Final Thesis for MA Degree in West Nordic Studies

The Role of China in the Questions of Greenlandic Independence

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Abstract

China has been strengthening its presence in the Arctic in recent years, and Greenland is one of the locales where its interest has been growing sharply, via scientific diplomacy, economic cooperation, political ties, and other areas. Greenland, with abundant natural resources and unique geographic significance, has been pursuing independence from its former colonial host, Denmark, in the last few decades. Melting glaciers are opening up more exploitation opportunities and increasing foreign interest on the island, and have sparked concerns from another two vital stakeholders, namely Denmark and the United States for respective reasons. The thesis discusses the importance of China’s investment for possible Greenlandic independence, and other critical factors which may affect the process and analyses the considerations of Denmark and the US. The findings of this paper can be included in several points. First, China’s investment in Greenland is a motivation for its independence movement, even though the former does not intend to support it. Second, Denmark is worried that it would lose sovereignty over this Arctic island, which has benefited the Kingdom in numerous ways. The US is concerned that it would lose its traditional strategic presence in Greenland once the latter attains independence, especially the fiscal source was from China.
Preface

The thesis is written as the final assignment of 30 credits for the postgraduate program of West Nordic Studies, at the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Iceland.

Growing up in the subtropical region of southern China, I have been amazed by the vibrant yet quiet atmosphere in the Arctic after moving to Iceland. The ever-changing weather, retreating glaciers, increasing levels of human activity, and growing global interest in the region, including from non-Arctic actors, ranging from economics and the environment to polar bears, are all making headlines. All of these changes have greatly stimulated my thoughts and kindled my enthusiasm for studies of the Arctic region.

The motivations that I have developed, including an intense interest in the topic of the role of China in the question of Greenland independence, developed in numerous ways.

Academically speaking, in the autumn of 2015, I was registered in a diploma of Small State studies at the University of Iceland, which has enabled me to gain significant insight into, and understanding of, the relationship between the European, Arctic states and their relationships with external actors.

My Master’s programme in West Nordic Studies, at the same university, started in the autumn of 2016. I have also taken part in a university exchange with the University of Greenland in Nuuk in spring 2017, allowing me to conduct extensive research on Greenlandic economics, local politics, and its emerging foreign policy interests.

Additionally, I have participated in a number of educational programmes on Arctic issues in the past two years, including with the UArctic network, and have presented my research work on China-Greenland related topics on many occasions, including in Reykjavik for the Arctic Circle conference but also for conferences in Oslo and Tórshavn. I have also had the opportunity to publish my work in online journals such as The Diplomat, and to assist with the publication of a policy paper for the Government of Finland on Sino-Arctic relations.
All these experiences have formed and bolstered my research in Greenland-related topics, including the MA thesis I have worked on.

In the long run, I wish to include more researchers and students in my Arctic studies, to promote the greater bridging of Asia and the Arctic. The region has become an arena which is constantly demanding more participants and engagement, as well as further study.

I would like to thank Dr. Marc Lanteigne, my supervisor and a constant friend in life, for his encouragement, and professional comments and critiques in my research on the topic in the past few years. I would lastly like to thank all of my dear family and friends for their support and belief in me.
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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

First, so far, the concept of post-colonialism has focused primarily on the case studies of African and Asian countries, yet the importance of the case of Greenland is not only understanding the politics of this independence-seeking island in the Arctic, but also contributing to studies of small states, post-colonialism and geopolitics.

Second, at present, many studies on Greenland in political science are mainly in the Danish language, many of which reveal discourses from the perspective of Danes, meaning that Greenland is often seen as an extension of Danish interests as opposed to a distinct foreign policy actor. Besides, information in the English about Greenland is usually either insufficient, not well-researched, or dated, which are obstacles in understanding the island whose has limited public outreach resources. For example, there was an article punished on BBC in 2018 on “How Greenland could become China’s Arctic base” (Simpson, 2018), where there are several factual errors. To name one, the author describes Greenland as “self-governing, though still nominally controlled by Denmark”, which is misleading and implying that Greenland is in charge of all domestic and external affairs. However, under the 2009 Self rule agreement between Nuuk and Copenhagen, Denmark still retains oversight of defense and foreign policy portfolios, along with other jurisdictions over many responsibilities. In the same article, reactions from Greenland on China’s possible investment introduced on the island was rough and simplified as “Inuits thought it was a good idea”, which is actually a common stereotype of how desperate Greenlanders’ are for foreign fiscal injections in order to gain independence. However, this conclusion does not take domestic politics into considerations. Despite its small population of around 57,000, there are a few political parties representing diverse voices of the people, and Greenland’s inhabitants do not necessarily share the same opinion on external presences.

Additionally, there are ongoing, alarmist and speculative reports on China and its ambition in the Arctic regions, including Greenland, which tend to exaggerate the influence and consequence of China’s activities. For example, in the same article mentioned above, the author seems to misunderstand the role of China in the Arctic Council as an observer, rather than a member. Additionally, there are other critical stakeholders in Greenland
affairs, namely Denmark and the US Therefore, China has to be cautious to avoid offending the “Arctic Eight” states, especially given Denmark is already concerned about Chinese economic activities in Greenland. Moreover, sub-state factors, such as public opinion, different approaches to independence advocated by political parties, rates of emigration, and so forth, can affect the process of possible independence.

All of these issues require more careful academic dissection. Hence, the thesis seeks to analyze these issues from a non-Danish stance, and provide a comprehensive understanding of the interlinkages between domestic politics and international relationships of Greenland in order to discern China’s role.

The thesis aims to answer the primary questions as follows:

First, even though Greenland has been integrated into the Kingdom of Denmark since 1953, the debates over the current relationship between Greenland and Denmark have never ceased. What are the motivations behind the current independence movement in Greenland?

Second, is the role of China in the question of Greenlandic independence under- or overestimated in present day discussion?

Third, what kinds of roles does Denmark play in the relationship between Greenland and China, and why?

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into several chapters.

The second chapter discusses the applicable theories used in the cases study, consist of small states and shelter theory, post colonialism and geopolitics. The third chapter explains the methodology for the research, including sources, and approaches of data collecting. The fourth chapter provides a brief review of the involvement of China in the Arctic, and outlines the vital interests and presence of the country in the region, including Greenland, via the specific instance of the Kvanefjeld project on the island. The fifth chapter focuses
on the relationship between Greenland and Denmark, the incentives of Greenlandic independence movement, and how the presence of China’s engagement is received on the island. The sixth chapter examines this perception from the perspective from Denmark and the US, of China’s presence in the Arctic, including Greenland. The seventh chapter predicts the future trend of the Greenlandic independence pursuit, including what sub-state factors needed to be taken into consideration, and the possible methods of China’s participation in Arctic affairs. Then, the thesis concludes with a brief discussion of other theories can be applied in research of Greenland in the future.
2  **Theoretical Framework**

There are three major theories applied in the case study, namely the small states and shelter theory, post-colonialism and geopolitics.

2.1  **Small States and Shelter Theory**

Behaviors of small states are not well explained in existing International Relations (IR) theories (Thorhallsson, 2019), and the mainstream does not distinguish the difference between great powers and small nations. Small states and shelter theory does look at how small entities behave in international community and explain the vulnerabilities of smallness, such as “more vulnerable to external as well as internal, shocks, because there are few domestic buffers that can share the burden of an economic setback” (Bailes, Thayer and Thorhallsson 2016).

