

# State's Image as Future Capital

## A study of China's cooperation with Russia on developments in the Arctic

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## **Abstract**

China's influence on the global stage is constantly expanding. Recently, a considerable amount of attention has been paid by the Chinese officials to the developments in the Arctic region. Majority of scientific works which have focused on the underlying rationale behind Chinese presence in the Arctic used theoretical tools provided by either liberal institutionalism or realism. Consequently, the picture painted by them is rather pale and does not allow for a sufficient understanding of the Chinese grand international strategy. Chinese actions are presented in one dimension only – either as a threat or being in line with international law. This thesis aims to broaden theoretical scope by using the tools of post-structuralism for analyzing and comparing two radically different discourses on the Arctic – Chinese and Russian. This study's main argument is that China uses its Arctic presence and cooperation with Russia as a tool for building and projecting its amiable, yet assertive international image, which essentially becomes China's future capital and a basis for even stronger international position in the years to come.

**Keywords:** *China-Russia relations, state's image, Arctic, post-structuralism, identity, the Other*

*Nature does not hurry,  
yet everything is accomplished.*

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# 1 Introduction

The Arctic region has been lately gaining an increased publicity. The array of debates stretches from the political, encouraged by the handful of Asian states becoming observers to the Arctic Council<sup>1</sup>, through security, sparked by the territorial advances of Russia in Europe<sup>2</sup>, to environmental, highlighted by Ludovico Einaudi's performing his *Elegy for the Arctic* on the floating platform in front of a glacier in the Arctic Ocean<sup>3</sup>. Finally, it is Chinese involvement in the Arctic matters that causes most controversy and even backlash.

This thesis discusses Chinese cooperation with Russia in the Arctic developments. Cooperation of these states shows how appealing it is to partner with China in politically and strategically rough times for regimes like the Russian. Their strictly pragmatic relationship in the Arctic is a considerable component of the image-projection exercise undertaken by China.

This thesis proposes a more sophisticated theoretical point of departure than a simple realist-liberal divide. To the best of the author's knowledge, Chinese engagement overseas in general is rarely being analyzed from the less orthodox points of view. Viewing Chinese activities in the Arctic through the lens of a poststructuralist theory of International Relations makes an excellent opportunity for studying the impact of self-perception and civilizational identity on foreign policy choices.

This study's contributions are many. First, it adds to the already vast pool of knowledge about Chinese activities overseas. Second, it offers an in-depth theoretical study of an important dimension of the Arctic international relations. Third, it revives a constructivist theory of the image of the state and shows its relevance to the modern day strategic developments.

## 1.1 Aim of the study

The main objective of this thesis is to show that Chinese engagement in the Arctic is currently aimed at building a desired international image of the country. Focusing more on symbolic rather

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<sup>1</sup> "A warmer welcome" (The Economist 2013).

<sup>2</sup> "NATO and the Arctic revisited: spillover from crisis in Crimea?", NATO Watch (Chamberlain & Davis 2014).

<sup>3</sup> "Ludovico Einaudi performs with 8 million voices to save the Arctic", Greenpeace International Blog (Jimenez & Tellnes 2016).

than material gains for the time being contributes to the image building and management exercise. Importantly, it also builds up an ideational capital for reaping the future benefits of the melted Arctic waters. The argument is built around China's activities in the Arctic with a special attention given to the Sino-Russian cooperation in that region.

## **1.2 Focus of the study**

The study focuses around the ways in which China puts its engagement in the Arctic to use when it comes to communicating not only future interests but also a more assertive stance of the current government. These are, in my view, the means of building and managing China's image as a global power.

## **1.3 Object of the study**

The object of study is Chinese paradoxical discourse on the Arctic. Most of the time it is withdrawn and indirect, yet surprisingly assertive when being voiced through the official channels. Four clusters of messages – written, silent, spoken and unuttered – sent by the Chinese high-profile decision makers and influencers are analyzed. The peculiar approach to the message-sending and image-building which China has adopted, is highlighted by putting it in the perspective of Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic.

## **1.4 Research question**

*Research question*

**In which ways does partnering with Russia in the Arctic help China to project a desired international image of the Chinese state?**

*Sub-questions*

- To what extent does China favor symbolic over material gains in the Arctic?
- In which ways do civilizational identity and self-perception concerns inform Chinese exercises in image-projection and cooperation with Russia?

## **1.5 Disposition**

This thesis starts with providing essential background information on the Arctic and history of Sino-Russian relations. It then follows to discuss the literature streams by tying the concept of image in international relations to the relations between China and Russia in the Arctic context. The chapters on theoretical framework and methodology explain in detail the logic followed in the analytical part of the thesis. The analytical section is followed by Conclusion. The ultimate part constitutes of References.

## **2 Background**

This chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first I attempt to systematize diverse ways of narrating the Arctic. In the second I offer a brief overview of the history of Sino-Russian relations. Third section uses the concept of “frenemies” to capture the contemporary dynamics of their relationship.

### **2.1 Narratives about the Arctic**

It is in the last decade that the Arctic again started to be debated from the point of view of strategic and international importance. Prior to that the emphasis was mainly on environmental and social aspects linked to global warming and the preservation of indigenous cultures. This newly emerged intellectual challenge of thinking about the Arctic has been confined mainly to the frameworks of a Westphalian understanding of it as a geopolitical space, where states’ interests might potentially clash – also over social and environmental issues. Faced with this multiplicity of understandings this section systematizes narratives about the Arctic.

#### **2.1.1 *Conceptual***

What is the Arctic? For the geographer, it starts with that line on a map, the Arctic Circle... For the biologist, the Arctic is a way of describing a set of conditions in which a certain ecology may or may not flourish. For the political scientist, the Arctic extends far to the south of the Arctic Circle, limited only by the ambitions of states to claim an

Arctic role, as do China, France and the United Kingdom, to name a few. While the geographer's Arctic is fixed, the political scientist's Arctic is in a constant state of flux (Emmerson 2010: 3-4).

It is hard to disagree with this neat take on the conceptualization of the Arctic. Indeed, the notion of the Arctic has recently been reworked and expanded considerably. Many recent publications announced Arctic's entering the international political stage because of climate change. It is an undeniably important development in international politics and obviously, a very challenging one. However, to understand the weight of the changes in the Arctic and what it may mean for the world order, it is vital to know its history.

### ***2.1.2 Historical***

For a major part of the recorded human history polar regions for obvious reasons were left outside historians' and politicians' interest. For ancient Greek and Roman historians, polar regions were not suitable to sustain any form of life and uncondusive of civilization. As such, the Arctic remained "in the possession of those who had lived there the longest – the indigenous communities of the North" (Emmerson 2010: 14). Major exploratory works in the Arctic were aimed at discovering hidden potential of the region and dismantling the image of "imaginary Arctic" not suitable for progress and development.

With the advances of the Russian Empire, the Arctic became a pinnacle of Russian identity. It was during the reign of Tsar Peter the Great (1721-1725) that the Russian Arctic navy was formed. Important developments like the discovery of Alaska and the Great Northern Expedition continued through the years. Russian explorers continued to discover new places and seas and drew detailed maps of the Arctic region. Vast Siberian forests and plains (taiga and tundra) became perfect locations for labor camps where the tsar's opponents were kept. This trend became even stronger after the seizure of power by the Communists in 1917. Soviet Union developed a gulag: "a system of prison camps which extended across the length and breadth of the Soviet Union..." (Emmerson 2010: 40). By the late 1920s, the gulag system served two purposes – along with incarceration of political opposition and people considered to be dangerous to the Communist rule, it was destined to contribute to the industrialization of the Soviet Union at a great human cost. Many of the camps were placed in the Arctic, where "labor was needed and escape was impossible" (ibid.).

Strong Soviet legacy which is rooted in the relatively successful development of the Arctic, continues until today. Russia has a sense of ownership over the Arctic which stems from the fact that millions of Russian citizens continue to live there. It has been neatly summarized in the following words:

As Russia re-emerges from decades of economic stagnation and considers its national future, the Arctic is, once again, a central focus. The Russian vision of the Arctic as a source of material strength and national power – rather than simply a wilderness of ice - remains very much alive (Emmerson 2010: 69).

Arguably, the most critical for the nationalistic vision of the Arctic which Russia holds is its geostrategic component, which is explored in the next section.

### ***2.1.3 Geostrategic***

In Stalin's eyes Arctic was a region full of undiscovered geostrategic and military opportunities. Faced with the growing Japanese influence in the East and losses of influence in Finland and Poland in the West it was essential for the USSR to develop port bases and navy. As a result, Arctic is one of the forgotten yet very important stages of the Cold War where the influences of the West (American Alaska) and the East (the Russian Arctic) clashed. Infrastructural developments dating back to the Cold War caught attention due to the newly emerging dynamic of power in the Arctic. The long abandoned Soviet military bases in the Russian Arctic are being now revitalized which causes a lot of concern.

To say the least, Russia indeed seems to be preparing itself for defending its Arctic interests. Not only does it already have the largest atomic submarine fleet, but it continues to invest in its development. There is a mixture of opinions regarding these activities. Some seem to be alerted and foresee a future conflict in the High North (e.g. Zysk's conference presentation 2016), while others see Russian efforts to be in line with any state's national interest, and do not see the Arctic being militarized (e.g. Klimenko's conference presentation 2015).

### ***2.1.4 Institutional***

Arctic Council was established in 1996 as:

the leading intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination and integration among the Arctic states, Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.<sup>4</sup>

There are eight members of the Arctic Council: Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States. The permanent observer status is open to non-Arctic states, intergovernmental and inter-parliamentary organizations, global and regional, and to non-governmental organizations. They have no voting rights hence they cannot influence the decision making in the Council. Their role is limited to observing the works of the Council, however, they can propose ideas of projects and submit written statements to the Ministerial meetings presenting their views on discussed topics<sup>5</sup>. Currently, there are twelve non-Arctic countries admitted as permanent observers to the Arctic Council. The most recent addition took place at the Ministerial meeting in Kiruna, Sweden in 2013. This was when Italy and a handful of Asian countries – China, Singapore, India, South Korea and Japan – became the observers<sup>6</sup>. This is when the debates about the interests of Asian states in the Arctic and the potential challenge they may pose to the status quo in the region have grown in seriousness.

