy goals of the three major subjects of Arctic affairs' (Zhao and Ou 2016, p. 42). Drawing on the theory of Arctic exceptionalism (Deng 2020, 164), these scholars hold that the Arctic will manage to maintain 'high latitudes and low conflict' (*gaoweidu, dichongtu*) – or that the United States and Russia are engaging in 'low-level cooperation and high-intensity confrontation' at the same time.

US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo's (2019, para. 29-32) comments singled out 'China's pattern of aggressive behavior' as threatening in the Arctic. Scholars have increasingly described an Arctic security dilemma (*anquan kunjing*), in which NATO's presence has given rise to Russian suspicions, while Russia's continuous development and deployment of offensive weapons is deemed threatening. A few scholars (Zhang and Wang 2019, C.-C. Wang 2021) have mentioned the possibility of a resource war or other Arctic-driven conflict but most noted instead how exogenous conflicts spill over to the Arctic. As Deng (2020) put it, 'When Russia and the United States conflict at the system level, the unique geographical endowment and strategic value of the Arctic region make it an incremental area for the two countries to enhance their global strategic deterrence and a frontier for strategic confrontation' (164).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 triggered a new dialectical cycle in Chinese Arctic discourse as institutionalist arguments about cooperation were abruptly weakened. China found itself caught in the crossfire of a fragmented governance structure where 'confrontation and dialogue co-exist', with a rapidly diminishing role open to non-Arctic states (Y. Xiao 2022). Realist analysts have reasserted that the likelihood of conflict is increasing as the Arctic ice buffer between Russia and NATO disappears. They argued that the United States provoked Russian aggression by interfering in its sphere of influence to strengthen NATO's cohesion, urging China and Russia to prepare for encirclement by US allies in Europe, the Arctic and the Asia-Pacific (Xie and Du 2022; Zhao and Jiang 2022).

Overall, optimism and belief in cooperation have persisted despite the growing uncertainties and changing international situation in the Arctic following Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Li and Chen 2022). Some Chinese scholars have noted that the crisis has affected the Arctic governance mechanism, scientific activities, cooperation and economic development and heightened pressure on climate and environmental protection. However, they believe that in the longer term, 'international cooperation is the only way to deal with challenges in the Arctic region, and Arctic cooperation and dialogue will continue to move forward despite twists and turns' (Chen, Liu, and Wang 2022, 20). Although the China Ocean Shipping Company paused all operations on the Northern Sea Route, the Chinese academic community still discusses the potential for economic and energy connectivity between Europe and China in connection with a Polar Silk Road despite risks associated with the sanctions regime (Deng 2022; L. Zhao 2023). Even if the geopolitical situation makes the prospects for Arctic shipping uncertain, its attractiveness will continue to rise, given its inherent advantages and the spectre of global warming (Q. Liu and Han 2022; Zhu 2022).

Previous literature has centred on discussions about Chinese strategic intentions, suggesting that while China may 'publicly' engage in cooperative rhetoric, there is also a parallel underlying agenda that 'treats the region as a site of geostrategic competition' (Pezard et al. 2022, 18). Instead, this section argued that neither cooperation nor competition singularly defines China's understanding of international relations. Dialectical thinking invites scholars to look for sources of cooperation and competition and drives Chinese academic discourse about the Arctic. As academics adapt their interpretations to new empirical realities, they constantly reconsider their assessment of international relations in the Arctic, looking for ways in which China can effectively exercise its policy to safeguard its interests and cooperate with some nations while hedging against potential conflicts with others. This reflects the official

discourse's insistence on peace and development as hallmarks of the current international system.

Development and environment: Between protecting the Arctic and using the Arctic?

In China's Arctic Policy White Paper, the Arctic is constituted as both a 'fragile ecosystem' in need of protection and a region 'abundant' in resources providing opportunities for economic development. Environmental protection and economic development represent contradictory policy imperatives, and in a certain simplistic sense, the trade-off between them is a zero-sum or a negative-sum game. Both are a result of human activity, and while zero development is the best way to protect the environment, unrestricted development maximises economic growth. In the case of China, applying dialectical thinking to this tension demonstrates how these oppositional elements result in dialectical synthesis. Chinese scholars consider the contradictory elements of exploitation of resources and the protection of the environment a dialectic that justifies China's engagement in the Arctic as a response to the demands of economic growth, climate change and risks to Arctic ecosystems.

Previous studies have suggested that China underplays environmental protection domestically and 'prioritises development first and environmental protection second' (Brady 2017, 219). The perspectives of China's domestic actors on Arctic resources vary, with the government's stance described as intentionally understated to avoid appearing aggressively extractive in the eyes of Arctic nations (Hsiung 2016). For instance, top polar policy official Xu Shijie's statement that 'China is only interested in climate change' in the Arctic because 'there is no proven data on oil and gas deposits' (Huang et al. 2015, p. 62) is interpreted as downplaying China's interest in resource development. Woon (2020) discussed how Chinese scholarship on environmental protection seeks to mitigate the potential risks to China's Polar Silk Road project. However, this section will instead argue that Chinese scholars think

dialectically about environmental protection and resource extraction and prioritise domestic interests in their assessment of China's involvement in the Arctic.

Exploratory keyness analysis of academic articles yielded keywords for 'resource development' and 'energy development' (*ziyuan kaifa* and *nengyuan kaifa*) and 'environmental protection' (*huanjing baohu*). As Figure 3 shows, resource development and environmental protection are discussed in roughly the same proportion in the articles, and although resource development and energy development have been discussed slightly more since 2011, they constitute one dialectical balance and are largely understood together. The discussion below selects the articles that mention the terms 'resource development' and 'environmental protection' the most.

<Figure 3>

Realist analysis engaged with the issues of the environment and resource development from the beginning, viewing both as pertaining to China's interests and as separate questions. For example, according to Chang (2007, p.12), 'The Arctic ecology is a concern for the security and well-being of humankind, and our country has the right to speak out and engage in maritime, mining development, and other commercial activities in the Arctic region.' Realist scholars argued that 'China should pay attention to taking countermeasures together with the international community to prevent environmental damage in the Arctic region from accelerating Arctic warming and slow down the negative impact on China' (Lu 2010, p. 303). Indeed, the melting of Arctic ice was recognised as a non-traditional threat to China's national security by increasing natural anomalies, putting China's coastline at risk of sea-level rise and negatively affecting China's food security (Xia 2011; X. Zhang 2015). At the same time, realist scholars argued that China should pursue the development of Arctic resources, which is related to China's 'energy procurement diversification strategy' (Lu 2010, 311). These scholars

asserted that China should pursue its own interests alongside the 'collective regional interests and the overall interests of humanity' and 'avoid leaving the impression that China only cares about exploiting resources in the Arctic region without caring about environmental protection' (Lu and Zhang 2016, 390).

These two contradictory elements became dialectically synthesised as institutionalist scholars focused on the inability of current governance mechanisms to deal with the contradiction between environmental protection and resource development, inviting China and other international actors to fill the gap. They postulated that 'the contradiction between the development of Arctic resources (whether oil, gas, mineral resources, waterways, tourism resources) and the protection of the natural ecology' can only be solved by adhering to sustainable development and public and indigenous participation in decision-making (B.-Z. Cheng 2012, 65). Without the involvement of the 'major powers', including China, 'it would be difficult to form a universally binding international legal mechanism that matters involving the common interests of all mankind, such as Arctic resource utilization and environmental protection' (Han 2011, p. 6). Ultimately, 'the current Arctic governance mechanism has failed to develop simultaneously with the new trend of increased human activities, showing a serious lag' (J. Yang 2014, p. 7) – necessitating 'major powers at the global level to make their own contribution to the Arctic environmental governance… and oppose any development at the expense of destroying the environment' (J. Yang 2014, p. 13). At the same time, it is the Arctic countries that should 'take the lead in further strengthening system design and strictly implementing the Arctic ecological environment management compensation system' (Luo and Guo 2020, p. 63).

The Arctic Policy White Paper attempted to reconcile environmental protection and resource development, aiming for 'sustainability' to achieve 'better coordination between ecological protection, economic growth and social progress, better balance between utilisation,

management and protection, and intergenerational equity' (China's Arctic Policy 2018, para. 20). This was in line with Chinese academics' renunciation of 'zero development' (Yu 2015) and entailed calling for 'a balance between "appropriate utilization" and "effective protection"', which could involve the 'adoption of new technologies as an effective means to deal with the contradiction between resource utilization and environmental protection' (J. Yang 2017, p. 12).