Greenland is not an independent state yet; however, as Anders Wivel (2010:15) points out that “a small state is by definition the weaker part in an asymmetric relationship”, Greenland exactly falls into the category of “smallness”, compared to Denmark, in terms of population, economy, political abilities of home affairs and connecting itself and the rest of the world.

Small state and shelter theory implies that smaller entities need protection from their bigger counterparts to survive and thrive, which partially borrows from traditional realism, that the international system is anarchic, where self-help ideas prevail, and tend to rely on the latter.

Generally, the shelter theory consist of three factors, politically, economically and societally. Due to ingrained structural weakness (Thorhallsson & Steinsson, 2019:24), such as small domestic market, limited diplomatic capacities to handle international affairs, small administrative competence to deal with internal and external issues, educational institution and occupation options for citizens, smaller entities seek external shelters to protect them and compensate for their vulnerabilities.
Meanwhile, shelter theory also suggests that protection comes with costs for smaller nations in relations with their bigger counterpart (Thorhallsson & Steinsson, 2019:44-5), such as the shelter might interfere home and external affairs of small nations. Furthermore, shelter theory also implies that if a ‘shelter’ failed to fulfill its role as a protector, and might contribute to separatism (Thorhallsson & Steinsson, 2019:44).

2.2 Post-colonialism

Small states and shelter theory addresses the question partially, in that some of the reasons that Greenland is staying in the Kingdom of Denmark are due to the island’s smallness, such as its small population and economy. However, the historical, political and legal issues, such legacies from the colonial period between the two entities make this case different from other small independent states. Therefore, post-colonialism is required to be introduced to examine the case.

In short, post-colonialism consists of two aspects, that one refers to the period after colonialism ends, and other other refers to an approach in the study of international relationships to examine the ongoing consequence of colonial era. The theory effectively reveals the dynamic between Greenland and Denmark, in light of equality which still existed even after Greenland has been incorporated into the kingdom in 1953.

Post-colonialism explains the incentives behind the Greenlandic independence movement and foreign investments seeking, including from China, as Diana Brydon argues that “Post colonialism matters because decolonization is far from complete and colonial mentalities, including the inequality they nurture, die hard” (Butt, 2013). This argument exactly describe how Greenland is still suffering the consequence of colonialism even though it terminated half century ago. For example, some Danish politicians still do not fully respect the appeal from Greenlanders that independence pursuing is a trend as well as the right granted by the Self rule act in 2009, instead, they tend to play a role as a master or parent in dealing with Greenland and Greenlanders. In Greenland, pursuing independence is motivated beyond reducing dependency on annual subsidy from Denmark, and achieving a more sustaining economy, and obtain equality, therefore, as Raka Shome points out “The post-colonial” is thus important because it enables us to conceive of complex shifts brought
by decolonization(s)” (Shome, 1998). Moreover, mainstream international relations (IR) theories focus on the perspective of great powers (Biswas, 2013: 223-4), while postcolonialism provides another angle to examine the relationship between Western and non-Western entities, in the case of the thesis, namely Denmark and Greenland, the former colonial host and the former colony.

2.3 Geopolitics

Geopolitics refers to a “method of foreign policy analysis which seeks to understand, explain and predict international political behavior in terms of geographical variables, such as location, size, climate, topography, demography, natural resources and technological development and potential” (Evans & Newnham, 1998: 197).

There are some discussions on the concept of geopolitics in the Arctic in recent years (Strandsbjerg, 2012), as the melting oceanic ice opening potential sea routes, retreating glacier for more possible extractive industry, abundant natural resources, including oil and gas, and minerals, etc, security affairs appearing, and growing interest from non-Arctic states, such as China.

In terms of Denmark, one of the biggest reasons that Denmark has been attempting to include Greenland and reserve the kingdom is the significance of the geography of the island, in other words, its Arctic location, which gives the rights to access to the Arctic Ocean and to territory claiming in the region, such as the dispute over the Lomonosov Ridge (Barkham, 2014). Denmark has opportunities to exercise diplomatic power with other states, such as the US, China, etc, regarding High North affairs. On the other hand, Copenhagen is worried that the investments of China in Greenland would fuel the ambition of Nuuk to obtain independence, causing Denmark to lose its Arctic profile.

The US is wary about China’s interest in Greenland out of similar geopolitical considerations, even though without any territory claimed in Greenland. The ongoing century-long interest and presence of Washington on the island, through military facilities, scientific diplomacy and business connections, and the idea of US President Donald Trump purchasing Greenland in August 2019 (Menezes, 2019), have demonstrated the
geopolitical importance of this Arctic island to the island. Therefore, the US is very concerned about the increasing interactions between Greenland and China which could damage its traditional “asset” in the Arctic.

2.4 Why Not Realist Theory?

Even though the theory of power is discussed in the thesis, especially in the chapter outlining the reaction of the US to the presence of China in Greenland, traditional realist theory is not fully applicable in the case study, which tends to be state-centric and fixated on the idea of power-maximisation. Greenland is not a state, but neither is it completely a domestic or sub-state level actor, so it lies within a rare gray area of IR theory. As well, much of the debate about China’s role in Greenland cannot simply be measured on the state level, (the Kingdom of Denmark), as major actors including the Greenland government, Greenlandic domestic actors, as well as the international level which includes the United States. As well, military security, while not absent from this question, is taking a back seat to issues of both economic security and identity development.
3 Methodology

In early 2017, I conducted fieldwork in Greenland, researching China’s interest on the island, gaining direct exposure to political and social issues by interviewing political figures and public, which established the basic foundation of the thesis. Since then, I have been given various kinds of opportunities to present the outcome of my work, and have collected feedback from other Arctic experts such as in group talks.

In terms of sources, the major ingredients are in the English language, and some in Danish and Chinese. Primary sources include legal documents such as the Self rule agreement between Greenland and Denmark, China’s Arctic White Paper and MoUs with Greenland for mining activities and scientific cooperation. News released from the Foreign Ministries of Greenland and Denmark, for both historical and reference and for current events. Secondary sources include commentaries and academic articles, such as from Marc Lanteigne, Baldur Thorhallsson, Martin Breum, as well as my work presented in the past few years.

4 China’s Presence in Greenland

4.1 Background: Expanding Foreign Policy of China

As a rising power, China has been coherently seeking to enhance its strength and power, and promoting its external relationships with the other parts of the world. Back in 1997, the sitting President of China, Hu Jintao, the first Chinese highest leader to actively pursue cross-regional diplomacy, including with Europe (Lanteigne, 2014), put forward “The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (zhonghua minzu weida fuxing 中华民族伟大复兴), aiming to increase China’s comprehensive national power; In 2002-3, “peaceful rise” (heping jueqi 和平崛起) along with “harmonious world” (hexie shijie 和谐世界), were advocated. Hu referred to China as a rising power, yet one which would not repeat the previous paths of other great powers in history. In other words, China was seeking to grow and maintain the status quo, instead of challenging international norms (Lanteigne, 2016). However, the first term was modified into “peaceful development” (heping fazhan 和平发展) later, which was more politically palatable (Glaser & Medeiros, 2007; Koivurova et al, 2019).
In 2009, China surpassed Japan to be the second-largest economy in the world (BBC 2010). Later Xi Jinping, the current President, came to power in 2012-3, bringing forward the idea of the “Chinese dream” (zhongguomeng 中国梦) to the public, revealing the economic successes achieved, stressing visions of the future (Wang, 2013), which suggested that China had become more confident in expressing its ambition and status as a great power (Su & Lanteigne, 2015). At a new year reception in 2014, Wang Yi, the foreign minister of China, gave a speech on the foreign policy of the state, claiming that China’s diplomacy demonstrated “greater global perspective and being more enterprising and innovative” (MFA of China, 2013). Compared to its predecessor, Xi’s government appears to be more innovative and confident to express the ambition of a rising great power, and China’s foreign diplomacy, in a more extensive scope, via seeking to expand its markets, and to demonstrate to different parts of the world that this country is interested in various partnerships. This has been regarded as a sign by some commenters that the current administration has adjusted the traditional foreign policy strategy of “hide your strength, bide your time”, or in Chinese (taoguangyanghui 韬光养晦), proposed by Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) in the 1990s (Wang, 2013:7).