In the institutional sense the existing framework is enough to ensure peaceful cooperation in the Arctic. All parties involved stress the importance of adhering to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which is regarded as the most important document regulating the issues of the Arctic Ocean and ensuring sovereignty of the Arctic states. However, in recent years the issue of new permanent observers to the Council has gained increased attention. Asian countries came to the Arctic table and this started a debate about their alleged interests in the Arctic resources and a shorter shipping route from Europe and North America to Asia. Undoubtedly, their presence does mean a lot, considering their economic and international significance. At the same time, the notion of the Arctic as a defined bordered space has been challenged. It became possible for countries like China to talk about the Arctic as a heritage of the whole humanity and voice concerns over the influence the changing climatic conditions have globally.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/about-us/arctic-council/observers>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.arctic-council.org/index.php/en/ministerial-meetings/kiruna-mm-2013>

The arrival of the new actors to the Arctic scene cannot be analyzed with the use of realist or liberal theories as they do not allow for a sufficient depth. Especially China, as a large, expanding and resource-hungry economy, seen as a potential threat to the Arctic states' interests in the region, poses a theoretical and conceptual challenge. One cannot be certain about China's position in the Arctic – will it remain a norm-taker or will it eventually aspire to become a norm-maker in the region?

Not only the complexity of Arctic issues allows to place this region in several international contexts – from institutional and social to environmental, but also the nature of those issues makes Arctic an outstanding case. In this light, it is interesting to point out that although Arctic Council serves as an example of an institution which facilitates peaceful cooperation between its members the region remains to be seen by some as a space for potential future conflict.

Arguably, with the rapid changes taking place in the Arctic, emergence of commercial opportunities and many vital interests clashing in the High North, it is inevitable for the Arctic Council to change its shape. Current frameworks for dialogue and cooperation may not be sufficient in protecting national interests from more assertive new players, one of them potentially being China. Marc Lanteigne also voiced a concern whether China's current position in the Arctic Council, as an observer without a right to vote, will remain sufficient for this large player. Such a question becomes even more pertinent when realizing that China is moving from a position of a norm-taker to that of a global norm-maker (Lanteigne's public lecture 2015).

## **2.2 The history of Sino-Russian relations**

Sino-Russian strategic partnership has attracted a lot of attention and their maneuvers are being continuously scrutinized. Especially the United States views this partnership as directed against American hegemony and in general an anti-Western alliance. Meanwhile, while at the first glance China's rapprochement with Russia seems to be a concerted effort towards overthrowing the global leader, a significant level of mutual mistrust remains. This mistrust is rooted in the history of their problematic relations, existing – and deepening – asymmetry between the two and the leading position of China, which Russia perceives as a potential threat. This chapter discusses these issues and puts them in the context of the main argument of the thesis. I concentrate on the events dating back to the beginnings of the Soviet Union in 1922 until most recent occurrences.

Newly established USSR was supporting Chiang Kai Shek's Kuomintang, which eventually seized power in China in 1928. Nevertheless, despite not having Soviet Union's support, Mao Zedong's Communist Party of China managed to win the Chinese Civil War in 1949 and established the People's Republic of China (PRC). Afterwards, the two countries established an alliance which lasted until the 1960s. Despite ideological affinity, a considerable asymmetry between the PRC and USSR remained. Mao Zedong was not content with the superior position of his counterparts in Moscow, and as the USSR's global ambitions grew it attempted to treat China in the similar way to the Eastern European Soviet republics. Mao Zedong condemned Nikita Khrushchev's renouncement of Stalin's crimes and accused the new Soviet leadership of revisionism, and Khrushchev openly criticized Mao's Great Leap Forward (1958-1961) (Fairbank and Goldman 2006: 379). This marked the beginning of the two decades of hostility between the two countries, which even saw a border conflict in 1969<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, in the eyes of the Chinese leadership, the Soviet Union posed a threat greater than the capitalist United States. Hence, as an outcome of, so-called, ping pong diplomacy<sup>8</sup>, President Richard Nixon was the first American president to visit Mao Zedong in Beijing in 1972 (Kissinger 2011: 129). This was one of the most important events to take place during the Cold War and allowed China to break free from being the underdog of the Soviet Union without falling into the American sphere of influence.

In the post-Cold War order, it was China who came out "on the winning side" (Kissinger 2011: 131) and was in a more favorable and stable economic condition. The Russian Federation, which was established after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, had to face a collapse of its economy caused by unregulated form of privatization. The so-called "shock therapy" brought deep inequality and hindered the development of the Russian economy and market reforms. This stood in a sharp contrast to the opening of the Chinese economy to the outside world and gradual implementation of key elements of capitalism in China (Kaczmarek 2015). Noteworthy is the fact that the Chinese leadership managed to overcome international isolation in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre and the Chinese position continued to strengthen.

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<sup>7</sup> Tensions arose along the border between Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China and Soviet Republic of Tajikistan (Hyer 2015: 138).

<sup>8</sup> Mao Zedong ordered the Chinese ping pong team, which was participating in the international tournament in Japan (it was the first time for the Chinese team to go abroad since the beginning of Cultural Revolution in 1966), to invite American players to China. American accepted the invitation (Kissinger 2011).

It was a turn towards a multipolar world and opposition to the global hegemony of the US that brought the two countries together in the 1990s. The process of Sino-Russian rapprochement took over in 1992 when China and Russia formed a “constructive” relationship (Nye 2015). Four years later it evolved into a strategic partnership and a joint declaration signed put emphasis on the leading role of the United Nations. Notably, the countries’ motivations for the signing differed considerably. Beijing sought primarily economic gains, while Moscow highlighted the political dimension of the alliance. What formed a basis of the newly assumed partnership was arms trade, which mainly benefitted China, as it obtained access to the military technology previously blocked by the Western embargo. The relationship further tightened in 2001, when the two parties signed a treaty on good neighborliness and friendly co-operation and established the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) aimed at joint development of Central Asia (Kaczmarek 2015).

The global economic crisis of 2008-2009 brought a new context to the evolving relationship between China and Russia. The asymmetry existing between the two countries has not only been highlighted but even deepened. The Russian economy experienced a significant downturn as the oil prices fell. Although China had also experienced difficulties, it nevertheless managed to provide the largest stimulus package in the world<sup>9</sup> to prevent its economy from collapsing. While Russian economy remained stagnant, Chinese economy continued to rise significantly.

Despite a couple of problematic issues concerning trade imbalance, migration and environmental protection, Russia and China managed to facilitate collaboration in the years following the economic crisis by striking deals on building an oil pipeline, multi-million dollar loans for Russian companies, regional development of the Russian Far East, joint military exercises, and signing a gas contract (Kaczmarek 2015: 21). In international forums like the United Nations China continues to keep its middle path and supporting the principle of non-interference in domestic issues. This strategy allows it to remain neutral on issues like the Georgian War of 2008 or the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. In Kaczmarek’s opinion “both Georgia and Ukraine illustrated the strength of the relations rather than their weakness” (2015: 20). It is hard to disagree with him on this, having in mind the economic and strategic developments that continue to take place.

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<sup>9</sup> US\$586 billion (The Economist 2008).

### **2.3 “Frenemies”?**

The term “frenemy” means “a person with whom one is friendly despite a fundamental dislike or rivalry” (Oxford Dictionaries [online]). The term “frenemies” has been used by researchers (Kaczmarek 2015:23) and various media outlets to describe current atmosphere in Sino-Russian relations<sup>10</sup>. Hence, the analysis would be incomplete without acknowledging that there is a competition between Russia and China, especially since China has assumed a leading position and continues to strengthen it. The two countries continue to challenge each other not only in the Russian Far East but in a number of other places like Central and East Asia and the Arctic. This puts a check on the claims of purely strategic partnership, which assumes Russia’s and China’s joint interests and increasing level of interdependence between them (Kaczmarek 2015: 24).

To highlight tensions and constraints existing in the relationship a notion of the “axis of convenience” was coined by Bobo Lo (2008). Lo’s main claim is that this partnership does not rest on solid foundations and is likely to be used by both sides to obtain their separate goals should an opportunity occur (2008: 3-5). From this perspective, the vital interests of Russia and China are fundamentally conflictual and sooner or later their clash will lead to an open rivalry. Hence, these are not common values and objectives that made their rapprochement possible but their antagonism towards the United States’ hegemony.

## **3 Literature review**

In this chapter I attempt to connect the conceptual dots which emerged in Chapter 2 when I discussed the background of this study. Therefore, this literature review is divided into three thematic blocs which need to be consulted before embarking on theoretical and analytical journey.

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<sup>10</sup> e.g. “Best frenemies” (The Economist 2014); “Russia and China are frenemies both in Central Asia and globally” (Hartwell 2015).

### **3.1 Importance of image in international relations**

Studies on the image of the state have highlighted its importance for the international relations and foreign policy conduct. Behavior of the state and its position in the international system influence the perceptions of community and cooperation on the hand and those of fear, danger and otherness on the other. Given that the main positions discussing states' images, perceptions and misperceptions have been published during the times of the Cold War, the examples given are predominantly those connected to the United States rivalry with the Soviet Union, Cuban missile crisis or Vietnam War. Interestingly, Jervis (1989) brings also an example of Nazi Germany and its behavior in the period preceding the outbreak of the Second World War. He lists the reasons for which state's behavior was deceptive and highlights that before the 1930s authoritarian states were not perceived as those that could potentially threaten regional or global stability.

Important is the fact that there is no structured discussion on the importance of the image for Chinese state and its evolving position in the international system. Hence, this thesis aims to revive image theory by putting it into use in explaining the major drives behind Chinese engagement in the Arctic. From the point of view of this theory not only actions but also *inactions* can send powerful messages, deceive or signal future moves and intentions.

The particular character of Chinese foreign policy conduct, the nature of the Chinese regime and the fact that some even called China a "civilizational state" (Jacques 2009; Pye 1992) all seem to be sufficient reasons that justify the choice of the theory for this particular enquiry.

### **3.2 Sino-Russian relations**

Publications to date have been concentrated around a couple of milestones in Sino-Russian relations. Sino-Soviet split of 1962, the end of communism in Russia which led to the new era in their relations (Kissinger 2011) and the recent global economic crisis are the main events that shaped the nature of their relations.

Authors mainly concentrate on the forever existing and widening gap between China and Russia. They also tend to mistrust both states' rhetoric on closer than before partnership of the equals. Bobo Lo, for example, in his seminal work indicates that this relationship is aimed at maximizing each side's sole national interests and is nothing but an "axis of convenience" constrained by a lack of trust. (Lo 2008). Having this in mind many expected Chinese-Russian relations to collapse under the weight of the global crisis and conform to the logic of power politics.

Kaczmarek (2015) takes this on and claims that in the aftermath of the global financial crisis Russia and China have entered a new era of their relations which transformed and fostered a peaceful power transition. Nevertheless, in reality the power asymmetry has grown between them in the aftermath of the Ukrainian crisis which brought sanctions that worsened Russia's economic standing. This situation has been noticed by China, however, it was Russia who became a side proactively seeking Chinese engagement in its energy projects. Literature, to date, has largely focused on the data driven material and is lacking studies that would be well grounded theoretically and methodologically. This thesis aims to partially fill in this scientific gap and propose a theoretical enquiry on China's presence in the Arctic.

