

ASIAN INTERESTS AND THE PATH FORWARD IN THE NEW ARCTIC SYMPOSIUM SUMMARY

February 8 and 9, 2021



TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Introduction | 1 |
| » Keynote Remarks US Senator Lisa Murkowski (Alaska) | 3 |
| » Keynote Remarks Minister Yoko Kamikawa, Minister of Justice, Government of Japan | 3 |
| » Panel Discussion National Strategies in the Arctic | 4 |
| » Panel Discussion Arctic Research and Environmental Change in the Arctic | 7 |
| » Panel Discussion Economic Development in the Arctic | 8 |
| » Panel Discussion Infrastructure in the Arctic | 11 |

Note to the Reader:

This document summarizes the presentations and conversations from the symposium. We believe it is important to share first-person perspectives and insights, so in addition to these summaries, video recaps are provided at the end of each section.

Image source (front cover) Editorial credit: PaulWong / Shutterstock.com

Image source (back cover): By Andrei Stepanov / Shutterstock.com

Introduction

The Wilson Center’s Asia Program and Polar Institute, along with the Embassy of Japan in Washington, DC, hosted a two-day forum entitled ***Asian Interests and the Path Forward in the New Arctic***. With a multitude of common interests and prospects for cooperation in the Arctic, the forum convened representatives, scholars, and experts from Japan, the People’s Republic of China, the Republic of Korea, and the United States to share their countries’ unique Arctic interests and policies.

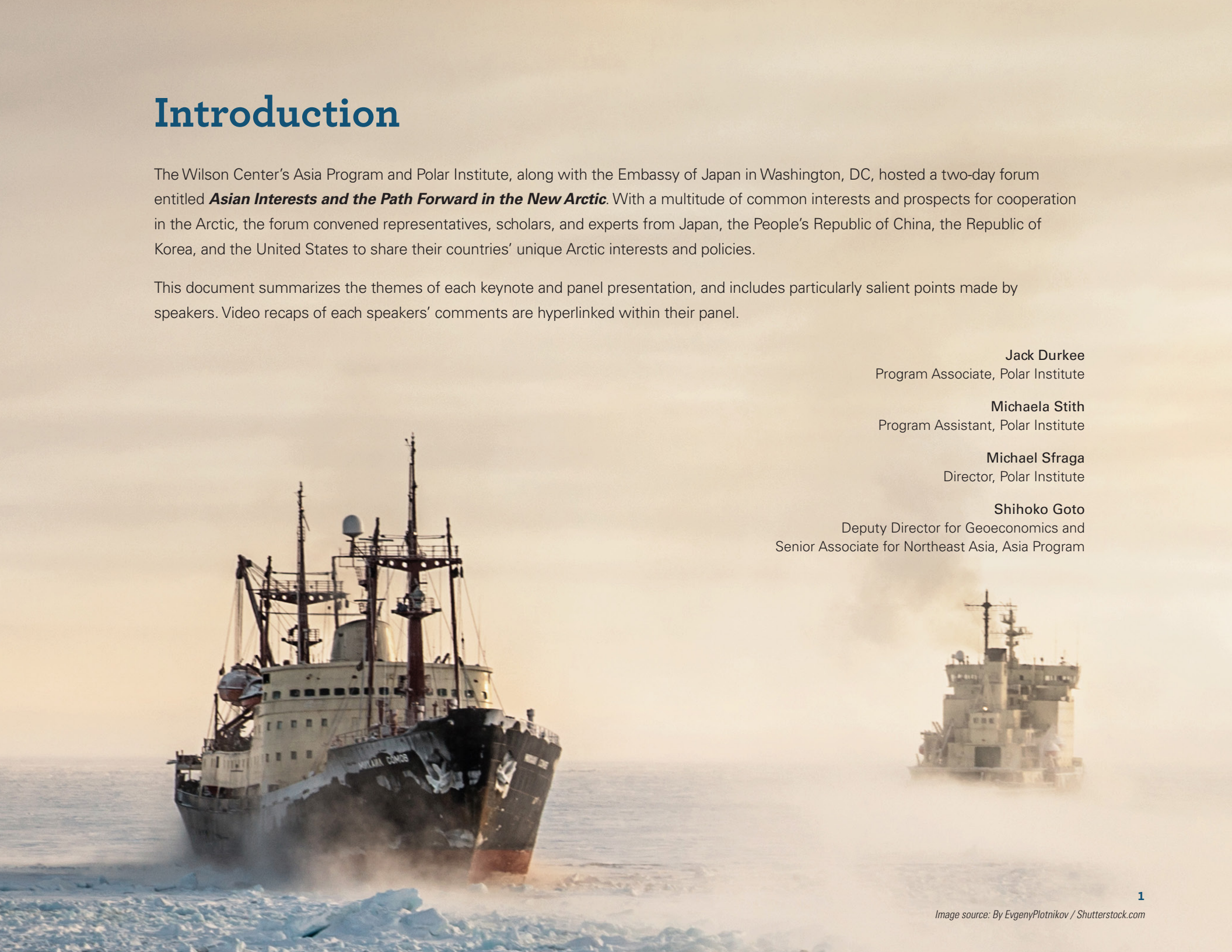
This document summarizes the themes of each keynote and panel presentation, and includes particularly salient points made by speakers. Video recaps of each speakers’ comments are hyperlinked within their panel.