One of the highlights of Xi’s foreign policy blueprint is Belt and Road Initiative (BRI, Yidaiyilu Changyi 一带一路倡议), presented by Xi in 2013. The initiative is an economics and trade-based concept of “improving connectivity and cooperation on a transcontinental scale” (World Bank, 2018) and mainly covering Asia Pacific and part of Europe at present. Ice Silk Road (Bingshang Sichouzhilu 冰上丝绸之路), as part of the BRI, was put forward by Xi in 2017 when meeting with Dmitri Medvedev, the Prime Minister of Russia. The concept refers to the oceanic passages going through the Arctic Circle, and connecting North America, East Asia and Western Europe (B & R Portal 2019).

4.2 A Brief History of China and Its Growing Interest in the Arctic: A ‘Near Arctic State’ and Its developing Arctic Identity

The concept of the Arctic is defined in several ways, of which, one of the most common is the region depicted above the Arctic Circle, namely 66°34’ N (National Snow & Ice Data Center, 2019). In reality, the concept is used more extensively and flexibly. For example, politically speaking, there are eight Arctic States, including Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, the United States, Canada and Russia, whose part of their territories are above the Circle. The region is abundant in natural resources,
such as fish stocks, forests and raw materials, such as oil and gas (US Geological Survey, 2008). In recent years, with unprecedentedly fast melting of sea ice and glaciers, potential oceanic passages and resource exploration and exploitation have been hot topics, which have aroused interest from non-Arctic states, such as China (Su & Lanteigne, 2015), into polar affairs, along with other external actors, including its neighbours, such as Japan, South Korea, India, and Singapore, so there is peer pressure on China to not be left behind.

The history of China involving in the region can be traced back to the 1920s when it joined the Svalbard Treaty. The membership of the treaty had provided a rationale in terms of international law for future rights and freedom of China’s activities in the Arctic, such as scientific research, fishing, resource exploration and exploitation (State Council of China, 2018). However, due to the anti invasion and civil wars until 1949, foreign policy isolation of the country during much of the Mao Zedong (毛泽东) period, as well as its internal economic trauma, and focusing on peripheral and trans-Pacific relations, mainly with the US, largely because of limited foreign diplomacy sources, such as only a handful of embassies abroad and insufficient numbers of diplomats. At that time, Arctic was hardly on the agenda of Beijing.

However, in the light of the deepening of Chinese economic reform (gaige kaifang 改革开放) in the 1990s, and post Cold-War desecurization in the Arctic (Liu, 2018), China started to pay more attention to the region, mainly via scientific diplomacy, to address a serious knowledge gap in both the North and South poles. Additionally, first, the end of the Cold War gave China a window to enter the Arctic with less interference. Second, the potential of the economy of the region, especially in terms of natural resources to serve China’s buoyant economy, got Beijing’s attention, but it has to avoid being seen as a gate crasher. Third, China needed lots of new Arctic information, in a speedy fashion, thus, science diplomacy came into place (Goodsite et al. 2016).

The Polar Research Institute of China, namely PRIC (Zhongguo Jidi Yanjiu Zhongxin 中国极地研究中心) (China-Nordic Arctic Research Center, 2019), founded in 1989, is one of the best known Chinese scientific institutes specializing in polar research, headquartered in Shanghai, overseeing the country’s Arctic research program, which largely concerns sea ice, glacial monitoring, and the atmosphere. In 1995, an expedition by a group of Chinese researchers and journalists to the North Pole to conduct scientific activities, marked the first step of the China-
Organized Arctic expedition. In 1996, China was accepted as a member of the International Arctic Science Committee (Liu, 2018). Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration (Guojia Haiyangju Jidi Kaocha Bangongshi 国家海洋局极地考察办公室), affiliated to the State Oceanic Administration of China (Guojia Haiyangju 国家海洋局), was established in 1981, and has supervised the polar expeditions and other related subjects (CAA, 2019).

The Snow Dragon (Xuelong 雪龙) is the first icebreaker of China capable of sustained polar missions, which was bought by the country and massively refitted in Ukraine and launched in 1993. In September 2018, Snow Dragon 2 (Xuelong 2 雪龙 2) the second icebreaker of the country was launched. Compared to its previous counterpart, it was first home-built in China and possesses stronger operational capacities in harsh conditions (Xinhua, 2019). Reportedly, by the end of 2019, the new icebreaker will join the thirty-sixth polar research mission of the country along with Xuelong. These two fully operational icebreakers enables China to match the competence of the USCGC Healy, a single icebreaker, by the United States Coast Guard (Humpert, 2018).

In order to be taken seriously as a great power, China entering the Arctic and not being left behind was required. In 2013, seven years after the first application to the organisation, China became an observer the Arctic Council after intense debates and discussions, along with another five countries, Italy, India, Japan, Singapore and South Korea, (BBC, 2013; Arctic Council, 2019a). This was an important signal that the role of Asian states in the region has been recognized by Arctic states. The acceptance of the new actors, from the viewpoint of some observers, meant that these external countries, including China, have explored economic opportunities and deemed the institution as an approach to impact its permanent members (Myers, 2013). This has provided a platform to China to express its Arctic interests in an intergovernmental multilateral venue, to further cooperation with other stakeholders on more specific topics, and increase its presence in the affairs of the region. Simultaneously, it also suggests the progress is in accordance with the statue of China as a rising great power and wishes to have a stronger presence in the region, whose attention is beyond its peripheral region, and to a global extent (ifeng news, 2013)

China’s government officials express the state’s concern on various occasions over climate change in the Arctic area affecting China, which indicates that China has realised that Arctic
issues are not only regional but also influential more widely, including itself, a country far away from the polar. Mr Zhang Ming (张明), the then-Vice Minister of China’s Foreign Affairs, reemphasised that China is affected by Arctic in many ways, including climate change, in his speech in Arctic Circle conference 2015 in Reykjavík, Iceland (MFA of China, 2015; Xinhua 2015). Also, Zhang emphasized that non-Arctic states have rights and responsibilities in the Arctic, which was another sign that China did not want to be left out Arctic affairs despite no Arctic geography. In terms of China’s Arctic policy, it developed from generalized claims to a clear articulated written White Paper.