### **3.3 The Arctic dimension**

Having in mind the particular nature of the Arctic region it is of no surprise that scientific inquiry is mainly concentrated around environmental, resource and indigenous peoples issues. As Arctic affairs are being successfully regulated in a peaceful manner by the workings of the Arctic Council there seems to be not much space for exciting political activity. Nevertheless, with the coming to the Arctic table of important Asian players like India, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and above all China the face of Arctic cooperation is ought to change.

Numerous publications grasping Asian interests in the Arctic along with research activities of institutions like AsiArctic1, NIAS2, SIPRI3 have produced a body of data driven factual analysis. The main aim of the published reports was to define the Asian future of the Arctic, assess potential implications and uncover the drivers behind Asian presence in the Arctic (Lunde 2014; Jakobson 2010).

Importantly, these are Chinese Arctic ambitions that attract most attention of the international observers. Considering Chinese international position as a growing, resource-hungry economy led by ambitious and confident leaders who are conducting serious social and political reforms this country's Arctic presence is a justifiable puzzle for policy makers and researchers alike. Studies which aimed to assess potential for the conflict concluded that there is a low probability of military clash and that the power asymmetry leads to Russia seek Chinese partnership rather than to oppose it (Zysk 2014; Roseth 2014).

While Chinese presence in the Arctic is stirring different emotions, it results in a general conclusion – potential resource base in that region. Researchers’ statements vary from those claiming that China will be or already is actively trying to secure the share of the Arctic resources for the future to those stating that the funding of the Arctic initiatives is marginal when compared to the funding that Antarctic research receives (Lantegne 2015). There are also voices that, rightfully so, indicate that the future shipping routes available through the Arctic may contribute to the “Northern Silk Road” for China (Humpert 2013; Reuters 2016).

## **4 Theoretical Framework**

Without any doubt, we are witnessing the evolving notions of the Arctic in world politics. Since certain innovative ways of thinking about this geosphere have been brought to the fore of debates about the place of the Arctic in world’s future, I have identified a need for a theory which offers broader opportunities for an inquiry that transcends simple realist-liberal division. As Chinese presence in the Arctic has been a subject to oversimplified interpretations the first section of this chapter engages in a discussion on two main theories of International Relations, namely liberal institutionalism and realism. It is here that I also seek to identify the existing gap in understanding of the Chinese Arctic endeavors and offer an alternative theoretical lens through which it could be viewed and analyzed. This thesis’ task is to aid understanding of Chinese strategic and diplomatic behavior aimed at projecting a desired international image, which is rooted deeper in a historical and civilizational context. Hence, after establishing a theoretical point of departure I discuss its vital concepts.

### **4.1 Theoretical points of departure**

#### ***4.1.1 Liberal institutionalism***

Liberal institutionalists share a belief in values and their power to create international order through the practices of good governance, democracy and worldwide cooperation. The reason behind creating international institutions is protection of liberty, justice and tolerance and creating

platforms for discussions on the political, economic and legal issues in the decentralized, multicultural system by containing rational egoists.

The proponents of the liberal institutional view on Chinese engagement in not only the Arctic but also global matters share the belief in the binding strength of numerous international agreements to which China committed (Jakobson et al. 2011; Klimenko 2014). In their view, China has proven to be a constructive partner and a *norm-taker* with an interest of strengthening principles of international law which have made it possible for its growth, development and current global position (Rahbek-Clemmensen' conference presentation 2015). As a result, China is expected to remain confined by international agreements. Moreover, despite its controversial political standing, it is viewed as a potential peacemaker, shall necessity occur (Lanteigne 2015; Su & Lanteigne 2015).

This understanding of China's place in the international system stretches also to the Arctic. On many occasions, Chinese policymakers have stressed the importance of abiding by the principles of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in that region. Also, Chinese participation as an observer to the Arctic Council has proven China's respect for international agreements.

#### **4.1.2 Realism**

From the realist perspective, the state is central to the international political system. It is only state's existence that allows – or not – for the presence of an independent political community. It is also the state that has a judicial authority over its territory. One thing realists know for sure is that state's security is never given once and for all, as all states are operating in an anarchical international system. Importantly, defensive realists see states as security maximizers, while offensive realists view them as power maximizers.

Having these views in mind it is easy to see where the fundamental distrust for Chinese presence in the Arctic can come from. Proponents of the realist view foresee an inevitable future conflict with this global player over the Arctic resources. From the offensive realism's viewpoint, most famously authored by John Mearsheimer (2006), which observes that a great power like China is ought to engage in a conflict with those opposing its growth and expansion: “[I]nternational

politics is a nasty and dangerous business, and no amount of goodwill can ameliorate the intense security competition that sets in when an aspiring hegemon appears in Eurasia” (Mearsheimer 2006: 160).

The validity of this assumption is being strengthened by the worrisome dynamics of Chinese activities in South China Sea and an ongoing unsettlement of international interests in that region<sup>11</sup>. Additionally, there is a growing conviction that China is consistently evolving into a *norm-maker* (Lanteigne 2015). This can present the international society of states with both opportunities for a more developed cooperation but also with the challenges of a changing system of norms and priorities.

Concerns regarding Chinese engagement in the Arctic mainly revolve around the uncertainty over how long will China be satisfied with being just an observer to the Arctic Council without any decision-making power. This can become a problematic issue especially that the environmental and, consequently, economic changes in the Arctic are taking place at a rapid pace compared to other regions on Earth.

#### ***4.1.3 A post-structural proposition***

Poststructuralism is critical of statism and perceiving the international system as guided by the anarchy. Of utmost importance for this thesis is the attention poststructuralism pays to the discourse as the process through which reality is given meaning. It accounts for events when identity enters the relationship with foreign policy and they become mutually constitutive.

The above overview of viewpoints shows that Chinese international strategies are interpreted mostly from either liberal or realist stands. Studies exploring the depths of Chinese culture and civilization with relation to China’s modern political conduct are still scarce (Kallio 2011; Shih 1990, 2013) and even if they appear at times, they are not contributing much to the mainstream political analysis. All this results in an important gap which must be narrowed in years to come if the international political system is to continue encountering a consistently developing and expanding Chinese state.

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<sup>11</sup> E.g. decision of international tribunal in The Hague which denies China’s claims to sovereign rights over South China Sea (Dyer & Mitchell 2016).

I decided to follow the notions of poststructuralism as it allows for the analysis of less tangible elements of Chinese national strategy of image projection and management. The chosen attempt at answering the research question is to analyze existing and “non-existing” discourses regarding Chinese engagement in the Arctic alongside Russia. As I am paying attention to the notions of image, identity, otherness and security, I found poststructuralism to be offering a suitable analytical framework for this kind of study.

#### ***4.1.4 State’s international image as a tool***

With the view of enriching the discussion on Chinese activities in the Arctic I am going to utilize the explanatory tools offered by the image theory, as discussed by Richard Herrmann and Robert Jervis.

In international relations image can be internal – the perceived self-image and external – state being seen by other in the international system. On both occasions, image influences, to an extent, the actions that states take toward each other: “images or stereotypes of other nations stem from perceived relationships between nations and serve to justify a nation’s desired reaction or treatment toward another nation” (Alexander et al. 2005: 28). While there are other, measurable and well-defined variables which make states act, like economical, geographical and border issues among many other, an image has been given considerably less attention. Discussion on the concept of an image of the state was conducted primarily during Cold War times and used to deepen the analysis of, for example Cuban missile crisis in 1962 (Jervis 1989: 13).

When generating a perception of a state in international relations three critical qualities are under scrutiny: (1) goal compatibility, (2) relative power/capability, and (3) relative cultural status, or sophistication (Herrmann et al. 1997: 408). Decision whether a state is a threat, potential ally or a neutral entity has effects on policy choices. To derive from Herrmann again: “the pictures people have of other countries become the building blocks in their identification of the threats and opportunities their country faces” (2013: 3). The nature of a country in question influences the perception of it, for example another democratic country will be perceived as less threatening to the peaceful order than the authoritarian regime. Jervis dates that perception back to the 1930s and the advances of Nazi Germany. According to him, prior to that and authoritarian country was not

seen as a dangerous or destabilizing force (1989: 15). I found this conceptualization of an image to be a useful theoretical tool which I will use to strengthen my analysis.

## **4.2 Discussions on post-structural concepts**

### ***4.2.1 On foreign policy and identity***

Poststructuralists view identity as relational and discursive. For them identities are being constantly made and remade, defined and redefined, and are subjects to interpretations dependent on the context in which discourses are created, as well as on the context in which political and social changes take place.

Hansen says that “identities are produced and reproduced through foreign policy discourse, and there is thus no identity existing prior to and independently of foreign policy” (2006: 23). From the relational point of view foreign policy and identity are performatively linked and impossible to be viewed in causal terms. In practice, it means that foreign policies rely on representations of identity and, identities are in turn produced and reproduced through the formulation of foreign policy. To view identity as discursive, it is necessary to bring language into the scope of analysis and acknowledge that it is “constitutive for what is brought into being” (Hansen 2006: 15). Poststructuralists view language as “an inherently unstable system of signs that generate meaning through a simultaneous construction of identity and difference” (ibid.) and that makes policy and identity ontologically interlinked. Of immense importance for this thesis is that both material and ideational factors are incorporated in the discourse.

Language is understood as being social and political: social, as it is being reflected in codes and conventions, and political, as it is “a site for production and reproduction of particular subjectivities and identities” (ibid.: 16). The inherent instability of the language, mentioned earlier, is important for the arguments in this thesis. It can result in change of value of terms, depending on the discourse. A term or object valued negatively in one discourse can be viewed positively in another. For example, Russian activities in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea in 2014 are being the source of distress for Russia’s neighbors and Baltic states. As a result, Russia is seen as a destabilizing and potentially dangerous force. On the other hand, having these activities in mind, states of the Arctic Council, at the time of writing, still perceive Russia as a largely constructive

force in Arctic matters. During the Match Point seminar in Aarhus, 2015, the discussion on the unsuccessful continental shelf claim made by Russia. Discussants have praised Russian authorities for a constructive reaction and obeying international principles.

At the same time, having in mind Chinese activities in the South China Sea and the ongoing sovereignty disputes in that region, Arctic states become worried seeing China becoming an observer to the Arctic Council. The level of distrust among journalists, policy makers and academics is huge, given that China has not only insisted on abiding by international law, but also never voiced any claims that would disrespect Arctic states' sovereignty (Jakobson and Peng 2012).

This brings us to the importance of a discourse of which both material and ideational factors are components. Hansen indicates that from poststructuralist point of view ideas and materiality cannot have a meaningful presence when viewed separate from each other (ibid.: 19). She gives an example of a war tank, which cannot be viewed simply as an object of warfare made of metal – *materiality* – but that it also has an *ideational* meaning situated “within an abstract discourse of national security” (ibid.: 20). This outlook allows for a potent analysis of the Russian military bases in the Arctic, whose relatively recent re-emergence and revival are being debated, sighting of a fleet of Chinese submarines near the coast of Alaska during the visit of the United States President Barack Obama there in 2015<sup>12</sup>, as well as Chinese efforts at building new icebreakers or plans of increasing the number of Russian-Chinese joint naval drills.