Jack Durkee
Program Associate, Polar Institute

Michaela Stith
Program Assistant, Polar Institute

Michael Sfraga
Director, Polar Institute

Shihoko Goto
Deputy Director for Geoeconomics and
Senior Associate for Northeast Asia, Asia Program





Keynote Remarks



US Senator Lisa Murkowski (Alaska)

Senator Murkowski highlighted growing interest in the Arctic from the international community and reiterates that the Arctic does not fit the “Wild West” stereotype. Rather, current governance frameworks benefit from a robust set of institutions and norms, such as the IMO, Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Arctic Council, and the Arctic Coast Guard Forum. Nonetheless, future development will require an investment in infrastructure, and she looks to international partners for support in this endeavor. Senator Murkowski also noted for U.S. leadership in the Arctic and called on the Biden Administration to create the position of U.S. Arctic Ambassador.



Minister Yoko Kamikawa, Minister of Justice, Government of Japan

Minister Kamikawa began her keynote presentation by recalling her long-term commitment to Arctic issues and her collaboration in the region with the U.S. Emphasizing the vulnerability Japan has to climate change, she discussed the importance of Arctic cooperation for stakeholders for whom the rule of law is a common interest.

Minister Kamikawa also noted the importance of expanding research and development through coordinated systems, including data sharing, which she noted will help produce a “three-dimensional view of the Arctic region and a birds-eye view of the earth.” Infrastructure improvements, including engaging in the sustainable collaboration of Arctic sea routes, will help create an “ocean of collaboration.” The Minister concluded her presentation by expressing her concerns about the fragility and importance of the Arctic and provided support for continued collaboration with the U.S. and other partner countries in the region.

Panel Discussion

National Strategies in the Arctic

The panel expressed support for international cooperation in the Arctic, signaling hope that the Arctic will continue to be a model for other regions. Moving forward, priorities will include environmental protection measures, implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and continued research and data sharing – all of which are peaceful measures that will require international partnership.

The priorities of Asian countries may take different forms. Japan envisions an “ideal Arctic” where the international community promotes the rule of law, understands environmental changes, and pursues sustainable economic activities that respect Indigenous peoples. Japan favors scientific diplomacy as a means to achieve these objectives, and since 2011, Japan has sponsored various research projects like the GRENE Arctic Climate Change Research Project.

China, for its part, also favors a green approach and has engaged in efforts to reduce its carbon footprint, with President Xi Jinping pledging to make China carbon neutral by 2060. The other two pillars of Chinese policy are connectivity and cooperation. In pursuit of these pillars, China will participate in international

economic projects aimed at increasing the trade linkages between Arctic and non-Arctic countries and improving the lives of Arctic peoples. China is also working to ratify the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement.

Finally, South Korea continues to be a partner for Arctic development and cooperation. Korea’s objectives include contributing to international research on climate change, leading dialogue with international fora like the Arctic Council, and building greater capacity for cooperation through mutually-reinforcing trade relationships and public outreach.

Despite these positive developments, the panel expressed concern that Great Power Competition narratives and activities may disrupt peaceful development. However, it is possible that would-be competitors will learn to compartmentalize sources of conflict, as complex and transnational problems like climate change require multilateral solutions.