Even though given China’s ongoing presence in the Arctic for the last two decades and has sparked international attention, for example, high-profile national visits of Chinese leaders to the Arctic states such as the then-sitting President, Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) to Denmark in 2012, along with mounting activities participation in the regional affairs. However, Beijing tended to keep a low profile in the process of expanding its footprint in the Arctic and keep relatively more wary and ambiguous in terms of expressing its Arctic ambitions, to avoid an image as a gate crasher. In an Arctic forum by the Norwegian government in 2009, Hu Zhengyue (胡正跃), a then-assistant minister of foreign affairs, claimed that China did not have an Arctic strategy (Jackobson, 2010). Some academic work on China’s foreign affairs based on interviews with governmental officials of the country also reveals that Beijing had been preparing its more specific policy paper on the Arctic in a quiet way, due to political concerns, and the fact that Beijing needed to consult with a number of different agencies before the paper could be published (Lanteigne, 2016).

China had often referred to itself in regional studies as a “near-Arctic state” (jin beiji guojia 近北极国家) and an “Arctic stakeholder” (beiji lihaiguanxiguo 利害关系国), however, without a written policy paper, there was constant speculation over the incentives and plans of Beijing (Liu, 2016; Chen, 2018), where words were required to ease suspicions (Braw, 2017). In January 2018, Beijing published its long-anticipated Arctic policy, which was interpreted as a signal that Beijing is becoming more confident and ambitious in its Arctic diplomacy (Sørensen, 2018) and has provided a guideline for future activities in the region (Stephen, 2019).

Considering the goals in the White Paper and the actual growing presence of the country in the Arctic, Beijing’s interests in the region can be summarized in the following aspects. First,
Beijing and some Chinese scientists expressed concerns on various occasions over climate change in the Arctic area affecting China, for example, some researchers believe that air pollution in spring in the country is related to Arctic sea ice thawing, and the extreme coldness in Northeast China in 2016 was because of the Arctic atmosphere (Xinhua, 2018), which indicates that China has realised that Arctic issues are not only regional but also influential more widely, including itself, a country far away from the polar regions.

Second, China has a great interest in economic engagement, especially with Russia, including utilization of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) for shipping, exploration and exploitation of natural resources, such as tourism, mining, oil and gas, promoting bilateral and multilateral ventures, etc. There are a handful of investment projects that China has been involved or interested in, to name some of the most famous ones, the Yamal liquefied natural gas project where two Chinese companies hold twenty percent share (Xinhua, 2018; Humpert, 2019) in Russia as well as a possible internet cable project in the Arctic Ocean (Koziol, 2019).

4.3 Major Interest and Presence of China in Greenland

In 2012, Hu Jintao (胡锦涛), the then-President of China, paid a three-day visit to Denmark, a small Nordic state in the Arctic right after Wen Jiabao (温家宝), the then-Premier of China, visited Iceland. It was the first time that the President of China that had visited Denmark after diplomatic ties were established in 1950. Even though Copenhagen attempted to ease the speculation over China’s aim for raw materials in Greenland, one part of the Kingdom of Denmark, however, some perceived the visit as an appetizer of China for Arctic resources and tested the waters for potential Chinese involvement in Greenland (Acher & Fræde, 2012).

The major interest of China in Greenland covers the following aspects, First, Greenland is a natural scientific site with eighty percent of its territory covered by vast snow and ice sheets, which is melting at a considerable rate (BBC, 2019) and rich in base and precious metals, minerals gemstones, etc. The Greenland Institute of Natural Resources, specializing in polar climate, mineral materials and other circumpolar related issues, has had extensive cooperation with other international organizations. This may be an ideal partner for Chinese scientific institutes. China has conveyed its research interest in Greenland and there was a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on scientific cooperation signed in 2016 by both sides. The MoU
priorities the Arctic area of bilateral cooperation, and explains the means, which included mutual exchanges of knowledge, personnel and other related manners (Government of Greenland, 2016). There was a breakout session of the Arctic Circle Conference 2017 in Reykjavik, Iceland, on “Research Infrastructure in Greenland - Status and Vision”, where possible new research facilities were discussed. Mr Yong Yu, from the PRIC, made a presentation on “China’s plans concerning establishment of a research station in Greenland” (Yu, 2017). However, there are no updates about the possible facilities so far, likely due to the pressure from Denmark and US (Shi & Lanteigne, 2019).

Second, China has a strong interest in economic engagement on the island, including, raw material exploration and exploitation, infrastructure investment, oil and gas extraction, given that such resources are more readily available due to melting of the ice sheet.

There have been five primary projects that China had been involved in, to various degrees (Wallach, 2018), including Citronen Fjord by Australian Ironbark, the main investor, along with China Nonferrous Metal Mining Group or 中国有色矿业集团 (Zhongguo Yousukuangyé Jituan), with a copper project by Jiangxi Zhongrun (江西中润), an airport expansion project bid by China Communications Construction Company (CCCC), Isua project by the firm General Nice, and the Kvanefjeld project by Greenland Minerals, an Australian company, along with Shenghe Resources (Shenghe Ziyuan 盛和资源). Noticeably, all the five ventures were initiated by Nuuk, or a Western corporation (Jiang, 2018), where China joined via investing in original enterprise, such as in Greenland Minerals, or assuming the previous project, such as the Isua iron site, or bidding the projects, such as in the airport expansion. The Kvanefjeld project appears to be moving at a steady pace, but not all of these attempts have succeeded, due to possible impediments from Denmark and the US, (to which I will return in the sixth chapter), or to low global commodity prices, such as the iron mine at Isua, which is currently on hold.

In the fall of 2009, a transportation commission was established by the government of Greenland, to initiate future opportunities of transport and infrastructure for the nation. In the following years, a planned package to expand the two airports in Nuuk, Ilulissat, and a new airport in Qaqortoq has been formed (Lihn, 2019). The China Communications Construction Company (CCCCC), was one of the bidding contractors for the project. However, in early June 2019, there was an update that the company would withdraw from bidding (Sermitsiaq, 2019).
Some experts suggest this might be because of the pressure from Denmark and the US (Sermitsiaq, 2019). More discussion on this specific cases will be presented in the sixth chapter.

An other story falls into the category of unsuccessful ambition was Isua. In 2012-3, London Mining took over the Isua site in Southwest Greenland, with plans to quickly commence mining, however, the company went bankrupt in 2014, due to their operations in Sierra Leone being affected by the regional Ebola outbreak (Amstrong, 2014), with General Nice, a Hong Kong firm, taking over in January 2015. At present, the company is sitting on the site, with no immediate plans to start extraction, since iron prices are still too low.

Additionally, the China National Petroleum Corporation (Zhongguo Shiyou Tianranqi Jituangongs 中国石油天然气集团公司 CNPC) and China National Offshore Oil Corporation (Zhongguo Haiyang Shiyou Zonggongs 中国海洋石油总公司 CNOOC) have expressed interest in bidding for onshore oil and gas blocks in Greenland to be offered in 2021 (Daly, 2018).

4.3.1 The Kvanefjeld Project

The Kvanefjeld (or Kuannersuit in Danish) project is one of the most salient examples of Chinese mining interests on the island. Kvanefjeld is located in southern Greenland, which is about eight kilometers from the town of Narsaq (population about 1500). It is an emerging world class mining project, and abundant in uranium, zinc and more famously rare earth elements, which is reportedly one of the biggest deposits in the world (Greenland Minerals, 2019; McGwin, 2018).

Rare earth elements (REEs), which are found in the Earth’s crust, are composed of a set of seventeen chemical elements in the periodic table. REEs, despite theirs names, are abundantly and usually discovered in the same deposits (Government of China, 2012; Simmons, 2016). Currently, China is the biggest REE producer and consumer (Koivurova et al, 2019; SCMP, 2019), and Greenland, reportedly is to be one of the largest REEs deposits in the world.