At the same time, there is a lack of clarity and agreement regarding China's practical role and responsibilities. Some scholars stress that China faces 'common but differentiated responsibilities' (F. Yang 2010, p. 28), implying that China as a 'developing great power' should 'oppose sharing equal responsibility' for the Arctic environment (Y. Xiao 2019, 298–299). China's responsibility is mostly limited to support for and implementation of multilateral protection measures, even when they clash with the country's economic interests – as with the prohibition of the use or transport of heavy-grade oils in the Arctic or sustainable fisheries management (Zhao and Wu 2016). For example, China should actively support the jurisdictional measures of Arctic coastal states, improve compliance efficiency as a flag state and strengthen regulatory mechanisms as a port state to provide comprehensive protection for the fragile Arctic ecosystem, contributing to sustainable development and constructing a shared future for humanity (Bai 2021b). The same is true for the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean (CAOFA), where non-Arctic states, including China, were given an equal role. Although these protection regimes may present disadvantages for China (Fu 2021), they form part of China's efforts to construct a 'maritime community with common destiny' and allow it to balance development and protection interests (C. Zhang 2022; Lou 2022).

Thus, Chinese academics believe that they 'have to look dialectically' (*bianzhengde kan*) at the 'ever-present problem' of the 'balance between Arctic environmental protection and development needs' of Arctic countries (Guo and Yang 2022, p. 68). From a dialectical

perspective, even 'changes in the Arctic ecological environment caused by climate change are generally beneficial to the realisation of the Arctic value from the perspective of development, especially to the resource development and economic utilisation of the Arctic region' (L. Zhao 2020, 224). It is 'conservation and utilisation of Arctic natural resources in a sustainable manner' that is often presented as the solution to this dilemma (Luo and Guo 2020, p. 63), although some scholars contend that 'environmental limitations' and the 'state's continuous pursuit of economic development form an irreconcilable contradiction' (Yu et al. 2021, p. 2406). Chinese academics are invariably sympathetic to China's participation in both environmental protection and resource development, condemning the narrative that China 'plunders resources' and 'destroys the environment' (Yu et al. 2021, p. 2419).

In the official discourse, the Arctic is seen as a fragmented region that 'has abundant resources, but a fragile ecosystem' (China's Arctic Policy 2018, para. 31). It emphasises that economic development and environmental protection are not mutually exclusive, although the precise definition of what constitutes 'sustainability' remains open. Concerning environmental protection, Chinese scholars favour multilateral arrangements, a position consistent with the official discourse that calls for the construction of a community of common destiny for humanity. In continuing to balance resource development and environmental protection, China looks to protect its wider interests, whether by minimising environmental externalities or ensuring the supply of needed materials.

Arctic governance: Between revisionism and the status quo

This section will argue that China's approach to Arctic governance is also marked by dialectical thinking about striking a balance between preserving the status quo and revisionism. Previous studies have characterised China as a 'mildly revisionist Arctic power' that 'challenges the rules and norms protecting the exclusive rights of circumpolar states'

(Rainwater 2013, 77) and argued that China will 'insist on having a say on any new Arctic governance measures' (Brady 2017, 198). Kossa (2024, 117) notes that 'Chinese analysts and academics are more vocal in their criticisms of the current state of Arctic governance' than the official discourse. The subsequent section will argue that the discernible tension between revisionism and adherence to the status quo should also be understood in terms of dialectical thinking. Building upon the interpretation that Beijing aims to preserve international legal frameworks that facilitate its Arctic engagement while simultaneously advocating for normative changes that would better accommodate its interests, this section will argue that the two aspirations are seen as noncontradictory and mutually supportive.

In the exploratory keyness analysis of academic articles, the terms 'Arctic governance' (*beiji zhili*) and governance mechanisms, such as 'UNCLOS' and 'Arctic Council', emerged more frequently than in the reference corpus, indicating their significance for qualitative research. Although China's rights and interests in the Arctic are substantiated by UNCLOS and international law generally, in order to exercise these rights, China must engage with other international institutions, such as the AC. The prominence of the AC within this discourse is arguably incommensurate with the actual role it plays as a soft law governance mechanism. Figure 4 shows that governance was initially barely conceptualised in the discourse (although there was interest in environmental protection mechanisms), but it rapidly grew in prominence, with 83% of articles mentioning it in 2022. Initially, the percentage of academic articles concerned with UNCLOS was significantly higher than those mentioning the AC, but over time, the AC gained a prominent position, with as many as 72% of all articles mentioning it in 2022. A common view among Chinese scholars is that China faces a dilemma in that appearing as a revisionist power is unappealing, but the current system of governance does not reflect Chinese interests or the common heritage of humanity (B.-Z. Cheng 2012b; J. Yang 2018).

<Figure 4>

Arctic governance is a point of contestation in Chinese discourse. Realist accounts hold that there is not much point in China engaging with Arctic governance as such because it is ultimately geopolitical considerations that dictate the political landscape (Ye 2012). Within an anarchical international order, efforts should be concentrated on using opportunities as they present themselves, as well as strengthening bilateral relations with Arctic countries in an effort to gain the upper hand in this geopolitical struggle (Lu 2010, 329–337). Although not mainstream, these accounts reflected the widespread sentiment that while it could be advantageous for China to gain a seat in the AC as an observer, ultimately, 'China can transcend (*chaoyue*) the Arctic Council' and exercise its rights in the region through other platforms (Guo and Sun 2013, 134). Institutionalist accounts also criticised the status quo in Arctic governance. For example, the AC was described as having a 'congenital' defect (*xiantianxing quexian*). This was because the council was not an international organisation and lacked legally binding obligations and regulations. At that time, participation was also limited to Arctic countries and there was no permanent secretariat or long-term funding (B.-Z. Cheng 2012a; Guo 2012).

Initially, Chinese scholars agreed that the current system of Arctic governance was built on the principle of excluding external actors from platforms such as the AC (B.-Z. Cheng 2013; Chen, Tao, and Qin 2011; Y. Xiao 2014; Ye 2012) or fisheries management (L. Zhao 2013, 2016). The institutionalist understanding of exclusion (*paita*, *paiwai*) emphasised the barriers to Chinese participation in Arctic governance. In contrast, the realist understanding of exclusion as it relates to resources and rivalry in consumption has been systematised primarily in terms of the economic rights and interests that China already has, including scientific exploration, navigation and resource development (Lu and Zhang 2016). Exclusion was seen as the reason for the unwillingness to grant China observer status before 2013, despite the fact that China had attended AC meetings as an ad hoc observer since 2006 and had sought full observer status since 2007. Further development of the AC building up to China's admission

as a permanent observer in 2013, such as the 2011 Nuuk Declaration and the establishment of a permanent secretariat in Tromsø, boosted the importance of the council as a focus of Chinese diplomatic efforts (Sun and Guo 2012). Increased cooperation between Arctic states at the expense of non-Arctic states had thus been seen as an attempt to exclude external actors (Sun and Guo 2012; Sun and Wang 2014b; Z.-Y. Liu 2014).

The acceptance of China as an AC observer has strengthened Chinese scholars' confidence in the status quo, resulting in a dialectical synthesis between the status quo and the desire to reform it. Some scholars have interpreted these moves as a final recognition of China's position as a stakeholder in the Arctic (Sun 2014; Sun and Zhang 2016; Y. Xiao 2014; Z-Y. Liu 2014). The decision-maker-oriented academic publication *The Blue Book on the Arctic* concludes that although the observer system is an equilibrium between Arctic and non-Arctic states, it is a 'cooperative game situation that expands the actual and potential interests of all parties' and is thus positive (Ma 2015, p. 318). Xu Hong (2017, p. 8), the director of the Treaty and Law Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, underscored in an academic article that 'China supports the advancement of Arctic governance in compliance with the basic principles of international law and internationally recognised norms' to 'continuously improve and develop the rules-based Arctic governance system'. This translated into increased optimism about China's equal role in new governance mechanisms, such as the CAOFA (Bai and Zhuang 2017; Fu 2021). In line with the official aim of 'guiding the international community to jointly shape a more just and reasonable new international order' (Renmin Ribao 2017, para. 1), contributing to Arctic governance by 'China's wisdom and power' (*Zhongguo zhihui he Zhongguo liliang*) has become firmly established as an official policy (China's Arctic Policy 2018, para. 2).

With the growing emphasis on Arctic governance, some Chinese scholars have felt it necessary to explicitly address the claim that China is 'challenging the rule-based order by

breaking existing rules' (Jiang 2020, 18). In international discussions, especially since the 2015 arbitration ruling regarding conflicting territorial claims in the South China Sea – which found China's claims to historic rights within the 'nine-dash line' to be inconsistent with UNCLOS (Permanent Court of Arbitration 2016, 6) – China has been criticised for being unwilling to abide by the 'rules-based international order' (*jiyu guize de guoji zhixu*). In Chinese academic Arctic discourses, the question of the rules-based international order has been mentioned in 23 documents since 2017 and is strongly associated with the analysis of US foreign policy. The concept has negative connotations as a US ideological front. It has been widely criticised in Chinese official and academic discourses on the basis of the suspicion that, as China's UN ambassador Zhang Jun (2023, para. 12) put it, the 'true intention of a scant few countries touting a rules-based international order is to create an alternative to the existing system of international law, to impose their own standards and will on others by putting their own narrow interests at the centre of the universe, and to open the back door to double standards and exceptionalism'.