Please click here for the comments of [**Ambassador Suzuka Mitsuji**](#), [**Mr. Gao Feng**](#), and [**Mr. Lim Hoonmin**](#).



TOP ROW (left to right): Ambassador SUZUKA Mitsuji, Shihoko Goto, LIM Hoonmin. MIDDLE ROW (left to right): Ambassador David Balton, Dr. Michael Sfraga, GAO Feng. BOTTOM ROW: Congresswoman Jane Harman

Wilson Center | Wilson Center | Wilson Center | Wilson Center | Wilson Center

Wilson | Wilson | Wilson | Wilson | Wilson

Wilson Center | Wilson Center | Wilson Center | Wilson Center | Wilson Center

Polar Initiative | Wilson Center | Wilson Center | Wilson Center | Wilson Center

TOP ROW (left to right): Evan Bloom, Dr. Atsushi SUNAMI, Dr. Kelly Falkner. BOTTOM ROW (left to right): Dr. Michael Straga, Dr. Hyoung Chul SHIN, Dr. Huijen Yang.

Panel Discussion

Arctic Research and Environmental Change in the Arctic

Science collaboration is at the heart of Arctic cooperation, and Arctic research has never been just for the countries with territory in the Arctic. Arctic research is an international effort, as scientists attempt to unravel the mysteries of climate change, undertaking work that in many cases can only be done in the polar regions. Asian States have been among the most active of non-Arctic States in regional science initiatives and investments.

Asian countries have been leaders in Arctic science, mounting expeditions and participating in numerous national and joint programs. Many have located activities in Ny-Alesund in Svalbard. They have played a pivotal role in MOSAiC, the year-round deployment of Germany's RV Polarstern as a drifting observatory in the Arctic pack ice to advance climate change research. They have participated actively in the technical working groups of the Arctic Council. Japan, South Korea and China have made major investments in polar research vessels.

Climate change is a central concern of Asian countries' policies, and has caused Japan, South Korea and China to focus attention on Arctic science. All three countries have made great strides in areas of Arctic analysis and research related to climate change, through their national programs, academic institutions and individual scientists.

Japan's emphasis on Arctic research and development is one of the major pillars of Japan's national Arctic policy. Its efforts center, inter

alia, on strengthening observation and analysis systems, forming a research network within Japan and establishing research stations in the Arctic region. It's national flagship Arctic research project – ArCS (Arctic Challenge for Sustainability) – currently in its second phase, melds natural sciences, social and human sciences and data management. Japan hosted the third Arctic Science Ministerial meeting on May 8 and 9, 2021.

South Korea aspires to be a reliable Arctic partner through its scientific programs, especially those related to climate. It conducts monitoring at an increasing number of sites throughout the Arctic, and aims to promote close cooperation with Arctic States.

China's Arctic science is also focused on global responses to climate change. This includes measuring key chemical changes in the Arctic Ocean, for example using buoys to measure ice melt and carbon dioxide. China is making particular efforts to incorporate social science into Arctic research. It engages young scientists in Arctic research and uses media to promote dissemination of information about the Arctic.

Please click here for the comments of [Dr. Atsushi Sunami](#), [Dr. Hyoung Chul Shin](#), [Dr. Huigen Yang](#), and [Dr. Kelly Falkner](#).

Panel Discussion

Economic Development in the Arctic

The third panel on Economic Development in the Arctic featured five panelists from academia, the private sector, political office, and government bodies, all highlighting interests in sustainability in the Arctic and cooperation opportunities for participating countries.

Mr. Tadashi Maeda discussed existing Japanese projects to support business supply chains, including the potential for LNG investment in Alaska and the role of ESG and hydrogen production in achieving Japan's carbon-neutral goal of 2050.

Such interests were mirrored by **Mr. Michael Perkinson** who highlighted the growing role of geopolitics in the Arctic region and the importance of improving infrastructure to avoid a US-Russia-China competition for resources. **Dr. Aki Tonami** discussed the long-term approach necessary for international cooperation in the Arctic. In particular, she noted that the turbulence intertwined with scientific collaboration with Russia presents a challenge for the new posture of the Biden administration regarding climate change.