REEs play an important role in modern industries in the 21st century, such as in electronic equipment used in daily life, as well in national defence and ‘green’ technology (Simmons,
2016). In recent years, demand for REEs has been growing, due to the larger scale of electric cars production and the demand for clean and new energy such as the utilisation of wind turbines, which is highly related to official environmental policies of development in a number of countries.

The site was discovered in the 1960s, long before China stamped its presence in Arctic territory. An exploration license for the deposit was not issued to Greenland Minerals, an Australian mining corporation until 2007. In 2016, Greenland Minerals announced its partnership with Shenghe Resources Holding Co., Ltd, or Shenghe Resources to cooperate in the Kvanefjeld region. The latter is co-owned by the Chinese government and the second largest REE company in the world, who has a worldwide business, including the California Mountain Pass rare earth mine, and the Vietnam RE metallurgical and separating plant, which along with the recent Kvanefjeld project are major international cooperation ventures (Shenghe Resources, 2019). In the case of Kvanefjeld, Shenghe owned 12.5% equity stake in Greenland Minerals.

In September 2018, Greenland Minerals expressed its goal to estimate possible mining startup in Kvanefjeld in three years, namely in 2021 (Elkjær & Lindstrøm, 2018). So far, the company has submitted the assessment of social and environmental impacts of the project to the Greenlandic government, and an application for its mining license is being processed (Greenland Minerals, 2019).

Indeed, the Kvanefjeld project is also in accordance with Beijing’s 13th five-year plan, as China released a Rare Earth Industry Development Plan (Xitu Hangye Fazhan Guihua 2016-2020 《稀土行业发展规划 2016-2020年》) in 2016 in order to assure its strategic resource security, increase innovative competence of the state and satisfy the demand of various fields, etc (MIIT of China, 2016). The document stresses that Beijing’s awareness of the value and roles of REEs in global technology industries and the increasing demand for REE production, along with the awareness of environmental issues. Among the six primary tasks of the Plan, promoting the utilisation of overseas resources and international cooperation is outstanding, which encourages home REEs corporations to seek external raw materials and cooperation internationally in resources exploitation and technology development. The plan can be understood as the ambition of China in foreign natural resources and paving the way for domestic companies’ mining activities abroad.
Last but not least, China’s interest in Greenland is beyond energy security and economic cooperation, but also involving building up and expanding its Arctic profile as a stakeholder by enhancing its presence in Greenland, an autonomous territory in the High North and Arctic. After gaining its observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013, China has been actively participating in the region, trying to form and strengthen its profile as a congenial partner and contributor, and Greenland, is an excellent locale to demonstrate that investment of China in mining projects might potentially improve Greenland’s economy.

4.3.2 Political Intention of Beijing in Greenlandic Independence?

Regarding whether China may have an agenda in Greenlandic independence movement or not, given its enhancing activities on the island, however, there is no solid proof that Beijing is intending to support this political trend in Greenland or attempt to challenge to the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Denmark. Instead, Beijing has been cautious and kept a low profile during the engagement in Greenland, and made an effort to release its signals that it will not disrupt the status quo of the kingdom. For example, according to Sermitsiaq (Turnowsky, 2019), a local newspaper in Greenland, General Li Quan, from the Chinese Defense Academy, stressed that “Denmark and China have a partnership built on respect and we recognize the Kingdom community” in his visit to Copenhagen in June 2019.

There are several reasons can be assumed behind the prudence of China when dealing with Greenland and Denmark. First, as an external actor in the Arctic, China does not want to be perceived as a rule-breaker or sovereignty disruptor, especially given Beijing’s concern towards its own “One-China policy”, or spark backlash from the Arctic states. China tends to engage in risk avoidance in foreign relations. Also, China’s White Paper on the Arctic actually provides other stakeholders an informal standard to examine the presence of China (Stephen, 2019) as it commits that “respect the sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction enjoyed by the Arctic States in this region” (State Council of China, 2018), therefore, stirring up political controversy or conflicts would not benefit it in any way. Additionally, there is a greater historic rationale for China’s foreign policy proposed in the 1950s that still works nowadays (Panda, 2014), namely the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (heping gongchu wuxiang yuanze 和平共处五项原则) (MFA of China, 2000). Two of the principles are “Mutual respect for each other’s
territorial integrity and sovereignty” and “Mutual non-interference in each other’s internal affairs”, which are the guidelines for China in terms of the relationship between Greenland and Denmark. Last, as a newcomer to the Arctic affairs, China is still on its way to understand the region, including politically, such as comprehending the updated relationship between Greenland, Denmark and the US, in the light of more intensified international attention to Greenland.

Summary

Beijing is more confident to develop its expanding foreign policy, including adding the Arctic to the Belt and Road Initiative, after Xi came to power. China’s Arctic diplomacy started relatively late but has grown fast in recent years, mainly via scientific research, economic activities and other international cooperation. The White Paper on the Arctic claims its interests, principles, and goals in the region. Greenland, the biggest island in the world with abundant natural resources, such as rare earth elements, has attracted engagement from China. Gradually, it has been included in the Arctic blueprint of China, primarily through mining projects, scientific investment, tourism and other sectors. Meanwhile, Beijing has been cautious when developing its presence in Greenland and not to challenge the sovereignty of Denmark. At the same time, China is not going to be dissuaded from engaging with Greenland, a crucial part of Beijing’s emerging Arctic diplomacy, despite US and Danish misgivings.
5 Political Dynamics between Greenland, Denmark and China

This chapter seeks to clarify the relationship between Greenland and Denmark, with a short overview of the colonial period, and the reasons that Greenland has recently pursued independence, and the motivation of Greenland to connect itself with the external world, including China, especially in the forms of politics and economy.

Three theories are adopted in the chapter, namely small states and shelter theory, post-colonialism and neocolonialism. The complexity of the Greenland case lies in its colonial experience, nature of smallness, and current relationship with foreign actors, such as Denmark and China, etc. As noted previously in the Introduction section, these theories combined can explain the situation better than a single one.

5.1 An Overview of Greenland

Greenland, located in the Arctic, is the biggest island in the world. There is a population of around 57,000 (BBC, 2018), most of whom are Inuit, one of the Arctic’s indigenous peoples, living in both sides of the island. The most dominant geographic feature of it is its territory covered by vast ice sheet which are secondary to those in Antarctica. Politically, Greenland is an autonomous nation within the Kingdom of Denmark, and has its own government, or “Naalakkersuisut” in the Greenlandic language, and the parliament, or “Inatsisartut”, the counterpart in Greenlandic, consisting of 31 seats. In addition, Greenland has its national day and flag (Government of Greenland, 2019). The government is democratically directly elected by its citizens, the current one being elected in 2018, led by the Siumut Party, one of the biggest political parties. There are quite a few political parties on the island, some of the most prominent of which are Siumut, meaning “forward”, Atassut, meaning “the connecting link”, Inuit Atagatigiit, meaning “human or Inuit brotherhood” (Alfredsson, 1982), and Demokraatit meaning “Democrats”, along with some other newly founded ones, such as Partii Naleraq in 2014, Nunatta Qitornai in 2017 and Suleqatigiissitsisut in 2018. The focuses and stances of the parties are various, as well as their attitude towards Denmark and national independence, which play a role in pursuing greater autonomy.
Economically, there are two major sources of income for the nation, one is fishing exports, specializing in prawn products (Government of Greenland, 2019), and the other is the annual block stipend from Denmark (BBC, 2018), which almost takes about one-third or at times even half of the GDP of Greenland. In recent decades, the temperature in the Arctic is at a rate of almost twice the global average (Joyce, 2014; WWF Arctic program, 2019), due to climate change and global warming. Greenland is no exception as glaciers are eroding faster than expected according to a study by multiple scientists, published in early 2019 (Bevis et al. 2019), which presents severe environmental consequences (Leahy, 2019), but also bringing up opportunities for valuable metal extraction, such as rare earth elements (REEs), gold, diamonds, rubies, and other like resources.