The deteriorating relations between the West and China, as well as between the West and Russia, necessitated a new dialectical cycle in Chinese discourse, with a revised synthesis of Arctic governance mechanisms. Chinese academic literature has noted the fragmentation (*supianhua/tiaokuaihua*) of governance mechanisms, the inability of Arctic states to harmonise international and domestic law and the resultant inability to act upon pressing issues, such as biodiversity (C.-G. Wang 2016, 80; Guo and Sun 2013, 138; Wang and Wu 2019). This applies in particular to the trend of remilitarisation (*zai junshihua*) of the Arctic, much discussed after 2014. Chinese scholars have expressed displeasure at the lack of institutional mechanisms that could effectively counteract the various negative effects of remilitarisation, such as environmental degradation (Y. Tang 2015). Remilitarisation, similar to any form of 'great power games' in the Arctic, is seen as a sign of governance failure. It is felt that China should

actively oppose a military interpretation of its actions in the Arctic in addition to resisting the unilateral actions of great powers, striving instead to establish some kind of institutional mechanism to counter them (Jiang 2020).

Thus, when governance is discussed explicitly in Chinese Arctic discourses, neither the status quo nor complete revisionism is extolled. The insistence on being included in the Arctic governance structure is a part of China's desire to reform the international order –specifically, the 'West's normative hegemonism' (*Xifang guifan baquanzhuyi*) (Y. Xiao 2019, 286). Unsurprisingly, constructivist scholars favour using soft power tools to reform Arctic governance, holding that reforming it fits the policy of 'creative involvement' (*chuangzaoxing jieru*) or wielding 'China's wisdom', which is typically held to be completely consistent with international law (C.-G. Wang 2016; He and Song 2013; Li and Wu 2010; Sun and Zhang 2016). These scholars want China to become more comfortable with governance ideas originating in the West (B.-Z. Cheng 2012a). However, instead of taking such ideas at face value, they insist that the global order and Arctic governance must be reformed by renegotiating their meaning (Y. Xiao 2019, 286), such as defining 'good governance' and thus bringing about changes in governance philosophy (Ruan and Wang 2018).

Dialectical thinking is an important explanatory tool for understanding the tension between China's commitment to the prevailing international order and its ambitions to reform existing governance structures. These seemingly divergent pursuits are not seen as contradictory within Chinese policymaking but rather as complementary – China is seeking to align the Arctic governance structure with its own visions. Given that Chinese academic discourse is informed by realist, institutionalist and constructivist theories, the role of China is interpreted as underlining the importance of maintaining a balance of power while recognising the value of norms and rules, any of which can be changed. The way this translates into actual policy is not static. In recent years, the vague vision of the new international order is a

'community of common destiny'[2] bridging the dialectical gap between democracy and autocracy or Arctic and non-Arctic dichotomies, with an emphasis on the common interests of development and growth. By sharing its wisdom, China's role is to support and encourage the construction of a pan-Arctic community and to be recognised as an active participant (Ding and Zhang 2016). China taking such a role, in this line of thinking, could help to solve the governance problems of the Arctic, both environmental (Z.-J. Yang 2022) and political, despite the mounting geopolitical troubles – even ones as great as the war in Ukraine (Wu 2022).

Conclusions: Chinese Arctic discourse and dialectical thinking

Theoretical literature within IR has pointed out the importance of dialectical thinking as a distinctive feature of the Chinese intellectual tradition. However, there have been few empirical attempts to examine the importance of dialectical thinking in Chinese foreign policymaking. By examining the case of China's Arctic policy, this study suggests that China's indigenous epistemic tradition permits and even encourages the partial resolution of tensions by acknowledging the usefulness of dialectically opposing positions. I propose that dialectical thinking, reflecting a uniquely Chinese epistemology and methodology, is key to explaining and reconciling China's seemingly contradictory positions in the Arctic region.

By capturing the breadth of complex and polyphonic China's discourse on the Arctic, this study seeks to shed light on the social construction of China's Arctic policy and the dialectical resolution of tensions within Chinese foreign policy discourse. By zooming in on the 'voices' within China, this study addresses the often speculative nature of Western-centric scholarly analyses and contributes both conceptually and empirically to the discourse on China's Arctic strategies. As demonstrated in the study, the tensions within China's official

[2] This concept has its origins in German discourses on *Schicksalsgemeinschaft* and Meiji-era Japanese discourses on *unmei kyōdōtai* (Mitchell 2022)

Arctic discourse reflect academic debates, as dialectical thinking helps to find a middle ground between seemingly contradictory elements by presenting them as complementary and not mutually exclusive. This allows Beijing to achieve a balance between its complex identities, between competition and cooperation, between development and environment and between the desire to maintain the status quo while attempting to reform international governance. These findings complement Woon's (2020) already convincing arguments that Chinese academic discourses use positive frames to address a spectrum of economic, environmental and diplomatic concerns about China's engagement with the Arctic region.

This article sought to demonstrate that the binary perception of China's foreign policy as representing both an explicit and a concealed agenda falls short of capturing the nuances within Chinese policy discourse. While Brady (2017), Doshi et al. (2021) and Pezard et al. (2022) identified inconsistencies as indicative of hidden intentions, the dialectical and discursive approach analyses these contradictions as points of contestation, where contradictions in the official discourse are not necessarily seen as a problem but instead emerge as a result of attempting to keep two thoughts in one's head simultaneously. Thus, while the 'two voices' explanation seeks to understand China's strategic posture as a unitary actor, the dialectical approach reveals how and why these dual positions arise in the first place.

Likewise, this article's findings differ from actor-centred analyses that hold that a certain policy consensus is reached as a result of bargaining. The article contends that contradictions are not simply a reflection of disjointed policy efforts but are indicative of dialectical interactions among various scholars, institutions and policy actors. By analysing academic discourse through the lenses of realist, institutionalist and constructivist scholars, the article demonstrates how discussions among them result in an evolving discursive environment that accommodates, and indeed thrives on, multiple perspectives on international relations.

This is because the making of China's foreign policy is informed by different IR perspectives intended to best serve the country's interests.

Using this dialectical method, the article enriches the literature that examines the relationship between academic discourses and policymaking. It advances findings by Woon (2020) and Andersson (2021) by showing how the official Chinese discourse harmonises contradictory policy priorities and scholarly positions to synthesise a cohesive foreign policy deliberately informed by academic discourses. For example, China's genuine scientific interest in the Arctic does not rule out the region's potential value for resource development to China. The tensions in China's academic discourse on the Arctic illustrate how the partial fixation of meaning can lead to the harmonisation of tensions as scholars seek a middle ground between opposing positions.

In bringing together the dialectical and the discursive perspectives, this study sought to create a more nuanced, contextual and situated way of understanding China's official discourse. In a document such as China's Arctic Policy White Paper, the conflation of regional and global, environmental and developmental, civilian and military, revisionism and reformism, and near-Arctic and stakeholder identities represents a compromise between different paths of meaning construction. Dialectical thinking is present even in China's military discourse, where explicit calls for a greater Chinese military presence in the polar regions emphasise 'extensively developing coordination and cooperation with the civil and military forces of other countries', as well as reliance on international cooperation to achieve strategic goals (T.-L. Xiao 2022, p. 167). This dialectical and discursive perspective could be useful in both the field of Arctic geopolitics and Chinese foreign policy analysis.

Declarations of interest

The author reports that there are no competing interests to declare.

References

Acharya, A. 2019. From heaven to earth: 'Cultural idealism' and 'moral realism' as Chinese contributions to global international relations. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 12 (4): 467–94.

An, N. 2020. *Confucian geopolitics*. Singapore: Springer. doi: 10.1007/978-981-15-2010-5.

An, Q., and Y.-G. Chen. 2011. Hou lengzhan shiqi beiji guoji hezuo [Arctic international cooperation in the post-Cold War era]. *China International Studies* 4: 63–9.

Andersson, P. 2021. The Arctic as a "strategic" and "important" Chinese foreign policy interest: exploring the role of labels and hierarchies in China's Arctic discourses. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1177/18681026211018699.

Anthony, L. 2022. AntConc. V 4.2.0. Tokyo, Japan: Waseda University.

Bai, J. 2021a. "Sipicibeiergen qundao tiaoyue" gongping zhidu tixi xia de shiyong zhenglun jiqi yingdui [The controversy of application under the fair system of the Spitsbergen Treaty and solutions]. *Contemporary Law Review* 6: 144–57.