#### ***4.2.2 On the Self and the Other***

To conceptually deal with the arrival of Chinese to the Arctic debate and with the recent Russian activities abroad, we need to introduce the concept of the Other. In Hansen's words: “the state's construction of “its” national identity is only possible through a simultaneous delineation of something which is different or Other” (2006: 17). Very often obvious differences lead to perceiving the Other as potentially dangerous, and as Campbell explains

“there need not be an action or event to provide the grounds for an interpretation of danger. The mere existence of an alternative mode of being, the presence of

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<sup>12</sup> In a roundtable discussion Marc Lanteigne admitted that it is “certainly something to think about as such acts do not happen without communicating something. It will be interesting to see what is being, in fact, communicated.”

which exemplifies that different identities are possible... is sometimes enough to produce the understanding of a threat” (1992: 3).

China arriving at the Arctic table is inevitably seen as an outsider, different and potentially dangerous Other in relation to Arctic states. The reason is that not only China is geographically distant from the region in question, but also its discourse on the Arctic challenges. An increased Asian participation in the Arctic matters in general received a mixed reception, and much of it concentrated around potential competition, challenge and change of the status quo in future (Bekkevold 2016; Blank 2014; Wilson 2013) although none of them voiced any claims to Arctic sovereignty.

If “danger is an effect of interpretation”, as Campbell puts it (1992: 2), then we are having an interesting example of Russia, which considering its recent military actions in Ukraine and Syria, remains being untrusted. No wonder, annexation of Crimea in 2014, which remains illegal under international law, and military involvement in the Ukrainian civil war stir up controversies and diminish Russia’s trustworthiness as a political and economic partner.

Following the notion of otherness and perceptions of threat discussed above, both China and Russia are outsiders to the Arctic; both are “Others. With regards to their mutual history they are Others to each other, as their partnership is still undermined by mistrust on both sides. This is where a pertinent question comes to mind and begs well-informed answers – why is China even interested in partnering with Russia in the Arctic, considering problems it still has with diffusing a “China threat” theory (Hough & Malik 2015) and those it already has with justifying its activities in the Arctic.

#### ***4.2.3 On subject positions***

The remedy for being seen as the Other, at least for China, is to try and manage the image projected to the international society of states. We can conceptualize Chinese efforts of doing so by using the poststructuralist idea of “subjectivity” or “subject positions”, according to which identity “is a position that one is constructed as having” (Hansen 2014: 180). In relation to this thesis, it brings us to the elements of discourse which present China’s identity as that of “an Arctic stakeholder” or even “a near-Arctic state”, as in the words of Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming (Xinhua 2015a). From these examples, we can see clearly that identities depend on discursive

practices. It is important to note that in this way identity is utilized for the enactment of policy; it becomes simultaneously a discursive foundation and a product (Hansen 2006: 19).

Constructing and having an identity often mean being subject to the “demands of identity” (Campbell 1992: 12). Chen points out that “China is strongly expected to demonstrate its vision for the world and how it will use its newly gained power and influence to work towards (that) international order” (2009: 17). This thesis argues that China is using such an international demand for identity to its own advantage. It is in China’s interest to be perceived as a responsible rising power and as a result, Chinese efforts concentrate around projecting a favorable image and influence the perceptions that international society holds about it. Chen highlights a much more “proactive and internationalist” characteristics of the recent Chinese foreign policy endeavors (2009: 17). This thesis focuses on one, seemingly limited yet powerful, example of Chinese engagement in the Arctic. China is voluntarily responding to the demand for taking more international responsibility being voiced by both developed and developing states. This demand stems from China assuming a greater role in global affairs and taking an assertive stance belonging to a confident rising power.

#### ***4.2.4 On image management***

This is where investigating the notion of an image of a state becomes pertinent. For this purpose, we analyze concepts of security, identity and image as being constructed through discourses and practices. Our inquiry led us to realize the interdependency between security, identity and image of a state. Depending on the security of the state, state’s identity can change and, consequently, the image its projects to the outside world – if threatened it will threaten in return, if being unwillingly perceived as a threat it will try to soften its image (Jervis 1989: 10).

Chinese scholars tend to categorize this projection of a desired image as an exercise in building and managing China’s soft power. Mingjiang Li sees soft power as being composed of five core elements such as culture, norms, development model, international institutions and international image (Li 2009). For Chen and Chang, one of the dimensions of Chinese power is “application of resources for certain goals” (2013: 6). They further argue that Chinese coercion is relatively weak given the limited power resources and principles of peaceful diplomacy and non-interference (2013: 13). Notwithstanding, this thesis aims to show that China is utilizing these limitations to

achieve its current goal of diffusing the “China threat” theory. Such an account of managing identity is presented in Yong Deng’s piece (2000). According to him, the most comprehensive attempt at being Chinese in world politics is showing “the purposes, the roles, and images that the Chinese nation collectively pursues and projects in the international arena” (Deng 2000: 44). This exercise becomes even more pregnant in meaning when keeping in mind the idea of a state as a permanently incomplete entity, an ‘imagined political community’ which is “always in process of becoming” (Campbell 1992: 12).

The above discussion comes down to a simple need of Chinese state – projection of a desirable international image. For a state like China it means taking a more assertive stance in the matters of national importance, being viewed as an equal member of the international society of states, maintaining the image of being the Other, yet signaling readiness for cooperation with as many states as possible, and as many different regimes as possible. This thesis aims to show that Chinese engagement with Russia in the developments in the Arctic is one of the ways for achieving such image.

### **4.3 Level of analysis**

Poststructuralists pay attention to intangible rather than tangible elements of power such as power differentials, national will or resolve. For them, the effects of power are diffused and present in less direct venues like laws, security systems, military and foreign strategies. Of interest for this study is a very intangible Chinese foreign strategy for image management. Interestingly, as the analysis will show, sometimes the most essential element of that strategy is, seemingly... lack of any strategy.

## **5 Methodology**

Data for this thesis were gathered through document analyses, participant observation and active participation in knowledge dissemination at academic events during the year 2015 in Denmark –

a roundtable discussion<sup>13</sup> with Marc Lanteigne and his public lecture<sup>14</sup>, the MatchPoint Seminar<sup>15</sup>, and during the year 2016 in Norway – the Arctic Frontiers (as a panel speaker) and in Denmark – a roundtable discussion<sup>16</sup> with Rasmus Gjedssø Bertelsen. Among documents analyzed were official policy documents, peer-reviewed articles and media pieces. Chinese and Russian media pieces in their original languages, as well as in English were derived from state-regulated media outlets: for China Xinhua News website, and for Russia Russia Today website. Participant observation in the academic events presented me with an opportunity of accessing information and insights provided by Chinese and foreign specialist in China-Arctic matters. I also benefitted from informal gatherings during networking events, as well as plenary discussions and breakout sessions.

## 5.1 Research design

### 5.1.1 *Discourse analysis*

This study adopts Jacques Derrida's maximalist formula according to which everything is a text<sup>17</sup> (1997: 158). Such an enlargement of the concept enables the inclusion of the *texts* which have crucial meaning for the interpretation of states' actions and motives and which would otherwise be excluded since they are neither written nor spoken. This is of crucial importance for this thesis' argument that unuttered and quiet messages are vital components of image projection and management efforts.

Methods used in the study are primarily document and written material analyses and interpretations of Chinese and Russian states' "body language" (Hansen 2006: 19). Qualitative research strategy resting on the theoretical framework of post-structural discourse analysis allows for such scrutiny through deployment of a comparative research design for a multiple-case study approach (Bryman 2012: 75).

For the purposes of this thesis it is particularly useful to see identity through a discursive lens. In this view, we realize that identity comes about resulting from a set of linguistic and discursive

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<sup>13</sup> "China and the Arctic"

<sup>14</sup> "China's Foreign Policy – a New Normal?"

<sup>15</sup> "Security and Governance in the Global Arctic"

<sup>16</sup> 'Arctic science diplomacy: a case of managing the rise of China'

<sup>17</sup> "*Il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" – "*There is no outside-text*".

practices. For Foucault, discourse was fundamental to the creation of a social world; it was language that had an ability to produce the social world. As such, discourse is also viewed as a form of action (Foucault 2002) through which acts could be accomplished. Importantly, language can be used for purposes of presenting oneself in a certain way and that way depends on the subject of a discourse.

Discourse analytical framework offers a useful perspective on unuttered messages (Schröter 2013:4) which is of importance for this thesis, since it extends its analytical scope to such. Namely, it is vital to note that “what is said is always a way of not saying something else” (Bryman 2012: 531). Additionally, unwritten signs and messages, like submarines or military exercises, are also pregnant with meaning and such “body language” (Hansen 2006: 21) of a state cannot be ignored.

It is pertinent for this thesis’ argument to derive from Foucault again. In his view, discourse could be regarded as a vehicle for power exercise. It made the construction of individual subjectivity, rules and procedures possible, which in turn made the construction of disciplinary practices possible, which in the end resulted in the construction of a self-disciplining subject. China, as a self-disciplining subject performs disciplinary practices deriving from the rules and procedures of the Arctic Council, UNCLOS and notion of sovereignty embedded in principles of international law.

### ***5.1.2 Discourse analytical research design***

For the purposes of this thesis the author will follow a four-dimensional research design for discourse analysis presented in Lene Hansen’s book *Security as practice: Discourse analysis and the Bosnian War*. The dimensions in question are (a) number of Selves, (b) intertextual models, (c) temporal perspective and (d) number of events.

#### ***a). Number of Selves***

In the foreign policy context of research “Self” represents a nation, a state or any other foreign policy subject (Hansen 2006: 67). Deciding on a number of Selves to be analyzed depends on the research context, the issue in question. There are two possibilities of studying Self’s relation to events or issues. First is a “multiple-Self option” where research revolves around comparing Selves’ responses to the same event or policy issue. Second is that of a “discursive encounter”

interested in the discourse of Self and counter-construction of Other (Hansen 2006: 68). In this thesis, a multiple-Self option will be used which allows for a comparative study of Chinese and Russian discourses on the Arctic.

*b). Intertextual models*

Intertextuality is one of the notions central to the practice of discourse analysis. Within the field of foreign policy intertextuality enables theorization of the importance of textual influence and debate. Kristeva's theory of "the intertextual generation of meaning" sees all texts as written with traces of previous texts (Hansen 2006: 50; Kristeva 1980). Importantly, intertextual focus is also on the readings and interpretations of texts, that is on the ways in which knowledge and facts are being drawn from text to text and their location within foreign policy discourses, not just on quotes and link between texts being made (Hansen 2006: 51).