5.2 Greenland and Denmark: A small Entity and Its Former Colonial Host

In 1721, Greenland became a colony of the Kingdom of Denmark when the Danish-Norwegian priest Egede visited the island. There were two primary reasons why Denmark wanted to occupy the island: one was to spread Christianity, and the second was to take economic advantage of fishery resources around Greenland, and to trade with Greenlanders (Beukel, 2010:13). The Kingdom had commenced its dominance of Greenland after the event; in 1933, the sovereignty of the Kingdom over Greenland was confirmed by the International Court of Justice in the Hague (A.J.F, 1957).

The termination of the status of Greenland as a colony was brought about by the constitutional amendment of the Kingdom of Denmark, coming to force in 1953 (Alfredsson, 1982). Since then, Greenland became part of the realm and Greenlander started to enjoy the same rights as Danes. The Danish constitution was revised in 1953 to give Greenlanders and Faroese equal rights as citizens of of the Danish Kingdom. Greenland was then allowed to send two representatives to the Danish parliament, or Folketinget in Danish. The Greenlandic representatives are included in the Greenland Committee, where bills and other issues related to Greenland are discussed before submitting them to the parliament (Gronning, 2019). The integration, was not out of pure benevolence, however, according to some analysts, that Denmark attempted to alleviate international scrutiny and pressure on its colonization on the island (Alfredsson, 1982), in the wake of decolonization movement and development of human
rights after the Second World War (Gad, 2017: 70). Additionally, it was one side decided by Denmark, where Greenlanders were excluded in the process (Alfredsson, 1982).

There were a number of reasons for Denmark to retain Greenland. To name some of them, first of all, the colonial power sensed that it was an ‘obligation’ (Beukel & Jensen, 2010: 382-4) to protect and assist the vulnerable island of small population and a limited economy. Second, Denmark got extra exposure and significance internationally thanks to Greenland, as well as the political and which will be specified further in the sixth chapter. Third, the notion of “patriarchy” in Denmark had developed through its control over Greenland starting almost three hundred years ago that how a polar domain should be managed (Beukel & Jensen, 2010: 382-4).

Danish colonialism over Greenland was highly related to another ideology, paternalism. This notion, generally speaking, refers to “those in positions of power have, just as in the relationship between parents and children, the right and the obligation to overrule the preferences of those deemed incapable of knowing their true interests” (Thomas & Buckmaster, 2010). Greenland, in the 20th century, in a factsheet by the Foreign Ministry of Denmark on the Kingdom, is described as ‘The colonial power did not trust the Greenlanders to assume responsibility for the development themselves and introduced an administrative system to handle all aspects of life in Greenland.’ (MFA of Denmark, 2010). However, paternalistic thinking over Greenland is still endemic in Danish politics. The Danish People’s Party, or Dansk Folkeparti in Danish, a right wing political party in the parliament, has blasted Greenland for being blind by pursuing independence, instead of solving social problems and lack of capacities to address the problems (Sørensen, 2018).

Even a few years after the Home Rule agreement was enacted in 1979, there were still a number of higher administrative positions in the charge of Danes (Alfredsson, 1982). Compared to the Home rule act, the Self rule agreement which came to force thirty years later, indicated immense progress forward for Greenland as a nation, such as, first, recognizing Greenlanders as a people ‘pursuant to international law with the right of self-determination’ and the status of the Greenlandic language “shall be the official language in Greenland”. Second, the act approves Greenlandic wishes to gain full independence (The Prime Minister’s Office of Denmark, 2019), and the decision, “shall be taken by the people of Greenland”.
However, there are also several new challenges for the self rule government created by the act. First, if Greenland wishes to gain full independence, the Greenlandic government shall finance the fields of thirty two governmental responsibilities under its own jurisdiction listed in the agreement (Foley, 2017: 101), which means Greenland would have to fund them independently in order to compensate for the current amount of aid from Denmark. According to the act, the number is 3.4396 billion Danish kroner per year, and “shall be adjusted annually in accordance with the increase in the general price and wage index of the Finance and Appropriation Act for the year concerned”. In reality, in the past ten years since the act was granted, only two items of responsibilities have been transferred to Greenland, including “the mineral resource area” and “the working environment” (Sermitsiaq, 2018).

Second, some items can be interpreted in respective ways by Greenland and Denmark. The dispute over uranium mining in Greenland a few years ago exactly fell into this category. In 2013, Aleqa Hammond, then-Prime Minister of Greenland, decided to lift a decades-long ban on uranium mining on the island to increase sources of income for the nation (Thomasen, 2014). According to Greenland Parliament Act of 7 December 2009 on mineral resources and mineral resource activities (the Mineral Resources Act), the Self rule government “has the right of use of and the right to exploit mineral resources in the subsoil in Greenland” (Parliament of Greenland, 2009), however, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, her counterpart in Denmark, claimed that the uranium issue fell precisely into the category of foreign affairs, defence and security policy, which Denmark is still in charge of (Rohde, 2014), given the statement in the Self rule act. After several years of negotiations, the two sides finally reached consensus and released a joint agreement on uranium exports (Arctic Portal, 2016; World Nuclear News, 2016; Vestergaard & Thomasen, 2016).

5.2.1 Incentives behind the Greenlandic Independence Movement

There are several incentives behind Greenland pursuing independence, and the wave on the island can be traced several decades ago, namely long before any concrete interests of China in the region.

First, growing confidence in handling home and external affairs through endeavor of generations.
The Second World War was a turning point to Greenland in the process of contact with external actors, such as the US and Canada, which “inaugurated a new sense of self-confidence and the courage to try something new in Greenland” (Beukel, Jensen & Rytter 2010, 30). Working for Americans, to an extent, helped Greenlanders be aware of their abilities of managing affairs without Denmark.

In the past twenty-five years, Greenland has opened three new representation out of the kingdom, to stretch its political and economic capacities and relations. In 1992, the first Greenlandic representative office out of Denmark was established in Brussels, in order to address the relationship between Greenland and the European Union, as one of the “Overseas countries and territories” of the latter (Government of Greenland, 2019). In 2014, the third one was opened in Washington, DC, the first one in North American covering Canada later, which is deemed as a significant step for Greenland to secure its economy and enhance the bond with other Inuit people in the High North (Government of Greenland, 2019). In October 2018, Greenland inaugurated its first diplomatic representation in Iceland, in order to strengthen business ties between the two nations (RÚV, 2018).

Second, prosperity for more diversified and self efficient economy and increasing trading partners over the past one hundred years. For a long time, Greenland was heavily depending on seal hunting and animal skin exports (A.J.F, 1957; Government of Greenland, 2009; ). In the late 1920s, more fishery resources, such as shrimp and codfish were discovered and utilised around the island, which contributed to form modern economy (A.J.F, 1957). Nowadays, sources of income are more varied, including from fishing, tourism, mining (Statistics Greenland, 2018), and as noted above, Greenland has enlarged its business scope, including EU, North America, and Asia, including China.