Bai, J. 2021b. Kechixu fazhan shi yu zhong de beiji hangyun zhongyou guankong quxiang ji Zhongguo yingdui [The trend of heavy oil control in Arctic shipping and China's response]. *Dong Yue Tribune* 42 (10): 171–82.

Bai, J., and L. Zhuang. 2017. Beibingyang hexinqu gonghai yuye ziyuan gongtong zhili wenti yanjiu [On the co-governance of fishing activities on the High Seas in the Central Arctic Ocean]. *Guoji Zhanwang* 9 (3): 135–52.

Bennett, A. 2015. Found in translation: combining discourse analysis with computer assisted content analysis. *Millennium* 43 (3): 984–97. doi: 10.1177/0305829815581535

Bennett, M. M. 2015. How China sees the Arctic: reading between extraregional and intraregional narratives. *Geopolitics* 20 (3): 645–668. doi: 10.1080/14650045.2015.1017757

Brady, A.-M. 2017. *China as a polar great power*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Cambridge University Press.

Byun, S.-W. 2016. China's major-powers discourse in the Xi Jinping era: tragedy of great power politics revisited?. *Asian Perspective* 40 (3): 493–522. doi: 10.1353/apr.2016.0022

Cai, G.-Q., and B.-J. Qiu. 2019. Lun beifang hangdao huanjing baohu de falü baozhang [On legal guarantee for environmental protection of the Northern Channel]. *The South China Sea Law Journal* 5: 10–20.

Chang, Y. 2007. Beiji fenghuo: E-Mei-Jia deng guo beiji zhengduozhan ji woguo de zhengce [Arctic War: Russia, the United States, Canada and other countries' battle for the Arctic and our country's countermeasures]. *Jianzai Wuqi* 10: 12–17.

Chen, Y.-T., H.-R. Liu, and C.-G. Wang. 2022. Zai diyuan boyi yu quanqiu zhili zhi jian de beiji [The Arctic between geopolitics and global governance]. In *Report on Arctic region development, (2021)*, ed. H.-R. Liu, Y.-T. Chen, and K. Sun, 1–20. Beijing: Social Sciences Literature Press.

Chen, Y.-G, P.-G. Tao, and Q. Qin. 2011. Beiji lishihui yu beiji guoji hezuo yanjiu [Arctic Council and Arctic international cooperation research]. *Guoji Guancha* 4: 17–23.

Cheng, B.-Z. 2012a. Beiji zhi lilun gang: Zhongguo xuezhe de shijiao [Probing into the Arctic governance: Chinese scholars' perspective]. *Pacific Journal* 20 (10): 62–71.

Cheng, B.-Z. 2012b. Dangqian beiji zhili de sanda maodun ji Zhongguo yingdui [Three major contradictions in current Arctic governance and China's response]. *Dangdai Shijie* 12: 71–3.

Cheng, B.-Z. 2013. Shi xi Beiji lishi hui de gongneng zhuanxing yu Zhongguo de yingdui celue [On the functional transformation of the Arctic Council and China's countermeasures]. *International Forum* 15 (3): 43–49.

Cheng, C. 2009. Dialectical thinking and coping flexibility: A multimethod approach. *Journal of Personality*, 77 (2): 471–94.

Cheng, Q. 2010. Qianyi Eluosi de beiji zhanlüe jiqi yingxiang [On Russia's Arctic strategy and its influence]. *Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies* 1: 76–84.

China's Arctic Policy. 2018. Information office of the state council of the People's Republic of China. Last Modified January 26, 2018. Accessed March 15, 2021. https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm.

Cook, L. J., and M. K. Dimitrov 2017. The social contract revisited: evidence from communist and state capitalist economies. *Europe-Asia Studies* 69 (1): 8–26. doi: 10.1080/09668136.2016.1267714.

Deng, B.-X. 2020. *Beiji anquan yanjiu* [Arctic Security Studies]. Beijing: Haiyang Chubanshe.

Deng, B.-X. 2022. Dangqian guoji qushe xia beiji hangdao liyong qianjing ji dui woguo yijngxiang [Prospects of utilisation of Arctic passage and its impact on China under current international situation]. *Chuanbo* 34 (1): 1–6.

Devyatkin, P. 2023. Arctic exceptionalism: a narrative of cooperation and conflict from Gorbachev to Medvedev and Putin. *The Polar Journal* 13 (2): 336–357.

Ding, H., and C. Zhang. 2016. Fanbeiji gongtongti de shexiang yu Zhongguo shenfen de suzao: Zhong jiangou zhuyi de jiedu [The vision of pan-Arctic community and the molding of Chinese identity: an interpretation of constructivism]. *Journal of Jiangsu Administration Institute* 88 (4): 76–83.

Ding, H., and N.-N. Zhao. 2014. Beiji zhili yu Zhongguo canyu: Jiyu guoji gonggongpin lilun de fenxi [The Arctic governance and China's participation: an analysis based on the theory of international public goods]. *Wuhan University Journal* 67 (3): 39–44.

Dong, L.-M. 2017. Zhongguo "beiji liyi youguanzhe" shenfen jiangou [The construction of China's identity of "Arctic stakeholder"]. *Pacific Journal* 25 (6): 65–77.

Doshi, R., A. Dale-Huang, and G.-Q. Zhang. 2021. *Northern expedition: China's Arctic activities and ambitions*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

Dunn, K. C., and I. B. Neumann. 2016. *Undertaking discourse analysis for social research*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

Freiberg, J. W. 1977. The dialectic in China: Maoist and Daoist. *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 9 (1): 2–19.

Fu, Y.-Q. 2021. Yufang zhong beibingyang bu guanzhi gonghai yuye xieding de zhanlüe shenshi yu shendu pouxi [Strategic review and in-depth analysis of the Agreement on the Prevention of Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean]. *Legal System and Society* 3: 168–71.

Gricius, G., and E. B. Fitz. 2022. Can exceptionalism withstand crises? An evaluation of the Arctic Council's response to climate change and Russia's war on Ukraine. *Global Studies Quarterly* 2 (3), ksac042.

Grimmer, J., and B. M. Stewart. 2013. Text as data: the promise and pitfalls of automatic content analysis methods for political texts. *Political Analysis* 21 (3): 267–297. doi: Guo, P.-Q 10.1093/pan/mps028.

Guo, P.-Q. 2012. Chinese perspective. In *The Arctic in world affairs: 2012 North Pacific Arctic Conference Proceedings*, ed. O. R. Young, J. D. Kim, and Y. H. Kim, 330–7. Honolulu, HI: East-West Center

Guo, P.-Q. and, K. Sun. 2013. Beiji lishihui de Nuke biaozhun he Zhongguo de beiji canyu zhi lu ["Nuuk Criteria" of the Arctic Council and China's road to the Arctic]. *World Economics and Politics* 12: 118–39.

Guo, P.-Q., and N. Yang. 2021. Eluosi dui beifang hangdao maodun de guanli zhili [Contradictory management system of Russian Northern Sea Route]. *Eluosi Yanjiu* 227 (1): 112–36.

Guo, P.-Q., and N. Yang. 2022. Eluosi renzhi beiji lishihui zhuxi jiqi beiji zhengce de tiaozheng [Russia's chairmanship of the Arctic Council and the adjustment of its Arctic policy]. *International Forum* 2: 50–75.

Han, Y.-C. 2011. Lun lianheguo yu beiji diqu zhi guojifa zhili [On the United Nations and international law governance in the Arctic region]. *Journal of Ocean University of China* 2: 5–12.

He, G.-Q., and X.-J. Song. 2013. Chuangzaoxing jieru: Zhongguo canyu beiji diqu shiwu de tiaojian yu lujing tansuo [Creative Involvement: the condition of China's involvement in Arctic region affairs]. *Pacific Journal* 03: 51–58.

Heggelund, G., and R. Nadin. 2017. Climate change policy and governance. In the *Routledge handbook of environmental policy in China*, ed. E. Sternfeld, 97–112. London: Routledge.

Holbig, H. 2014. Shifting ideologics of research funding: the CPC's National Planning Office for Philosophy and Social Sciences. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 43 (2): 13–32. doi: 10.1177/186810261404300203.

Hou, X.-S. 2020. The paradox of nationalism and globalism: China's participation in global capitalism. In *The Wiley Blackwell companion to race, ethnicity, and nationalism*, ed. J. Stone, R. Dennis, P. Rizova, and X.-S. Hou, 119–128. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell. doi: 10.1002/9781119430452.ch7.

Hsiung, C. W. 2016. China and Arctic energy: drivers and limitations. *The Polar Journal* 6 (2): 243–58.

Huang, L., F. Lasserre, and O. Alexeeva. 2015. Is China's interest for the Arctic driven by Arctic shipping potential?. *Asian Geographer* 32 (1): 59–71.