Hansen further proposes four intertextual models (1, 2 3A, 3B), each with distinct analytical focus, object of analysis and goal. Model 1 centers directly on official foreign policy discourse, its analytical object constitute official texts and documents, speeches, parliamentary debates and alike. Its main goal is to investigate the construction of identity in official discourse, what intertextual links stabilize such discourse and how the discourse reacts to criticism (Hansen 2006: 53-54). The analytical focus of Model 2 is widened and includes discourses of major actors and arenas of foreign policy debate such as political oppositional parties, corporate institutions and the media. This model allows for studying potential change in the official discourse and its goal is to highlight the hegemony of the official discourse, its potential transformation and the internal stability of media discourses (ibid.: 54-55). Model 3A brings in in "popular culture" representation of foreign policy issues (film, fiction, photography etc.). Model 3B's analytical focus is on marginal political discourses which are for example, marginal newspapers representing dissent and resistance in non-democratic regimes but also academic analysis and debates (ibid.: 55-57).

Intertextual models used in this thesis are 1, 2 and 3B. Their analytical details relevant for the study are presented in Table 1.

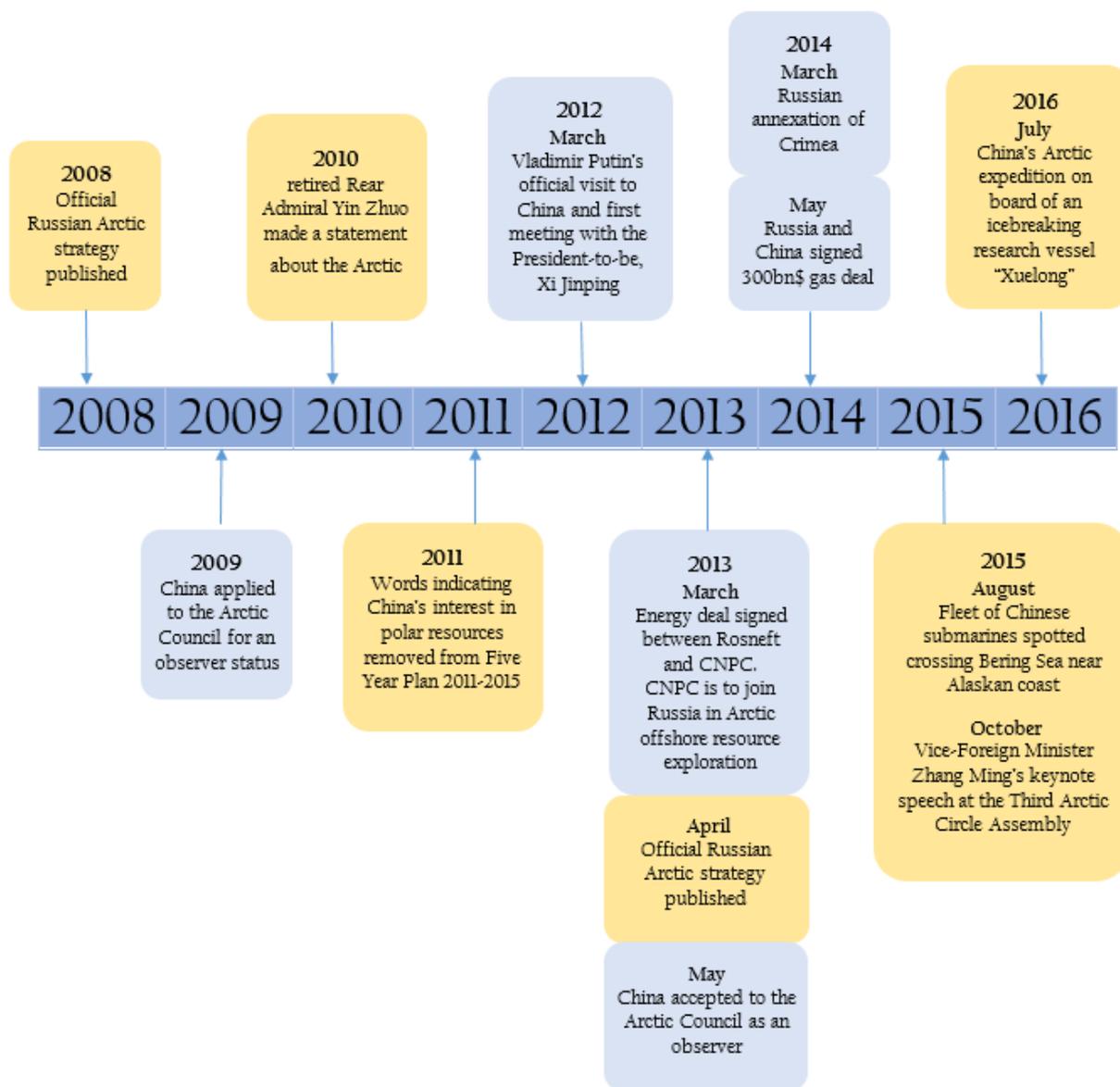
	MODEL 1	MODEL 2	MODEL 3B
ANALYTICAL FOCUS	<u>Official discourse:</u> Heads of states Heads of international institutions	<u>Wider foreign policy</u> <u>debate:</u> The media	<u>Marginal political</u> <u>discourse:</u> Academics
OBJECT OF ANALYSIS	Official texts Supportive texts <i>Direct and secondary</i> <i>intertextual links</i>	Media texts Speeches, statements <i>Recurring intertextual links</i>	Academic analysis
GOAL OF ANALYSIS	The stabilization of official discourse through intertextual links <i>The response of official</i> <i>discourse to critical discourses</i>	The hegemony of official discourse <i>The internal stability of media</i> <i>discourse</i>	Academic debates

**Table 1.** Intertextual research models used in a thesis (adopted from Hansen 2006: 57).

*c). Temporal perspective*

Foreign policy can be studied from the temporal perspective by analyzing a longer historical period, by focusing on one particular moment or on a set of smaller moments tied to a particular issue. Moments chosen for analysis by poststructuralist practitioners are usually striking in nature, such as conflicts or wars. Nevertheless, discourse analysis allows for a study of less visible events. Of major importance for this thesis is that discourse analysis is ample to study the implementation of identities and their placement into concrete negotiated practice (Hansen 2006: 69).

Research will focus on “comparative moments” which “evolve around a smaller number of clearly defined points in time which are tied to particular foreign policy events” (ibid.: 70). Following Hansen’s advice, chosen moments are not far apart in time. Figure 1 depicts the timeframe for the moments discussed in this thesis. Events, like signing of the gas deal in 2014, are marked in blue and serve as a necessary contextual background for the discussion of recent developments in Sino-Russian relations with regards to the Arctic. Comparative moments studied, which are marked in yellow, are messages which belong to the four groups: written, spoken, unuttered and silent.



**Figure 1.** Timeframe for the period analyzed in the thesis. Comparative moments are marked in yellow.

*d). Number of events*

The events analyzed in this study are related by both time and issue, which is the Arctic and two distinct ways of conceptualizing it for the purposes of serving national interest of China and Russia. In this study events are understood as policy issues which form a contextual background for the discussion and as such are presented in Fig. 1.

Policy issues in question are for example, acceptance of China as a permanent observer to the Arctic Council in 2013 and signing of major deals by China and Russia in 2013 and 2014. It is important for fulfilling the aim of the thesis that multiple-events study allows first, for an identification of patterns of transformation and reproduction through comparison across time, and second, for generation of knowledge of discourses of the Self embedded in political horizons (Hansen 2006: 71).

### **5.1.3 Basic discourses**

The importance of basic discourses cannot be undervalued in the discourse analytical inquiry if its focus is investigation of a larger political and media debate or putting events in a comparative perspective. Basic discourses help the researcher in three main ways. Namely, they

construct different Others with different degrees of radical difference; articulate radically diverging forms of spatial, temporal and ethical identity; and construct opening links between identity and policy. (Hansen 2006: 46).

While they are perceived as being an ideal-type, which means that they do not always are the main points of political debates, they hold an important analytical value. They enable seeing multiple representations as systematically linked and enrich the investigation on the debates by identifying the principal areas where disagreements are structured (ibid.)

Theoretical framework chosen for this study was selected deliberately to allow for an analysis of multiple discourses. Having in mind methodological advice of Hansen (2006) two basic discourses were identified: Chinese international discourse on the Arctic and Russian regional discourse on the Arctic. Categories guiding the selection of the discursive moments are discussed in the next chapter.

## **5.2 Epistemology and Ontology**

As this thesis' aim is to discover the underlying meaning of events and activities it will follow the epistemological standpoint of interpretivism. The focus of this study demands that science is seen as something that cannot be purely objective (Bryman 2008: 28). Essentially it means that I seek to *understand* rather than *explain* Chinese state's behavior (ibid). Characteristic for my study is a constant change of context and dynamism of political atmosphere. This informs my post-

structuralist ontological point of departure as it allows me to dismantle the “truths” constructed in the positivist realm. To derive from Der Derian:

“International relations requires an intertextual approach, in the sense of a critical inquiry into an area of thought where there is no final arbiter of truth, where meaning is derived from an interrelationship of texts, and power is implicated by the problem of language and other signifying practices” (1989: 6).

In other words, I do not aim at problem-solving, I aspire to deconstruct some preconceived notions and in this way, enrich the pool of knowledge regarding China, Russia and the Arctic. This ambition is being realized by the use of qualitative method of discourse analysis, as it allows me to focus entirely on language and communication without having to quantify my data (Bryman 2008: 36).

The concepts ensuring reliability of my study are those derived from post-structuralist theory of IR, image, perception of threat, Self and Other. Replication requires that I explain the procedures followed that allowed me to reach my conclusions (ibid: 47). Therefore, I remark on epistemology and ontology, my methods, and share the details of data collection and analysis. Finally, the scope and nature of this inquiry allows me to claim internal validity only, as my conclusions cannot be easily, if at all, generalized.

## **6 Empirical material**

### **6.1 Material selection**

As Hansen advises, material chosen for analysis should preferably be placed within the time under study, however, it is important to include older texts which enable putting the debate in the historical perspective. Moreover, material is most often divided into *key texts*, which are intertextually central, and *general material*, which aids conceptualization and interpretation (Hansen 2006: 74). The main criteria of the textual selection matrix are presented in Table 2, which was derived from Lene Hansen’s seminal book on the practice of discourse analysis.

MATERIAL	TEMPORAL LOCATION	
	Time of study	Historical material
GENERAL MATERIAL	3 criteria: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear articulations</li> <li>• Widely read and attended to</li> <li>• Formal authority</li> </ul>	Conceptual histories
KEY TEXTS	Primary reading of broader set of sources Digital search engines	Conceptual histories Quoted in contemporary debates Re-published

**Table 2.** Textual selection matrix (Hansen 2006: 74).

Arguably the main point of interest in the textual selection for this study is a notion of a “broader set of sources”, as presented in Table 2. As has been mentioned in section 5.1.1. this study adopts a maximalist definition of a discourse. Hence sources for this study, among others, are states’ “body language” along with silence, which I believe, speaks. As a result, some of the key texts are not texts per se, as they are not written or spoken, but unuttered or quiet. The next section provides a detailed account on the texts chosen for the analysis and the criteria for their selection.