Third, long-term dissatisfaction with Denmark. Emotions have played a role in Greenlandic independence movement. There is a consensus both in Greenland and Denmark that the latter implemented colonialism over the island, whereas, officially, the Danish government tends to remain “dismissive” of the past without answering any wishes for apologies from its former colony.

In 2013-4, Hammond’s government announced to establish a Reconciliation Commission, with the purpose of examining the influence of historical Danish colonialist era on Greenland
nowadays (Finne, 2018), a move seen as “very important on a path where Greenland strives for independence” (Jacobsen, 2014). Even though the then-Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt denied the necessity of the Commission and did not want to contribute to the project, however, the project was conducted and a final report was submitted in 2017-8, which pointed out that a majority of the population on the island at present are still suffering from the consequences of colonialism of Denmark (Finne, 2018; George, 2018).

Fourth, it is impossible to understand the reasons that Greenland has been pursuing independence without comprehending the identity of Inuit as an indigenous people and their ongoing sufferings because of past colonialism and present situation. Before being a colony, Greenlanders, or Inuit ethnically, were having very much different lifestyles from Danes. During the historical phase of being colonized and absorbed to the Kingdom, Danish assimilation policy over the island did damage the traditional Inuit identity, besides opening Greenland up to modernization. Greenlanders were not recognized as a people and Greenlandic, used in daily life, were not official language until the enforcement of the Self rule Act in 2009. (Alfredsson, 1982) What’s more, the act does stimulate a growing national identity for Greenlanders, which are a people different from Danes, their former colonial hosts. Aleqa Hammond, the first female Prime Minister in Greenland, won her landslide victory in the Greenlandic Parliament election in 2013 (Government of Greenland, 2013), and this was credited to “her ability to accentuate the importance of everything Greenlandic” (Breum, 2018:132). The mounting awareness of pursuing national independence gave Hammond an occasion to make one of her statements well known that “My personal goal is that the current government will take the steps that make it possible for Greenland to obtain its independence in my lifetime” (Breum, 2018:132).

Denmark tends to attempt to demonstrate its willingness to respect Greenland as an equal partner within the Kingdom (Thorning-Schmidt, 2014), for example, in the territory dispute a few years ago, over Lomonosov Ridge in the Arctic Ocean, claimed by Greenland, Russia, the US, Canada and Norway, Denmark asserted to support the claim of Greenland (Barkham, 2014). however, there is ongoing thoughts on how much Denmark spends on Greenland nowadays and why it is a loss for Copenhagen, without realizing it is actually a belated compensation for past exploitation (Evans & Newham, 1998:79-8). For example, an article on “No, Greenland Is Not A Colony” published in 2017 argued that what Denmark gains from Greenland weighs much less than it gives (Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2017), especially in the light
of the large annual grant from Denmark, and “one cannot say Denmark exploits Greenland economically”. However, it does not mean exploitation do not exist in other forms. As discussed above, Greenland still does not have full access to its domestic or foreign affairs, along with other interference from Denmark in reality, which are actually the legacy from the colonial period and the cost that a small nation pays for the exchange of political shelter.

Furthermore, it is exactly because of the qualifications of the annual block to Greenland, reduction of future Danish subsidy is tightly associated with the revenue gained from mineral related activities. In short, financial subsidy from Denmark to Greenland would be “reduced by an amount equal to fifty percent of such revenue exceeding DKK 75 million annually” and when it would be “reduced to zero kroner, the subsidy will be discontinued and no further subsidy will be provided hereafter” (The Prime Minister’s Office, 2019). In that case, financial relationship between Denmark and Greenland could negotiated, however, with the qualification of grant reduction, Greenland might be discouraged from engaging in mining without taking a short term economic hit in order to assure a more stable fiscal source (Shi, 2017).

5.2.2 Current statehood of Greenland

Potentially, as an independent state, according to statehood identified in the 1933 Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States, Greenland would have to possess the following elements, that (a) a permanent population; (b) a defined territory; (c) government; and (d) capacity to enter into relations with other states (Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States, 1933).

Currently, Greenland fulfills part of the statehood qualifications. First, it does have a stable population of inhabitants around 57,000, despite some out-migration; Second, Greenland itself is the biggest island in the world, even though there are still territorial disputes, such as over the Hans Island with Canada, which does not negate its possible statehood; However, (c) and (d) are more complicated and the major acid tests for Greenland becoming a state. First, the Greenlandic government and its administrative capacity has evolved greatly since the Home Rule Act came into force in 1979, however, as analysed above, Greenland has not had full access to the jurisdiction of all thirty-two items of responsibilities in the Self rule act, including domestic affairs and foreign policy.
Therefore, in short, Greenland is a quasi-state on its way to being independent.

5.3 Interaction between Greenland and China

5.3.1 Motivations of Greenland and Current Engagement between the Two Entities

In recent years, calls for national independence has been growing in number, despite differences over the agenda and approaches. Specifically, the question of fiscal capacity is a critical factor.

First, to achieve independence, diversifying its income and reducing reliance on fishing and Denmark is an important step. Currently, Greenlandic revenue sources primarily from Danish subsidy and fishery industries. The government of Greenland has realized that the importance of foreign investment in mining to supply traditional fishing exports (Government of Greenland, 2019). In an interview on independence topics, Vittus Qujaukitsoq, a local politician, argued that “the block grant has been too decisive for the way we organize our lives. The moment we no longer depend on it, we ourselves need to generate the necessary revenue” (Breum, 2019). Also, Hammond conveyed her strong remarks that Greenland should be more economically independent in the future (Hammond, 2014).

Second, the uncertain future of the US-administered Thule Air Base and dissatisfaction towards the US accelerates Greenland to look for another another long term financial source. In the past over forty years, maintains of the base had benefited Greenland financially since 1971 (Dam, 2015; The Local DK, 2015), however, in 2014, Greenland lost its contract to Exelis Services A/S, an American company which undertake the service for the base from October 2015 to September 2022. The economic loss for Greenland has been estimated as massive (Dam, 2015), and this issue has seriously irked Greenland. Christian Juhl, the Greenlandic spokesperson of the party Enhedslistens, expressed the discontent that “It is highly unsatisfactory. It shows that they only think of themselves and do not act as if they are guests in a country” (Krog, 2014).

Third, influential politicians and ruling political party’s promotion plays a critical role in attracting foreign mining exploration and investment. Aleqa Hammond, is a constant Greenlandic independence pursuer as mentioned before, is also a mineral activities promoter. Her speech at The Arctic Summit in London in March 2014 highlighted the possibility to
develop business opportunities in the Arctic, claiming that “Oil, gas and hard minerals - including rare earth elements, gold, uranium, iron, copper, zinc and nickel - to name only the most important - are becoming available in quantities and qualities which are unique internationally. Greenland has the potential in the coming decades to become one of the most important suppliers of some of these hard minerals to the world market” (Hammond, 2014). Greenlandic political elites have realized the significance of mineral deposits on this Arctic island that will serve their nation and the world.

Additionally, Greenland has had legislation premise for promoting natural resource extraction project. The nation had been viewed as a Danish “resource frontier” in the Arctic could be dated back hundreds of years. During colonial phase, raw materials in Greenland such as coal were exploited and then delivered to Denmark for different kinds of usage (Bruun, 2018). Knowledge in Greenlandic geography was accumulated to serve colonialism purposes.