Jackson, P. T. 2011. *The conduct of inquiry in international relations: Philosophy of science and its implications for the study of world politics*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Jia, G.-D., and W.-H. Shi. 2014. Dui xin xingshi xia Zhongguo canyu beiji shiwu de sikao [On China's participation in Arctic governance under new circumstance]. *Guoji Zhanwang* 4: 5–28.

Jiang, Y.-A. (2020). Zhongguo beiji weixie lun: Tiaozhan yu yingdui ["China Arctic Threat": challenges and countermeasures]. *Guoji Yanjiu Cankao* 12: 15–20.

Jin, X. 2016. Debates in IR academia and China's policy adjustments. *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 9 (4): 459–85. doi: 10.1093/cjip/pow014.

Keith, R. C. (2009). *China from the inside out: fitting the People's Republic into the world*. London: Pluto Press.

Koivurova, T., and A. Shibata. 2023. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022: Can we still cooperate with Russia in the Arctic?. *Polar Record* 59: e12.

Kossa, M. 2020. China's Arctic engagement: Domestic actors and foreign policy. *Global Change, Peace and Security* 32 (1): 19–38. doi: 10.1080/14781158.2019.1648406.

Kossa, M., 2024. *The Arctic in China's national strategy: Science, security, and governance*. Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.

Kuang, Z.-J. 2011. 2010 nian E-Nuo beiji haiyang huajie tiaoyue pingxi [Comments and analysis on the Treaty of Russia-Norway Maritime Delimitation in Arctic Area in 2010]. *Northeast Asia Forum* 97 (5): 45–53.

Laclau, E. 1990. *New reflections on the revolution of our time: Ernesto Laclau*. London: Verso.

Laclau, E., and C. Mouffe. 1985. *Hegemony and socialist strategy: Towards a radical democratic politics*. London: Verso.

Lanteigne, M. 2017. Walking the walk: Science diplomacy and identity-building in Asia-Arctic relations. *Jindal Global Law Review* 8 (1): 87–101.

Lanteigne, M. 2020. *Chinese foreign policy: an introduction*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Lanteigne, M., and S. Ping. 2015. China's developing Arctic policies: myths and misconceptions. *Journal of China and International Relations* 3 (1): 1–25. doi: 10.5278/OJS.JCIR.V3I1.1144.

Li, T., M.-H. Chen. 2022. Woguo "xiang bei kaifang" duijie "bing shang sichou zhi lu" lujing chutan [Study on the path of China's "Opening up to the North" connecting to the "Polar Silk Road"]. *Northeast Asia Economic Research* 33 (5): 33–45.

Li, W.-S., and D. Wu. 2010. Dongya zhuyao guojia yu fazhan zhongde beiji lishihui guanxi fenxi [Analysis of the relationship between major East Asian countries and the Arctic Council]. *Guoji Zhanwang* 6: 81–96.

Lin, Y.-T. 1956. *My country and my people*. London: William Heinemann Ltd.

Ling, L. H. (2013). Worlds beyond Westphalia: Daoist dialectics and the 'China threat'. *Review of International Studies* 39 (3): 549–568.

Liu, H.-R., and Y.-T. Chen. 2014. Beiji lishihui de Yazhou guanchayuan yu beiji zhili [The Asian observers of the Arctic Council and Arctic governance]. *Wuhan University Journal* 67 (3): 45–50.

Liu, H.-R., Y.-T. Chen, and Y. Dong. 2011. Beiji huanjing zhili de falu lujing fenxi yu zhanwang [Analysis and prospects of legal path in Arctic environmental governance]. *Journal of Ocean University of China* 2: 1–4.

Liu, H.-R., and F. Yang. 2009. Guojifa shiye xia de beiji huanjing falu wenti yanjiu [Research on Arctic environmental legal issues from the perspective of international law]. *Journal of Ocean University of China* 3: 1–5.

Liu, M. 2019. Huanjing baohu yiti: Canyu beifang haihangdao zhili de falü lujing [The issue of environmental protection: A legal path to participate in the governance of the Northern Sea Route]. *Chinese Journal of Maritime Law* 30 (2): 60–7.

Liu, Q., and J.-L. Han. 2022. Beiji shuiyu yingyun chuanbo de hei tan paifang wenti chutan [A preliminary study on black carbon emissions from ships operating in Arctic waters]. *Maritime China* 7: 72–3.

Liu, S.-S. 2012. "Jin beiji jizhi" de tichu yu zhongguo canyu beiji [Subarctic mechanism and China's participation in the Arctic region]. *Social Science Journal* 10: 26–34.

Liu, Z.-Y. 2014. Qian xi Zhongguo chengwei Beiji lishi hui yongjiu guanchayuan de libi: Jiyu guojifa de shijiao [A brief analysis of the pros and cons of China becoming a permanent observer in the Arctic Council: based on the perspective of international law]. *Legal System and Society* 1: 175–80.

Liu, Z.-Y. 2018. Beiji yuanzhumin liyi suqiu de duoweidu tantao [Multi-dimensional discussion on the interests and requirements of indigenous peoples in the Arctic]. In *Report on Arctic Region Development (2017)*, ed. H.-R. Liu, K. Sun, and Y. Dong, 285–300. Beijing: Social Sciences Literature Press.

Lou, S.-C. 2022. BBNJ xieding yu beibingyang gonghai yuye ziyuan yanghu he kaifa de guanlian xing [Correlation between BBNJ agreement and conservation and development of High Seas Fishery Resources in Arctic Ocean]. *Journal of Eastern Liaoning University* 24 (3): 34–45.

Lu, J.-Y. 2010. *Beiji diyuan zhengzhi yu Zhongguo yingdui* [Geopolitics in the Arctic and China's response]. Beijing: Shishi chubanshe.

Lu, J.-Y., and X. Zhang. 2016. *Zhongguo Beiji quanyi yu zhengce yanjiu* [China's Arctic interests and policy]. Beijing: Shishi chubanshe.

Luo., M., and Y. Guo. 2020. Beiji diqu lüyou ziyuan kaifa de falü kunyin yu jueding lujing [Legal dilemma and solution for the development of tourism resources in the Arctic region]. *Chinese Journal of Maritime Law* 31 (2): 58–66.

Ma, Q.-L. 2015. Beiji lishi hui guanchayuan zhidu he zhongguo yinying [Arctic Council Observer System and China's Response]. In *Report on Arctic Region Development (2014)*, ed. H.-R.

Liu, K. Sun, Y. Dong, B.-Z. Cheng, and S.-J. Xu, 304–18. Beijing: Social Sciences Literature Press.

Mitchell, R. M. 2022. The human community of fate: A conceptual history of China's ordoglobal idea. *Humanity: An International Journal of Human Rights, Humanitarianism, and Development* 13 (2): 175–195. doi: 10.1353/hum.2022.0015.

Neumann, I. B. 2004. Deep structure, free-floating signifier, or something in between? Europe's alterity in Putin's Russia. In *Identity and Global Politics*, ed. P. M. Goff and K. C. Dunn, 9–26. New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. doi: 10.1057/9781403980496_2.

Neumann, I. B. 2008. Discourse analysis. In *Qualitative Methods in International Relations*, ed. A. Klotz and D. Prakash, 61–77. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan UK. doi: 10.1057/9780230584129_5.

Nordtveit, B. H. 2009. Western and Chinese development discourses: education, growth and sustainability. *International Journal of Educational Development* 29 (2): 157–65. doi: 10.1016/j.ijedudev.2008.09.010.

Pan, M., and W.-J. Xia. 2011. Jinnian lai de Jianada beiji zhengce: Jian lun Zhongguo zai Nunawute diqu hezuo de kenengxing [Canada's Arctic Policy in recent years: Also on the possibility of China's cooperation in Nunavut]. *International Review* 04: 24–30.

Party School of the of the CPC Central Committee. 2020. *Xi Jinping xinshidai Zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi jiben wenti* [Basic issues of Xi Jinping thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era]. Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe.

Peng, K., Spencer-Rodgers, J., & Nian, Z. 2006. Naïve dialecticism and the Tao of Chinese thought. In *Indigenous and cultural psychology: Understanding people in context*, ed. U. Kim, K.-S. Yang, and K.-K. Hwang, 247–262. Boston, MA: Springer US.

Pezard S., S. J. Flanagan, S. W. Harold, I. A. Chindea, B. J. Sacks, A. Tingstad, T. Finazzo, and S. Kim. 2022. *China's strategy and activities in the Arctic: Implications for North American and Transatlantic Security*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. doi: 10.7249/RRA1282-1.

Permanent Court of Arbitration. 2016. The South China Sea Arbitration Award (Philppines v. China), PCA Case Nº 2013-19. https://web.archive.org/web/20220130083816/https://pcacases.com/web/sendAttach/2086.