Representative Zack Fields (Alaska) added to Dr. Tonami's

discussion by acknowledging existing flows of Japanese FDI in Russia and offered an additional dimension to the discussion by emphasizing the importance of Indigenous groups in the region. To conclude, **Mr. Norio Yamamoto**, (whose presentation was shared by the Honorable Mead Treadwell) echoed the previous speakers' discussion on sustainability by offering recommendations on potential long-term US – Japanese cooperation in Alaska to include technology and infrastructure development.

The panel also discussed the role of geopolitics in Arctic economic cooperation and emphasized the importance of a strong relationship between the administrations of Prime Minister Suga and President Biden. The discussants mentioned the modern transition to increased LNG usage and the importance of Russia's leadership role in the region, before concluding with a final emphasis on the role of international cooperation in the Arctic.

The image shows a video conference interface. At the top, a blue banner features the Wilson Center logo repeated six times. Below this banner is a 2x3 grid of video feeds. The top row contains three participants: a man with glasses in a dark sweater, a man in a suit and tie, and a woman in a black blazer. The bottom row contains three participants: a man in a blue shirt and tie, a man in a dark jacket and glasses, and a man in a suit and glasses. Below the video grid is another blue banner with the Polar Initiative logo on the left and the Wilson Center logo repeated five times.

TOP ROW (left to right): Michael Perkinson, Honorable Mead Treadwell, Dr. Aki Tonami. BOTTOM ROW (left to right): Representative Zack Fields, Dr. Yang Jian, Tadashi Maeda.





TOP ROW (left to right): Lori Parrott, Dr. Jong-Deog Kim, Dr. Yang Jian. BOTTOM ROW (left to right): Dr. Natsuhiko OTSUKA, Dr. Lawson Brigham, Honorable Sherri Goodman.



Panel Discussion

Infrastructure in the Arctic



Dr. Jong-Deog (Justin) Kim outlined South Korea's four lines of effort on infrastructure that support the goal of a sustainable Arctic: science infrastructure (research stations, new LNG-powered icebreakers, and new satellite capacities and deployments), technology infrastructure (safety and the environment, shipbuilding, innovations from a 4th industrial revolution that may benefit remote regions), business infrastructure (ports, airports, roads and railways), and human infrastructure (education, partnerships, and knowledge cooperation). **Dr. Natsuhiko Otsuka** explored key areas of infrastructure including Arctic ocean navigation, fiber optic cables, and research. He discussed new possibilities for Japanese participation in transshipment of cargo along Russia's Northern Sea Route, including an agreement between Mitsui OSK Lines, Novatek (LNG developer), and the Japan Bank of International Cooperation. **Ms. Lori Parrott** highlighted Sandia National Laboratories' atmospheric measurement user facilities on the North Slope of Alaska and also asserted the need for scientists to help corporations create climate-resilient infrastructure and to improve prediction capabilities for Arctic researchers. **Dr. Yang Jian** outlined Chinese and Chinese enterprise participation in current and planned Arctic infrastructure projects, including its participation as construction builders, including seaports, railways, and bridge projects. **Honorable Sherri Goodman** emphasized the strength of collaborative agreements on search and rescue, communication,

and oil spill preparedness and response, among other areas. She expressed hope for greater public and private investment, climate downscaling, and the conversion of sustainable infrastructure into resilient infrastructure to ensure that agreements are as effective as they can be.

A discussion and question/answer session followed the presentations. The importance of public-private partnerships (PPPs) in the development of Arctic infrastructure was noted. Research PPPs have evolved between government and industry; a good example of a maritime PPP is the Marine Exchange of Alaska (which monitors ship transits using AIS) that is funded by industry, the U.S. Coast Guard and the State of Alaska. The need for Arctic ports was discussed as a principal requirement for development of the maritime Arctic. Also discussed was the demand for, and requirements of, the marine tourist industry and how these dynamics may contribute to Arctic infrastructure. The key role of Arctic Indigenous peoples was explored and noted was the importance of early involvement of local communities in decision-making for development projects. A final discussion reviewed the complexity of Arctic infrastructure; the scale of infrastructure development, whether it be at the local level or span the circumpolar region, is inextricably linked to the availability and allocation of sustainable investment in the Arctic.



One Woodrow Wilson Plaza
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20004-3027

-  www.wilsoncenter.org
-  Polar@wilsoncenter.org
-  facebook.com/woodrowwilsoncenter
-  [@PolarInstitute](https://twitter.com/PolarInstitute)
-  202.691.4000