## 6.2 Moments

The criteria for the choice of moments are Lene Hansen’s definition of “moments”, timeframe, location and foreign policy issue which bind moments together and make them relevant for the study. Furthermore, a detailed account of four clusters of messages is presented.

### 6.2.1 *Criteria for the choice of the moments*

In general terms, moments are of striking character and become subjects of intense political debate. Consequently, majority of poststructuralist research revolves around events such as wars and conflicts. However, discourse analysis offers a possibility for analyzing more obscure, vague moments, which are of no less importance as they can illustrate “the daily practices of reproduction and transformation” (Hansen 2006: 69). With this definition in mind, messages and texts analyzed in the thesis were regarded as moments since they fulfil the criteria presented by Hansen. They vary from spoken or written official texts to military undertakings and stretch all the way to the messages that were never spoken. As the focus of the thesis is identification of the ways in which

an international image of China is being projected and managed, I consider lack of messages as a discourse itself and aim to analyze this form of silence and its political meaning. The timeframe of the events analyzed in this thesis is between years 2008 and mid-2016. Primary concern for the location was that the events had to take place either in the Arctic, other Arctic state (in this case Iceland and Greenland), in Russia or China with links to the Arctic either in speech, writing or other way of sending a message. The foreign policy issues around which the events and discourses are surrounded are new ways of conceptualizing the Arctic as a geographical and political space for the purposes of serving national interest. The study focuses on Chinese and Russian attempts at conceptualizing the Arctic in these ways. Two fundamentally different basic discourses were identified. In the context of the Arctic geopolitics it becomes obvious that they are rooted in two completely opposite understandings of the ways in which national interest should be protected and national security granted. Table 3 presents a textual selection matrix for this thesis.

MATERIAL	TEMPORAL LOCATION	
	Time of study	Historical material
GENERAL MATERIAL	Academic analyses RT.com articles, Xinhua News Conference material	Civilizational discourse
KEY TEXTS	Published Russian official strategies for the Arctic States' "body language" – joint Sino-Russian military drills, submarines, icebreakers Chinese official statements and speeches on the Arctic issues Lack of official Chinese White Paper on the Arctic published.	<i>The future history of the Arctic</i> by Charles Emmerson

**Table 3.** Material (textual) selection matrix for the thesis.

General material from the time of study consists of a broad selection of academic analyses of Arctic politics and the nature of Chinese and Russian foreign policy. Primary sources in the general material cluster come from the articles published online in the Russian and Chinese state-

controlled media websites: Russia Today and Xinhua News, respectively. They have been read in their original languages, Russian and Chinese. Attempting to present the fullest possible media image of the Arctic politics, articles from international media outlets published in English were also scrutinized. Finally, conferences and public lectures which I attended served as a rich source of facts and data, along with commentaries and opinions which were extremely helpful in the final analysis of chosen key texts.

Analyzed key texts from the time of study have been grouped in four clusters of messages: written, spoken, unuttered and silent. Written messages are official Russian strategies for the development of the Russian Arctic region from years 2008 and 2013. Spoken messages are speeches and statements of Chinese officials, in which they address relevance of the Arctic issues to the Chinese interests. Unuttered messages are Chinese-led international Arctic expeditions of Xuelong icebreaking research vessel including the most recent from July 2016, crossing of Chinese submarines next to the coast of Alaska in 2015. Finally, silent messages are the words removed from the 2011-2015 Five Year Plan, which indicated Chinese interest in exploring Arctic resource potential and a lack of China's White Paper or any other coherent official document stating Chinese strategy for the Arctic. Historical material consists of a book by Charles Emmerson's *The future history of the Arctic*, in which he discusses Arctic past, present and future by sketching broad historical background. He also engages in the debates on the Arctic environment, natural riches and power distribution. All these elements make the book an informed and fitting voice in the Arctic debates.

## **7 Analysis**

This thesis argues that China engages in image-projecting exercises. This chapter's task is first, the analysis of the discursive moment and second, tying the findings to the pragmatism permeating Sino-Russian relations. The goal of the chapter is to show that pragmatic relationship allows for Chinese image management activities and that for this reason China is currently favoring the symbolic over material gains.

## 7.1 Systematization of the discursive moments

The purpose of this part is to place the analysis of the chosen discursive moments (also referred to as messages) in the context of the discussed landscape and answer not only the questions about the ways in which *the Other* in the international system shapes its narrative to project a desirable image, but more importantly, it sheds light on China’s purposeful discursive practices which are aimed at securing the favorable environment for acquiring the symbolic gains. Discursive moments are organized into four clusters by the way in which the messages were sent. This systematization is presented in Table 4. This is also the order in which the analysis will follow

Written	Silent	Spoken	Unuttered
Official Russian Arctic strategy published in 2008 and signed by President Dmitri Medvedev	Lack of Chinese White Paper on the Arctic	Retired Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo’s statement about the Arctic	Sailing of the Chinese fleet of submarines near Alaskan coast
Official Russian Arctic strategy published in 2013 and signed by President Vladimir Putin	Removal of the words indicating China’s interest in polar resources from the Five Year Plan 2011-2015	Vice-Foreign Minister Zhang Ming’s keynote speech at the Third Arctic Circle Assembly	Chinese icebreaker’s Xuelong research expedition

Table 4. Four clusters of discursive moments.

### 7.1.1 *Written and silent*

Deriving from Michel Foucault and his conceptualization of silence makes it possible to establish a category of silent messages sent by the Chinese. Foucauldian silence can be “considered a statement if it is used for a rhetorical purpose” (Parrott 2012: 377). To view Chinese silence as a statement in itself it is necessary to introduce the written messages which are clear stances authorized by Russian Presidents – Dmitri Medvedev in 2008 and Vladimir Putin in 2013. It is the juxtaposition of their publication with the lack of any written Chinese document on the Arctic that makes that lack pregnant in meaning. Indeed, in the Chinese fashion of international policy-making what remains unsaid and unmentioned tends to communicate a lot. It stems from the cultural

inclination toward indirect communication and face-saving efforts (Shih 2013). In this case, lack of the White Paper is an attempt at indirect confrontation with other stakeholders in the Arctic region. Highlighting the importance of abiding by the principles of international law by the Chinese can be regarded as an element of face-saving directed at Arctic states. Nevertheless, the fact that China still has not delivered an official document on its Arctic strategy causes many observers to wonder about the hidden agenda of the Chinese state and potential danger of an outbreak of conflict in the High North (Lasserre 2015). The general feeling is that of navigating research on China in the Arctic in the dark, since there is no clear and consistent official statement.

Another silent message on the Chinese side is the removal of the words indicating China's interest in polar resources from the Five Year Plan 2011-2015. The only mentioning of China's research diplomacy came in the context of the Antarctica, leaving the Arctic outside the discourse. When having in mind the image projection hypothesis, such an occurrence can be viewed as a deliberate action – and a meaningful rhetoric statement. It becomes even more so, as in the newest published Five Year Plan 2016-2020, one of China's priorities is development of the new Arctic observatory (Asian Scientist Newsroom 2016) and active role in “rule-making in new fields such as ... polar areas...” (Xinhuanet.com 2016).

To sum up, we can clearly see that China puts discursive efforts into silencing its interest in the Arctic as a source of natural riches on the one hand, and highlighting its contribution to the international research endeavors. Even when finally admitting its interest in assuming an active role in the decision-making processes it puts the polar region among other areas of interest such as the Internet and deep space (Xinhuanet.com 2015b).

### ***7.1.2 Spoken and unuttered***

As mentioned in Chapter 5, inclusion of unuttered messages as a category was made possible by deploying Derridean view of “everything is a text”. Those unuttered statements of power are juxtaposed with the spoken messages which can be regarded as official, since they were made by high-profile individuals: a retired Rear Admiral and a Vice-Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China.

In an interview with the Xinhua news reporter, Rear Admiral Zhuo said that it is important for China to participate in shaping the future of the Arctic since this region is a common wealth of the world's human population (Luo 2010). These words were studied closely and have been given

numerous interpretations. They clearly indicate that China is ready to take an assertive stance in securing its Arctic interests, even though it has not been documented in any written form. Nevertheless, it comes as an important reminder of China's growing global position and outreach, which allows it to be present at every significant international forefront. To put it simply, international policy- and decision-making is no longer possible without China, no matter where in the world it takes place.

Chinese most worrying, albeit not illegal, presence in the Arctic to date was the appearance of five navy ships 12 nautical miles of the Alaskan coast during the former US President Barack Obama's visit to the state (Sciutto 2015). Their passing was within the rules of international law and officially does not mean anything. Importantly, there is no mentioning of this event in the Chinese state media. Yet, as it was discussed in the roundtable meeting with Marc Lanteigne, he admitted that it is "something to keep in mind as it is supposed to be drawing our attention". It is hard to disagree with Lanteigne, especially when remembering China's perception of its national interest and the influence that Arctic dynamics have on it. This unuttered message of powerful presence in the Arctic comes in line with the Rear Admiral's view of China's international importance.

This view was also shared by a Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Zhang Ming in his keynote speech at the China Country Session of the Third Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavik, Iceland in 2015. Mr Zhang has noted that "[A]t present, China's activities in the Arctic mainly focus on scientific research" and highlighted the importance of the mutual understanding and peaceful cooperation (Foreign Ministry of PRC 2015). He also makes an insightful remark considering China's location: "Geographically speaking, China is a near-Arctic state" (ibid.). This is followed by noting that changes in the Arctic have a major impact on China's "climate, environment, agriculture, shipping, trade as well as social and economic development" (ibid.) which in turn makes China "a major stakeholder in the Arctic" (ibid.). This is the clearest to-date spoken articulation of the reasons for Chinese interest in the Arctic.

Currently, securing it comes in the form of scientific diplomacy and an example of it is the 7<sup>th</sup> Arctic expedition of Chinese research vessel Xuelong, which started in July 2016 (Xinhuanet.com 2016). This international initiative aims at placing China in the scientific landscape of polar research. As discussed in the roundtable with Rasmus Gjedssø Bertelsen, it is currently the safest bet for Chinese efforts at being internationally recognized as a valid Arctic player. Research

activities go in line with China's self-perception of the Arctic stakeholder. This is also an illustrious example of putting the symbolic gains before the material gains for the time being.

The next section will embed these findings into a larger realm of China's attempts at image management, its self-perception and reasons for choosing a pragmatic relationship with Russia.