Pompeo, M. 2019. Looking North: Sharpening America's Arctic Focus. Last Modified May 7, 2019. Accessed September 18, 2024. https://ee.usembassy.gov/americas-arctic-focus/

Qin, Y.-Q. 2011. Development of international relations theory in China: Progress through debates. *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 11 (2): 231–57. doi: 10.1093/irap/lcr003.

Qin, Y. 2018. *A relational theory of world politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Qu, Y.-A., and H.-Y. Zhao. 2022. Lun beiji xibei hangdao hangxing ziyou yu huanjing baohu de pingheng lujing [On the balance path of navigation freedom and environmental protection in Northwest Route of the Arctic]. *Ocean Development and Management* 1: 3–11.

Rainwater, S. 2013. Race to the north: China's Arctic strategy and Its implications. *Naval War College Review* 66 (2): 62–82.

Renmin Ribao. 2017. Xi Jinping shouti "liange yingdao" you shenyi [Xi Jinping's first mention of "two guidelines" has profound meaning]. *Renmin Ribao*, February 20. Accessed May 8, 2023. http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2017/0220/c1001-29094518.html

Rolland, N. 2017. *China's Eurasian century? Political and strategic implications of the belt and road initiative*. Washington, DC: National Bureau of Asian Research.

Ruan, J.-P. 2016. "Jinbeijiguojia" haishi "beiji liyi youguanzhe"? Zhongguo canyu beiji de shenfen sikao ["Near-Arctic State" or "Arctic Stakeholder"? Thinking about China's identity in participation in Arctic affairs]. *International Forum* 18 (1): 47–52.

Ruan, J.-P., and Z. Wang. 2018. Shanzhi shijiao xia de beiji zhili kunjing ji zhongguo de canyu tanxi [Analysis of the Arctic governance dilemma and China's participation in the perspective of good governance]. *Theory and Reform* 05: 29–37.

Shambaugh, D. 2011. Coping with a conflicted China. *The Washington Quarterly* 34 (1): 7–27. doi: 10.1080/0163660X.2011.537974.

Shambaugh, D., and R. Xiao. (2012). China: the conflicted rising power. In *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers*, ed. H. R. Nau and D. Ollapally, 36–68. New York: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199937479.003.0002.

Singh, P. K. (2022). *Xi Jinping's 'Chinese dream': China's renewed foreign and security policy*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Staun, J. 2023. Russia's Arctic policy: Upcoming change?. *Polar Record* 59: e31.

Sun, K. 2014. Canyu shijian, huayu huchang yu shenfen chengren [Practice of engagement, discourse interaction, and identity recognition: Understanding China's participation in Arctic affairs]. *World Economics and Politics* 7: 42–62.

Sun, K., and Guo, P.-Q. 2012. Beiji zhili jizhi bianqian ji Zhongguo de canyu zhanlüe yanjiu [Changes in Arctic governance mechanism and China's participation strategy research]. *Forum of World Economics and Politics* 2: 118–128.

Sun, K., and C.-G. Wang. 2014a. Guowai dui zhongguo canyu beiji shiwu de butong jiedu jiqi yingdui [Different interpretations of China's participation in Arctic affairs abroad and the responses to them]. *Journal of International Relations* 1: 31–39.

Sun, K., and C.-G. Wang. 2014b. Zhongguo canyu beiji shiwu de zhanlüe xuanze: Jiyu zhanlüe guanli de SWOT fenxi shijiao [Strategic choice for China's participation in Arctic affairs: analysis based on SWOT approach]. *International Forum* 16 (3): 49–55.

Sun, K., and Y. Zhang. 2016. Dui beiji zhili jige guanjian wenti de lixing sikao [Myth and reality of Arctic governance: rational thinking on Arctic governance]. *Journal of Ocean University of China* 3: 1–5.

Tang, W.-S. 2021. Chinese critical geography: a non-dualistic, tongbian-informed spatial story. In *Placing Critical Geography*, ed. L. D. Berg, U. Best, M. Gilmartin and H. Z. Larsen, 141–162. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. doi: 10.4324/9781315600635-7.

Tang, S.-P. 2017. From offensive to defensive realism: a social evolutionary interpretation of China's security strategy. In *China's Ascent,* ed. R. S. Ross and Z. Feng, 118–146. London: Routledge. doi: 10.7591/9780801456992-009.

Tang, Y. 2015. Lun beiji diqu zaijunshihua de xindongxiang jiqi tezheng [An analysis of the new remilitarisation trend in the Arctic region and its characteristics]. *Journal of Jiangnan Social University* 17 (2): 44–49.

Tatum, D. S. 2018. Discourse, genealogy and methods of text selection in international relations. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 31 (3–4): 344–64.

Tian, C.-S. 2002. Tongbian in the Chinese reading of dialectical materialism. *Philosophy East and West* 52 (1): 126–44. doi: 10.1353/pew.2002.0007.

Wang, C.-C. 2021. Meiguo beiji zhengce jushihua jiqi yingxiang [Militarization of American Arctic policy and its influence]. *Journal of Strategy and Decision Making* 2: 18–38.

Wang, C.-G. 2016. Beiji zhili fazhihua yu Zhongguo de shenfen dingli [Arctic governance under the rule of law and China's national identity]. *The Forum of Leadership Science* 1: 76–85.

Wang, M.-L., and J.-S. Wu. 2019. Guojifa shiye xia de beiji bin wei yesheng dongwu baohu yanjiu [Arctic endangered wildlife conservation from the perspective of international law]. *Chinese Journal of Wildlife* 40 (4): 1101–7.

Wang, Q. 2018. Beiji beibingyang haibing fanwei suojian yu Eluosi haiquan xiaozhang [Shrinking Arctic sea ice and the vicissitudes of Russian sea power]. *Academic Journal of Russian Studies* 3: 137–52.

Wang, X.-H. 2013. Guojia liyi shijiao xiade Zhongguo beiji shenfen [China's Arctic identities from the perspective of national interests]. *Pacific Journal* 21 (5): 81–89.

Woon, C. Y. 2020. Framing the "Polar Silk Road" (冰上丝绸之路): Critical geopolitics, Chinese scholars and the (Re)Positionings of China's Arctic interests. *Political Geography* 78. doi: 10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102141.

Wright, D. C. 2011. *The dragon eyes the top of the world: Arctic policy debate and discussion in China*. Newport, RI: Naval War College Press.

Wu, H. 2022. Beiji anquan hezuo de xianshi kunjing yu lujing xuanze [The current predicament and path of the Arctic security cooperation]. *Journal of Ocean University of China* 3: 78–90.

Xi, J.-P. 2017. Work together to build a community of shared future for mankind. *Xinhua*, January 19. Accessed February 6, 2024. http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-01/19/c_135994707.htm

Xi, J.-P. 2018. Bianzheng weiwuzhuyi shi Zhongguo gongchandang ren de shijieguan he fangfalun [Dialectical materialism is the worldview and methodology of Chinese communists]. *Qiushi*, December 31. Accessed March 21, 2023. http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2018-12/31/c_1123923896.htm

Xi, J.-P. 2022. Xinfazhan jieduan guanche xinfazhan linian biran yaoqiu goujian xinfazhan geju [Implementing the new development concept in the new development stage will inevitably require the construction of a new development pattern]. *Qiushi*, September 1. Accessed March 21, 2023. http://www.qstheory.cn/dukan/qs/2022-08/31/c_1128960034.htm

Xia, L.-P. 2011. Beiji huanjing bianhua dui quanqiu anquan he Zhongguo guojia anquan de yingxiang [Impact of the Arctic environmental change on global security and China's national security]. *World Economics and Politics* 1: 122–33.

Xia, L.-P., and P. Su. 2013. Boyililun shijiao xia de beiji diqu anquan taishi yu fazhan qushi [The situation and trend of security in the Arctic from view of game theory]. *Tongji University Journal* 24 (4): 26–33.

Xiao, T.-L., ed. 2022. *Zhanlüexue* [Science of military strategy]. Trans. China Aerospace Studies Institute. Montgomery, AL: Air University.

Xiao, Y. 2014. Paitaxing kaifang: Beiji lishihui de menluozhuyi luoji [Exclusivity open: "Monroe Doctrine" logic of the Arctic Council]. *Pacific Journal* 22 (9): 12–9.

Xiao, Y. 2019. *Beiji guoji zuzhi jianzhanglizhi ji Zhongguo canyu lujing* [Establishment of the Arctic International Organization and China's participation path]. Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue Chubanshe.

Xiao, Y. 2022. Beiji anquan zhili: Diyuan fenxian yu yanbian qushi [Arctic security governance: geopolitical risks and evolving trends]. *Guoji Guanxi Yu Diqu Xingshi* 07: 54–9.

Xie, X.-G., and D.-G. Du. 2022. Fangyu xing xianshi zhuyi shi yu xia de zhong e beiji anquan hezuo [Sino-Russian Arctic security cooperation from the perspective of defensive realism]. *Area Studies and Global Development* 3: 5–21.

Xu, H. 2017. Beiji zhili yu Zhongguo de canyu [Arctic governance and China's participation]. *Journal of Boundary and Ocean Studies 2* (2): 5–8.

Xu, J.-J. 2014. ToRCH2014 Corpus. China, Beijing: Beijing Foreign Studies University.

Xu, C.-Q., and Q. Wu. 2007. Mei E zhengba beibingyang [U.S.-Russia contest for hegemony in the Arctic Ocean]. *Xiandai Junshi* 10: 20–4.

Yan, X.-T. 2018. Chinese values vs. liberalism: what ideology will shape the international normative order? *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 11 (1): 1–22. doi: 10.1093/cjip/poy001.

Yang, F. 2010. Shengtai baohu shijiao xia beiji falü zhidu de queshi yu wanshan [The improvement of the Arctic legal system from the perspective of ecological protection]. *Journal of Ocean University of China* 3: 23–8.

Yang, J. 2014. Yuwai yinsu de qianru yu beiji zhili jizhi [On the Arctic governance regimes and non-Arctic actors' participation]. *Xueshu Qianyan* 11: 4–15. 10.16619/j.cnki.rmltxsqy.2017.11.001

Yang, J. 2017. Zhongguo fazhan jidi shiye de zhanlüe sikao [Strategic thinking on the development of China's polar cause]. *Xueshu Qianyan* 11: 4–15. 10.16619/j.cnki.rmltxsqy.2017.11.001

Yang, J. 2018. 'Zhongguo de beiji zhengce' jiedu [An interpretation of China's Arctic policy]. *Pacific Journal* 26 (3): 1–11.

Yang, J. 2023. How expert communities contribute to the Arctic governance systems as and beyond knowledge holders. *Arctic Yearbook* 282–93.

Yang, P., and L. Tang. 2018. "Positive Energy": hegemonic intervention and online media discourse in China's Xi Jinping Era. *China: An International Journal* 16 (1): 1–22.

Yang, Y., and X. Chen. 2021. Globalism or nationalism? The paradox of Chinese official discourse in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak. *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 26: 89–113.

Yang, Z.-R. 2015. Beiji hangdao quan nian kaitong hou shijie diyuan zhanlüe geju de bianhua yanjiu [Changes in world geo-strategic situation and countermeasures after the all-year-open of the Arctic channel]. *National Defence Science and Technology* 36 (2): 7–11.

Yang, Z.-J. 2022. Renlei mingyun gongtongti shi yu xia beiji haiyang shengtai anquan zhili jizhi yanjiu [Research on the governance mechanism of Arctic marine ecological security from the perspective of a community with a shared future for mankind]. *Theory Journal* 301 (3): 60–8.

Ye, J. 2012. Shi lun beiji shiwu zhong diyuan zhengzhililun yu zhili lilun de shuangchong yingxiang [On the dual influence of geopolitical theory and governance theory in Arctic affairs]. *Guoji Guancha* 2: 32–8.

Yu, H.-Y. 2015. Qihou bianhua yu beiji diqu diyuan zhengzhi jingji bianqian [Climate change and the evolution of geopolitics and geoeconomics in the Arctic region]. *Guoji Zhengzhi Yanjiu* 4: 73–87.

Yu, H.-L., Li F., Lin Y.-H., and Cui, Y.-T. 2015. The evolution theory of national need structure and its application: A case study of the Sino-Russian Arctic development cooperation. *Geographical Research* 40 (9): 2399-2425. doi: 10.11821/dlyj020201029

Zeng, J.-H. (2020). *Slogan politics: Understanding Chinese foreign policy concepts*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan. doi: 10.1007/978-981-15-6683-7.

Zhang, C. 2022. Renlei mingyun gongtongti shiyu xiade beiji hangdao zhili guize gexin [Innovation of Arctic route governance rules from the perspective of a community of shared future for mankind]. *Chinese Journal of Maritime Law* 33 (2): 54–63.

Zhang, J. 2023. Remarks by Ambassador Zhang Jun at the UN Security Council Open Debate on the promotion and strengthening of the rule of law in the maintenance of international peace and security. Last Modified January 12, 2023. Accessed June 5, 2023. http://un.china-mission.gov.cn/eng/hyyfy/202301/t20230113_11006774.htm.

Zhang, J.-J., and C.-G. Wang. 2019. Zhongguo beiji zhili huayuquan: fenlei, pinggu yu jinlu [China's Arctic governance discourse power: Classification, assessment and approach]. *Journal of East China University of Science and Technology* 4: 65–74.

Zhang, M. 2015. Keynote speech by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming at the China Country Session of the Third Arctic Circle Assembly. Last Modified October 17, 2015. Accessed October 9, 2022.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/201510/t20151017_678393.html.

Zhang, R., and L. Yang. 2013. Zhongguo beiji anquan falü baozhang yanjiu [Research on China's legal protection of its Arctic security]. *Pacific Journal* 21 (6): 11–8.

Zhang, X. 2015. Jidi gongyu yu guoji anquan wenti [Polar commons and international security issues]. *Shijie Zhishi* 15: 23–4.

Zhao, F.-J., and J.-B. Jiang. 2022. Ewu chongtu: Tiqian yinbao de beiji lang dao zhi zheng [Russia-Ukraine conflict: the Arctic corridor controversy detonated early]. *Guoji Shangwu Caikuai* 13: 3–7.

Zhao, L. 2013. Cong yuye wenti kan beiji zhili de kunjing yu lujing [The dilemma and path of Arctic governance from the perspective of fisheries issues]. *China International Studies* 4: 69–82.

Zhao, L. 2014. Beiji quyu zhili fanshi de hexin yaosu: Zhidu sheji yu huanjing suzao [Key factors in Arctic regional governance paradigm: institutional design and environment shaping]. *Guoji Zhanwang* 3: 107–125.

Zhao, L. 2016. Patterns of international governance in the Arctic and China's approach. *Advances in Polar Science* 27 (3): 170–9.

Zhao, L. 2020. *Duowei beiji de guoji zhili yanjiu* [International governance of multidimensional Arctic]. Beijing: Shishi chubanshe.

Zhao, L. 2023. Shuangchong chongji xia Eluosi nengyuan zhanlüe tiaozheng yu Zhonge nengyuan hezuo yicheng gengxin [Russia's energy strategy adjustment and the update of the Sino-Russian energy cooperation agenda under the dual impact]. *Northeast Asia Forum* 165 (1): 86–97.

Zhao, N.-N., and K.-F. Ou. 2016. Quanqiu shiye xia beiji diyuan zhengzhi taishi zai toushi [Re-analysis of the geopolitics of the Arctic in a global perspective]. *Chinese Journal of European Studies* 34 (3): 30–43.

Zhao, N.-N., and L.-Z. Wu. 2016. Meiguo yu beibingyang gonghai yuye zhili: Liyi kaoliang ji zhengce shijian [America and fishery governance in the Central Arctic Ocean: interest considerations and policy practice]. *Socialism Studies* 225 (1): 128–34.

Zhu, X. 2018. *The politics of expertise in China*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Zhu, W.-Q. 2022. Zhong E Yama'er LNG xiangmu hezuo di diyuan zhengzhi fengxian [Geopolitical risks of Sino-Russian Yamal LNG project cooperation]. *Journal of Eastern Liaoning University* 24 (1): 44–51.

Accepted Manuscript: The Version of Record of this manuscript has been published and is available in *Geopolitics*, 07 October 2024, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14650045.2024.2408601