## **7.2 Ways of thinking about China in the Arctic**

Bergman-Rosamond and Rosamond have proposed two ways of thinking about the Arctic: as a space where practices of securitization and de-securitization continue to take place, and as a space with a possibility of emergence of alternative conceptions of it (2015: 148). As the discussion about borders and Arctic governance is not an aim of this thesis, I would like to shift attention to the second way of thinking proposed. Having in mind different conceptualizations of the Arctic space is of crucial importance for building an argument about Chinese engagement there, which, in my view, has a symbolic meaning for China's statecraft and international standing.

### ***7.2.1 Conceptualizing China's international position***

After submitting its bid for a permanent observer status to the Arctic Council in 2009 China assumed a more assertive stance on the Arctic matters, claiming that the region and its changing dynamics is exerting too much influence on the rest of the world to be left for a just a handful of countries to decide on. Consequently, China started being perceived as a potential challenger of the status quo. Even though China has never openly challenged Arctic states' sovereign rights over their parts of the region, many are fearing Chinese presence.

China is aware of that and it puts certain amount of effort in diffusing its threatening image which persist in much of media portrayals and political debates. However, before we start delving deeper into recent image projection activities undertaken by China, it is vital to ground our analysis in the historical and traditional views that China holds regarding its international position. This in turn, will allow for building an argument on the importance of the desirable image projection for first, symbolic, and second, material gains for China in the Arctic in future.

### 7.2.1.1 *Historical thinking*

The historical interest in civilization is an important part of this thesis and deserves to be explored in a greater depth. Throughout human history, great civilizations were stretching from the West to the East, and the main task was to build bridges between them, and not embark on exploring the seemingly empty polar regions. Recently, however, rapid Arctic developments open a new stage for bridging West and East and this is one of the most important challenges for the future world order.

According to Ho there has been renewed scientific interest in the notion of Chinese exceptionalism (2014: 1). Its assumptions rest on Chinese nationalism and emphasizing Chinese “goodness” and “greatness” and transmitting these views to the outside world. Such an effort is aimed at securing China’s national interest and supporting Chinese interests around the world. To understand why exceptionalism is present in Chinese thinking about foreign policy it is crucial to analyze cultural and historical contexts which paved the way for its emergence.

Speaking about the Chinese “goodness” and “greatness” becomes possible when keeping in mind the civilizational aspect of the policy-making. Throughout years, researchers have been pointing out to the distinctiveness of the Chinese condition as a civilization and its influence on the outcomes of its politics at home and abroad (Pye 1985: 235<sup>18</sup>; Jacques 2009: 244<sup>19</sup>; Shih 2013: 17<sup>20</sup>). For the purposes of this thesis I do not have to take such a broad theme under our inquiry. Yet, discussing cultural and historical contexts of Chinese political thinking become crucial for understanding the theoretical framework developed.

To begin with, I base on Shih’s claim that *national interest* in China is derived from its *national self-image* which “conceptualizes the role of the state in the world” (1990: 28). Interestingly, advances in Chinese diplomatic history, according to Shih’s analysis, are based on China’s self-motivation of its global role. Until the bitter defeat in Opium Wars (1839-1860), China was the center of all under-Heaven, and those living outside were barbarians (Kissinger 2011: 50-52 Shih 1990: 95). Its self-image of a growing global power came to being with the victory in Sino-Japanese War of Resistance. Period of a Cold War brought a couple of changes to the China’s self-

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<sup>18</sup> “China is a civilization pretending to be a nation-state.”

<sup>19</sup> “Chinese civilization is like a very old geological formation, its multitudinous layers comprising the civilization-state, with the nation-state merely the top soil.”

<sup>20</sup> “Chinese foreign policy is incomprehensible unless we first penetrate this pretense.”

image. Becoming a proponent of the Non-Aligned movement<sup>21</sup> and protector of communist ideals from Khrushchev's de-stalinization efforts made China perceive itself as a great country, capable of withstanding imperialist advances on its own. This belief resulted in a Sino-Soviet split, mentioned in Chapter 2. With Deng Xiaoping coming to power in 1978 China moved from being a "revolutionary" to "ordinary" power (Shih 1990: 119).

Clearly, historical environment had its impact on the normative system and Chinese foreign policy choices. It was national self-image held by China that played a decisive part in taking certain actions, like engaging in wars or keeping the low profile. Consequently, we can see that China's own self-perception as a growing global power legitimizes China's process of ending the "century of humiliation"<sup>22</sup> which essentially means reclaiming its rightful place on the global political and economic stage. As being perceived by China – it is not an *arrival* on the global scene, but rather a *comeback* on China's own terms, in China's own time.

### **7.2.1.2 China's self-perception**

The debate around China's power have been revived in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008 which resulted in diminishing the power and appeal previously hold by the European Union and the United States. The question whether Western-led world order is still valid resulted also from the mismanagement of Middle Eastern conflicts and global terrorist threat. As a result, we could observe the appearance of new publications, like that of Martin Jacques titled *When China Rules the World. The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order* or coining of new terms, like Beijing consensus<sup>23</sup> – as opposed to Washington consensus. However, such an essentialization of China is mistaken. In this view, China is supposed to assume global leadership and replace global hegemon – the US. Meanwhile, China has embarked on its own course and on its own terms. China's actions do not aim to overtake American zone of influence, but rather concentrate around building up its own.

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<sup>21</sup> A grouping of countries which were on neither side of the Cold War; concluded during the conference in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955 (Kissinger 2011: 173).

<sup>22</sup> The name for the period in Chinese history which starts with a loss in Opium Wars (1839-1860) to the British Empire; followed by colonisation of parts of China and series of internal conflicts; officially ended with the unification of China in the shape of the PRC.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. Stephen Halper's book *Beijing Consensus. How China's authoritarian model will dominate the twenty-first century*.

China's foreign policy goals are domestically embedded. Hence, China's interest in projecting an image of being a constructive global power serves purposes of the domestic audience. Chinese are traditionally accustomed to the notions of patriarchal authority and are sharing a belief of the moral superiority which their leader should possess (Pye 1985: 183-186). While achieving the absolute moral mastery is quite unattainable, Chinese rest in their "pleasure of suspending disbelief", as Lucian Pye concluded (1985: 182) and are content with indulging in what *can* be achieved rather than what is *actually* being achieved (Shih 1990: 28). Politicians then have the opportunity to state the facts as they ought to be rather than as they actually are (Ho 2014: 171), and this creates an immense space for voicing out Chinese Dream, rejuvenation of the Chinese nations and ending the century of humiliation, however vague the process itself might be. The same space allows for the emergence of the Arctic in Chinese practice and to a lesser degree in Chinese public discourse. Also, in this space symbolic gains outweigh the material ones.

According to Chen and Chang, China is limited by both "its power resources and its diplomatic ideas of peaceful diplomacy and non-interference and is weak in terms of coercion" (2013: 13). Considering the components of the soft power such as institutional resources, ideology and culture (Nye 1990: 31-32) we can observe Chinese efforts at developing those by, for example, establishing Confucius Institutes around the world aimed at promoting Chinese language and culture. Nevertheless, in comparison with a still potent global appeal of the West mixed with a partial isolation of China from the rest of the world (e.g. Great Fire Wall of China), these efforts still fall short.

The most important purpose of Chinese soft power is to alleviate the perception of China as a threat and facilitate the understanding of China as a cooperative, responsible, and cooperative growing power focused on its peaceful development (Chen and Chang 2013: 18). Considering how much time, effort and resources the development of soft power takes we argue that China instead targeted projecting an *image* of being such power. This is not to say that China is incapable of undertaking tangible actions worldwide, but currently these actions are aimed to win the hearts and minds of the global audience, before China is able and allowed to do more – on its own terms. Meanwhile, as China's experiences in the Arctic to-date prove, attempts at projecting an image are not looked favorably upon.

To deal with this conceptual challenge, I use the notion of *otherness* which contributed to the construction of the perception of potential danger. As David Campbell explains

“there need not be an action or event to provide the grounds for an interpretation of danger. The mere existence of an alternative mode of being, the presence of which exemplifies that different identities are possible... is sometimes enough to produce the understanding of a threat” (1992: 3).

In this context, at least China and India are being perceived as *others* in the international system for their large populations, rapid rates of growth and the uncertain changes these developments can bring to the status quo. To continue with Campbell: “identity is constituted in relation to difference” (1992: 9). Weighing identity of the Arctic states against the otherness of non-Arctic states results in the understanding of their involvement as a potential future threat.

### ***7.2.1.3 China’s strategy for image management***

Having in mind the above discussion on the perceptions of power and acquiring a desirable international image, my analysis of the Chinese engagement in the Arctic might seem as too narrow in scope. A lot has been said about the lack of expertise China has in the resource extraction in extreme conditions, how relatively little money is being devoted to Arctic research or how large should investments be there to bring any profit in long-term future (e.g. Su & Lanteigne 2015: 12-13). However, in the light of the discussion on the Chinese grand international strategy presented above, these seemingly weak points turn into strengths of the following analysis. It is exactly for those, and many more other reasons Chinese engagement in the Arctic is worth studying. Considering China’s multiple interests around the world and its long-term perspectives on the investment and capital, Arctic becomes a symbolic space where China can capitalize on its actions and this will have broader implications for its international image.

At a current stage, China needs to, has to and wants to respond to the demands of image and identity of a rising global power by assuming some of the international responsibility. In case of the current institutional regime present in the Arctic, China becomes one of the major voices advocating for peaceful cooperation in the region and obedience to the international law. However, China’s claims about the Arctic as a shared human heritage indicate that it has taken a more assertive stance in Arctic affairs aimed at protecting its long-term interests there and projecting an image of a confident global power.

Importantly, China must manage its Arctic practices and discourses carefully. Not only the goal of diffusing the ‘China threat’ theory is still far from being completed, but it had an impact on unfavorable perception of China’s activities in the Arctic already. For example, the untrue information of the “biggest Chinese embassy” in Icelandic capital has been spread undermining China’s efforts at projecting a friendly and cooperative image, as opposed to dominating and resource-oriented (Guschin 2015). As a result, a Chinese entrepreneur planning a land purchase in Iceland had to withdraw from his plans of developing tourist facilities, as he could not convince the public that the land will not be used for the military purposes (Higgins 2013; Su & Lanteigne 2015: 4).

In Greenland, China had to face the fact that it is largely perceived as a resource-hungry economy focused on exploiting riches wherever possible. Despite two Chinese companies operating in Greenland and surveying for copper and gold within the Arctic Circle, during 2012-2015 the most contested issue was partnering of the London Mining company with China’s Sichuan Xinye Mining Investment Corporation in potentially developing an iron ore at Isua, 150 km northeast of the capital, Nuuk. Greenlandic public opinion worried about the potential influx of Chinese capital and labor which could have a negative impact on minimum wages among other issues. China’s advances were interpreted as securing a stronghold in the Arctic by using Greenland and then potentially expanding to Iceland (Benediktsson & Pickering 2013). Eventually, with the slowdown of the Chinese economy, the plans of developing Isua ore have been abolished.