Figures

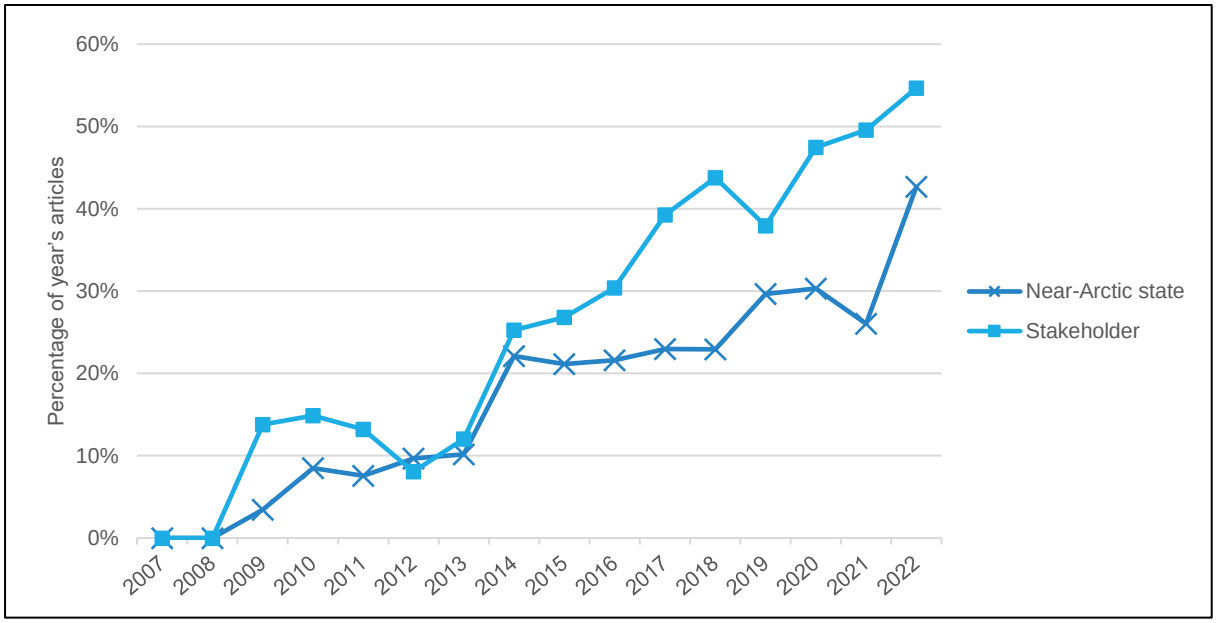

Figure 1. Percentage of academic articles mentioning Near-Arctic state and Stakeholder identities, 2007–2022

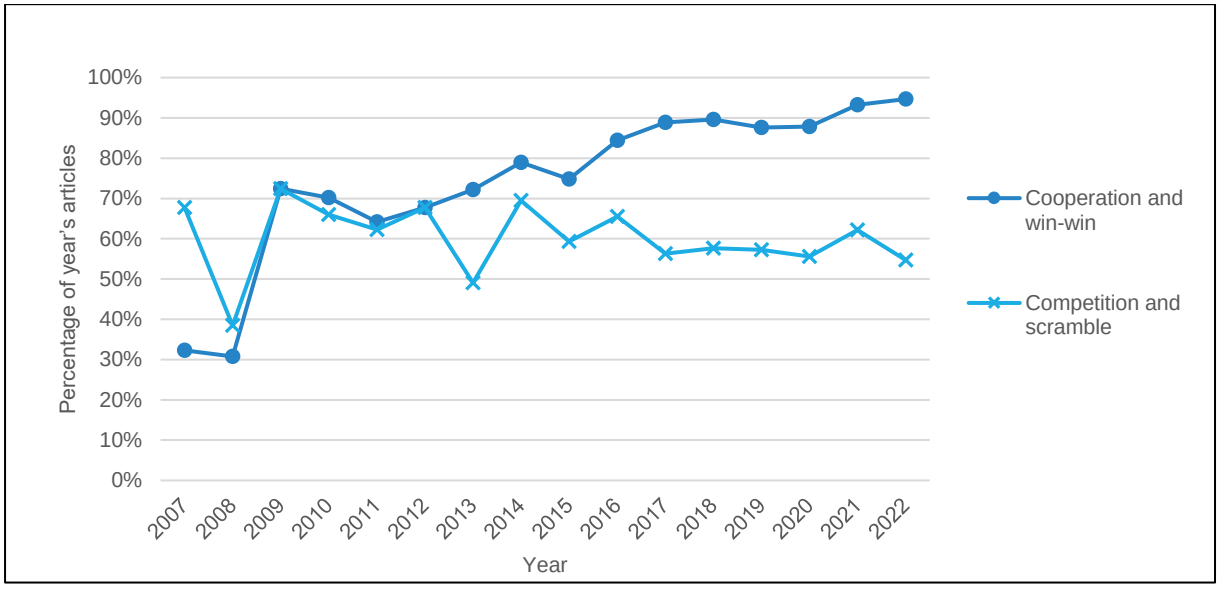

Figure 2. Percentage of academic articles mentioning cooperation, competition, disagreement, and win-win, 2007–2022

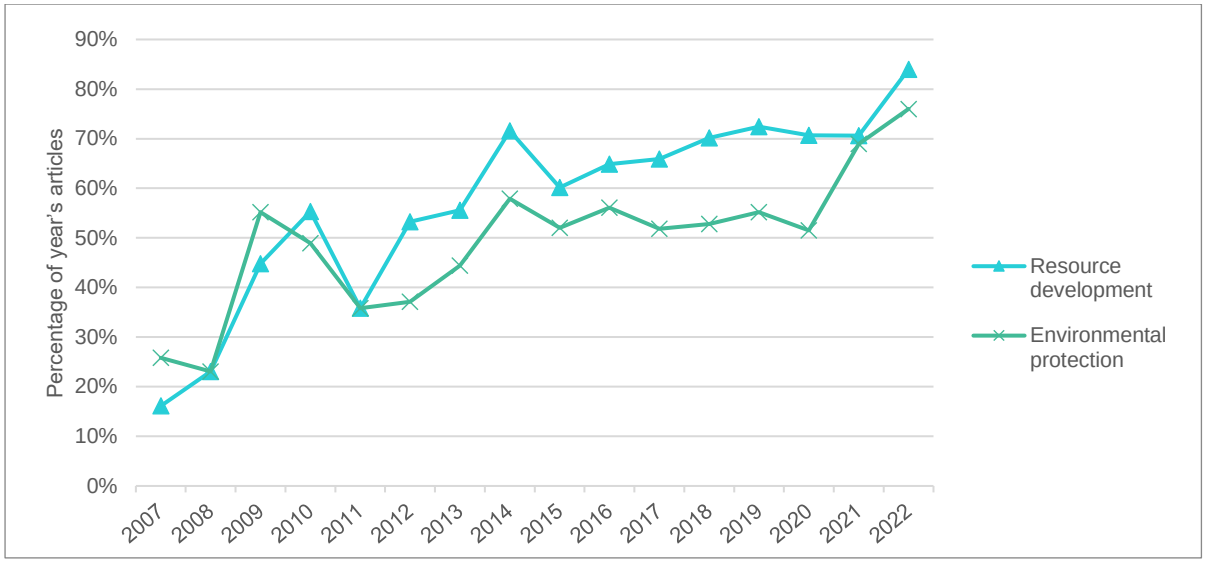

Figure 3. Percentage of academic articles mentioning resource development and environmental protection, 2007–2022

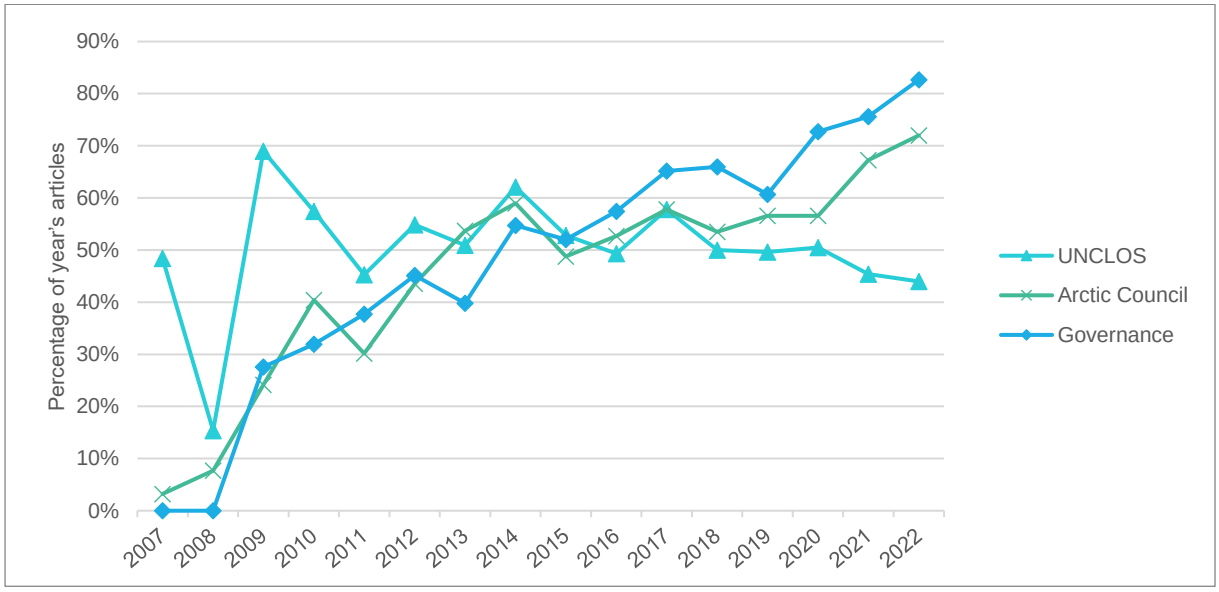

Figure 4. Percentage of academic articles mentioning governance, UNCLOS and the Arctic Council, 2007–2022