In the light of the examples presented above, we can clearly see that China has a lot to do if it is to project a favorable image of its own power and international economic and political presence. It is a question of the state’s security and identity which, as the cases above illustrate, rely on the image of the state. Having said that, we would like to reflect on another interesting case of China’s relations with an Arctic state. Since October 2010, when Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize which China sees as an interference in its domestic affairs, Sino-Norwegian relations came to freeze. China imposed several mostly symbolic sanctions on Norway, including the halt in free trade between the two countries. In its efforts to ease the situation, Norway was positive about China joining the Arctic Council as an observer. Also, in early 2016, during his private visit, Dalai Lama was refused any high-level meetings with Norwegian officials (Baker 2016). Still, the standoff in the relations remains which shows that Chinese identity,

reflected in its commitment to upholding its Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, does not change under this sort of pressure. In this case, the image projected is that of an assertive and decisive power, big enough to outweigh losses in one area of its international relations and capable of gaining in another area.

The above examples show clearly that it is not the identity that changes; it is rather an image that is being manipulated either by China or by the outside world. To meet its goals, China must gain mastery in manipulating its own image for its own benefits. This brings us to the question about Chinese engagement in the Arctic with Russia. Having brought up the examples of troublesome relations in the Arctic, it would be logical to avoid any other that could cause harm. Yet, China sees Russia as a promising partner in the Arctic, is willing to supply Russia with much needed capital and most of all, diplomatic attention, after international sanctions have been imposed on Russia. In the next section, I am going to discuss the reasons for Sino-Russian cooperation in the Arctic and assess the material and symbolic gains and losses for China in terms of image projection.

### **7.3 Ways of thinking about China and Russia in the Arctic**

Bringing Russia in the scope of this thesis means discussing its Arctic presence from a point of view of national ambitions and nationalist conception of borders and their importance. Publications of the Russian Arctic strategies in 2008 and 2013 indicate there is an increased emphasis on the importance of developing the Russian Arctic for securing Russia's national interest (Roseth 2014: 841). With the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis in November 2013 and active political and military engagement of Russia, which later led to the annexation of Crimea, worries about the future of peaceful cooperation in the Arctic emerged. There is no doubt that media attention concentrated around potential militarization of the Russian Arctic fueling heated debates about future dangers and coming of the "New Cold War"<sup>24</sup>. In the aftermath of Russian activities in Ukraine and Crimea, the West imposed economic sanctions which, among other issues, blocked the supply of financial and technological resources critical for the development of the Russian Arctic. Deep analyses of Russian advancements in the Arctic, however, conclude that there is no ongoing militarization and

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<sup>24</sup> Al Jazeera (2015) "The new cold war: The race for Arctic oil and gas"; Comte in Business Insider UK (2015) "The North could become a frontline in a new Cold War"; Ahmari in The Wall Street Journal (2015) "The New Cold War's Arctic Front".

that Russian advances in the region are in line with international agreements (Klimenko 2015). Yet, the questions continue to emerge when Russia announces a successful completion of the new nuclear-powered icebreaker for the first time in sixty years (TASS 2016). In addition, with the appointment of a controversial Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin as a head of a newly established Russian commission for managing the Arctic (Safronov et al. 2015), we can see that Russia is sending mixed signals. His unauthorized visit to Svalbard, Norway<sup>25</sup> and a tweet “The Arctic is Russian Mecca”<sup>26</sup> bring us closer to the particular understanding of the borders which Kinvall and Svensson (2015: 3) explain as follows:

borders are often rooted in historically contingent practices and discourses that continue to be related to national ideologies and identities in which emotional bordering tends to be loaded into national celebrations, memorized landscapes and other elements of national iconographies.

As has been discussed already in Chapter 2, Arctic has enormous weight for the Russian nationalistic self-image. All this added together does not make Russia a desirable international partner for any country mindful of its amiable international image. Nevertheless, China does not hesitate to seize opportunities which emerged after the sanctions were imposed on Russia. Even though at first it may seem counter-intuitive, there is method in this madness, as China is, for now, interested mainly in symbolic gains from partnering with Russia in the Arctic developments.

## **7.4 Pragmatic partnership**

### ***7.4.1 Traditional and symbolic ground***

To understand why it is pertinent to talk about the pragmatic partnership in the Arctic, it is important to first delineate the reasons for the growing importance of that region for both Russia and China. Both Russian and Chinese foreign strategies have been characterized as pragmatic (Ferdinand 2011; Hyer 2015; Oldberg 2010). Pragmatism is understood here as “a behavior disciplined by neither set of values nor established principles” (Zhao 2012: 198). The overall aim is serving the national interests and the understanding of it differs between Russian and Chinese leadership. Even though both countries see themselves as growing powers with considerable

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<sup>25</sup> Russian officials have a travel ban in the aftermath of the sanctions imposed by the West.

<sup>26</sup> “Арктика - русская Мекка” <http://twitter.com/rogozin/status/589822033955028992>

regional influence, and both are aiming to expand their international influence, as will be shown, the means of achieving this goal vary greatly between them.

The discussion about the key differences between Chinese and Russian international priorities brings us closer to the debate on the actual nature of their partnership in the Russian Arctic. Research suggests that while in the general sense Sino-Russian relations can be indeed regarded as strategic, in the Arctic they bear more characteristics of pragmatic. In his attempt at analyzing Russian relations with the NATO in the period after 1991, Martin Smith utilizes concepts of strategic and pragmatic partnerships. In his view, a *strategic* partnership is likely to last longer as it rests on a broader agreement between parties on the nature of international system, existing threats and most appropriate ways of addressing them (Smith 2006: 163). On the other hand, *pragmatic* partnership is less durable and is deeply rooted in the realist zero-sum game and reflects parties' concerns about gains and losses (ibid.).

#### ***7.4.2 Russian pragmatism***

Russian pragmatic stand in dealing with China in the Arctic stems from the historical legacy this region holds for Russia. For many decades, Arctic has had a symbolic importance for Russian national identity, as discussed above. Most recently, it became a space promising major changes in Russian economic strategies. Successful development of oil and gas infrastructure in the Russian Arctic could help Russia to diversify its energy exports from stagnating European receivers to Asian states, where China, as the world's largest energy consumer, is the most important actor.

The first steps in that direction have already been made and the situation which emerged in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis and embargoes imposed on Russia by European community only facilitated this process (Roseth 2014: 848-849). In this context, developing closer energetic cooperation with China is of vital – political – importance for Russia as it might lessen its international isolation and help boost damaged economy. China is interested in investing heavily in the Arctic to secure its foothold in that region for the years to come. The most recent development in the ongoing cooperation aimed at building energy infrastructure in the Russian Arctic is the signing of 12 billion dollars loan deal between Russian Yamal LNG and two Chinese

state banks – Exim Bank<sup>27</sup> and China Development Bank – for the development of the liquefied natural gas plant, reported Financial Times (Farchy 2016).

However, what ignites pessimism, is the fact that merely around ten years ago the situation looked completely different. In the 2000s Russia and China had problems with striking fruitful energetic cooperation, as Russia was afraid of China's too dominant influence. Instead, Russia preferred to trade arms with, for example India and Vietnam, and seek investments from, for example South Korea and Japan (Kaczmarek 2015: 53). It was only the global economic crisis of 2008-09 that made Russia revisit this strategy. China emerged as the only substantial trade partner wealthy enough to provide funds. As a result, the arms trade revived and several lucrative energy deals were signed, including the ESPO pipeline (Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean) with a branch to China (Kaczmarek 2015: 53; Lo 2008: 143).

### *7.4.3 Chinese pragmatism*

Having in mind that, at the moment, Arctic is of no priority for China (Jakobson & Peng 2012: vi), it might seem pointless to even try to place this case in a broader realm of Chinese grand international strategy. Nevertheless, after taking a closer look at Chinese activities around the world certain facts become of paramount importance for understanding of China's holistic approach China to building and projecting its global image.

While Arctic as a geographical space does not have any symbolic or traditional meanings that are close to the history and tradition of China, we can claim that it is becoming important in the context of protecting China's national interest and consequently, bearing importance for its identity of a growing global power. In its own eyes, China cannot afford **not** expressing interest in the Arctic. With this thesis, I argue that this interest goes somewhat beyond obvious tapping on the resources hidden under the ice.

From the symbolic point of view, Arctic is a unique region bringing together a couple of countries that otherwise would have been very distant from each other. Consequently, China, as a de facto growing global power, cannot afford missing an opportunity of having its own firm position in the Arctic decision making.

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<sup>27</sup> Export-Import Bank of China.

## 8 Conclusion

This thesis aimed at answering the following research question:

**In which ways does partnering with Russia in the Arctic help China to project a desired international image of the Chinese state?**

The analysis conducted allows me to answer that it gives China an opportunity to place itself in the realm of great power politics. China can also project itself as an alternative partner in international relations, ready to cooperate even when the other – Russia – is facing difficult times of seclusion from the international society. Also, compared to Russian activities elsewhere, China comes across as a peaceful player. Utilizing Russia's weaker economic conditions, China opens up to the Arctic future and is ready to assume a more assertive position regarding its Arctic interests. These are vital for the continuous development of the country – the Arctic developments influence China on many fronts, from environmental to economic. No wonder then that China has signaled its readiness to assume a more proactive role in the rule-making in the polar region.

The sub-questions used to deepen the inquiry were as follows:

**To what extent does China favor symbolic over material gains in the Arctic?**

**In which ways do civilizational identity and self-perception concerns inform Chinese exercises in image-projection and cooperation with Russia?**

China currently is in no position to aim directly at the material gains because first, due to the still harsh Arctic conditions there are not that many, and second, even if they were, it would be too early for China to be recognized as a rightful player in the Arctic. As a result, symbolic gains help to pave the way to reaping material gains in future. They form a basis for future cooperation with the rest of the Arctic states, as well as they prepare international society to be able to acknowledge Chinese rightful assertive stance in the Arctic matters.

Another reason for that is also the realm of the pragmatic partnership with Russia which allows just enough space for just enough symbolic benefits, as China is trying to show just a mild interest in the Arctic, for now, as shown in Chapter 7.

Civilizational identity and self-perception as a global power allow China to ask great questions about its rightful place in the world and to answer them in an increasingly assertive manner. A pragmatic calculation of the relationship with Russia is favorable for China as it would not want to be associated too closely with Russia for image purposes. Also, to project an image of a real global power China is interested in achieving on its own, with its own strength, by its own rules. Hence there is not much interest in a closer, more cordial cooperation with Russia simply because there is not enough room for a great Russia and a great China at the same time. China is interested in preparing its own ground simply because it can do so – and that sends a powerful signal to the rest of the international society.

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