However, in the same year when the Self Rule Act was granted, Ove Karl Bethelsen, the sitting minister (naalakkersuisoq in Greenlandic) for business and raw materials conveyed a message of the wish of the Greenlandic government to take over the jurisdiction of raw materials, that ‘The Self-rule government believes that it is of vital importance for the government that raw materials, as one of the first areas of the cases, be transferred to Greenland’ (KNR, 2009).

Mining resources were regulated by a joint Greenland-Danish administration until late 2009 when a new act approved by the Greenlandic parliament, stating that “The Mineral Resource Authority under the Greenland Government is the overall administrative authority for mineral resources”, which has entitled Greenland with more rights to welcome foreign interests in mining sector on the island, including investment from China.

Apparently, Greenland has been targeting China as a crucial mining partner and export destination. According to the Annual Report 2013 by the Government of Greenland, on mineral resources analysis, China was mentioned as one of the targets in Greenlandic mineral activities. Since 2011, the government of Greenland has attended the China Mining Congress and Expo in Tianjin (天津) China, as well as hosting a Greenland Day for Chinese mining investors to exhibit the mining situation and potential in Greenland (Government of Greenland, 2013; 2019).
Political figures and the government play a big role in enhancing the relations with China. Kim Kielsen, the successor of Aleqa Hammond who stepped down as the Prime Minister in September 2014, also from the Siumut party, has been serving Greenland and seeking further cooperation with China. In late October 2017, he paid a diplomatic visit to China along with three other ministers (Zhang, 2017). One of the focus of the trip was to aim to call for more Chinese investment into Greenlandic mining research, and cooperation in tourism. This biggest island, with polar scenery, on the globe is hoping to welcome more guests, including from China, given that airport expansion projects will make Greenland more accessible for visitors (Zhang, 2017).

As a potential independent state in the Arctic, forming and strengthening its relationship with a great power in the world, actually is one of the ways of promoting itself and gaining international recognition at the world stage. The Greenlandic government has been reported as planning a formal diplomatic presence in China for a few years (Wallach, 2015; Petersen, 2018), however, there does not seem to be an explicit timetable for further arrangement. In October 2018, a Greenlandic representation was opened in Reykjavik, Iceland (RÚV, 2018), which was the fourth representative venue abroad, and the first in the Nordic region besides Denmark. This move has aroused discussion on the next diplomatic office of Greenland.

Due to a small population and a high rate of emigration (Statistics Greenland, 2018) along with other social problems, the labour deficit is a headache in Greenland (Elkjær & Olsen, 2016), especially urgent in some industries like fishery. Royal Greenland, one of the biggest fishing companies in the nation, was reported to be difficult to maintain its local labour force at the plants and had to decrease severely its cod fillet production (Pedersen, 2016), and the company was eager to hire new employees from China (Elkjær, 2016). In 2017, over forty Chinese were hired by the company as factory workers (Pedersen, 2017), and distributed in several towns in Greenland to ease the employment shortage.

In addition to introducing Chinese employees to the island, Royal Greenland is also interested in enlarging its Chinese market (Petersen, 2015; 2016). In the late twentieth century, China was perceived as a ‘saviour’ of the Greenlandic sealing trade (Gad, 2017:78) and there was an unsuccessful trading attempt of Greenland to approach China in the following years. A long story short that Puisi A/S, a local company wanted to export Greenlandic seal meat products to China, however, it turned out that it did not obtain export permits and other problems such as
huge fiscal loss appeared, and unfortunately, the company ended up bankrupt afterwards (Thorin, 2010).

In recent years, Greenland has been exploring new business approaches to China, one of which is possible water exports. Because of climate change in the Arctic, glaciers in Greenland are thawing at a speedy rate, which provides more drinkable water, which is perceived as high quality, and generate an idea of water selling (W, 2018). The Greenlandic government has put forward a proposal of selling water plan (Pedersen, Nukaaka Tobiassen 2016). The reasons that China is assumed to a water trading partner is that the environmental pollution in the country, which leads to increasing demand of bottled drinking water consumption (Sommer, 2018). In 2018, Aqqalu Jerimiassen, the then-Minister of Industry, Energy and Research, completed a visit to China, to advertise Greenlandic water (W, 2018; Sommer, 2018).

In the latest Political and Economic Report published by the Ministry of Finance of Greenland, China is listed as one of the vital markets for water, mineral and other raw materials exports (Government of Greenland, 2019).

5.3.2 Domestic Opinion of Greenland in the Light of the Interests of China

Besides the government, Greenlandic media and peoples have been aware of emerging interest from China (Lynge, 2017), a country which is a thousand miles away. China’s appetite for the Arctic’s natural resources, aspiration to understand the region and hope of improving relations with Arctic states are not secrets on the island (Lynge, 2017; Fievé, 2017), and have received mixed reactions from local citizens. Some regard it as a positive chance to improve friendship, trading and business with China, and potential mining projects produce revenue to boost Greenlandic economy.

Others, including home political parties and inhabitants on the island, however, hold their own concerns, especially over upcoming mining operations. Although the mining projects are assumed to produce considerable value, to engine the Greenlandic economy and accelerate the possible independence, however the public, especially those who are inhabiting in smaller communities or towns near the mining projects perceive the changes in a different way and their main concern covering the following aspects:
First, they might challenge the island’s conventional lifestyles. For the past one thousand years, Greenlanders have been heavily depending on hunting, especially in remote small towns. However, when mining activities start in the future with the construction of industry infrastructure and an influx of foreign labour, the current lifestyle might be disturbed.

Second, different attitude towards the projects might drive the local community apart in the mining-unrelated issues. In small communities in Greenland, such as Narsaq, a town near the Kvanefjeld site (Walsh, 2017), residents tend to work closely for many years. However, some are concerned that the potential mining activities would disturb the cohesion within the community and affect other issues unrelated to mining. In addition, concern over the engagement in the decision making process and information notifications are among the locals (Johnstone & Hansen, 2017).

Third, the possible risks to health is one of the biggest concerns (Johnstone & Hansen, 2017). Indeed, domestic REE mining in China has caused many problems in terms of health and environmental turmoil (Bontron, 2012; Government of China, 2012). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that the local residents would backlash the future mining activities in Kvanefjeld. In 2018, there was a Naamik (which means no in Greenlandic) protest concerning the support for the Kvanefjeld project implied by the new elected government led by Kim Kielsen (McGwin, 2018). It is hard to tell how public opinion in the future towards the operation of the mining projects, including those Chinese companies have invested.

5.3.3 Is Greenland Overly Dependent on China?

Briefly, the answer to this question is no. So far, Denmark is still the closest actor which Greenland maintain its relations with, no matter economically that the former is the biggest market receiving exports from Greenland and the top source of imports for Greenland (Observatory of Economic Complexity, 2019), or the long history of political ties.

One of the most distinguished interests of China in Greenland is seeking raw materials, however, at present, there are only a handful of advanced mining exploration projects on the island (Government of Greenland, 2019), including the case of Kvanefjeld discussed in the
previous chapters. So far, there are only two active mines on the Greenland, one is Aappaluttoq ruby mine overseen by Greenland and US-based Greenland Ruby, which began operations in May 2017; the other is White Mountain (Qaqortorsuaq) mine, backed by Hudson Resources, a Canadian company starting production in late 2018 (McGwin, 2018). The existing two mining projects symbolize a critical progress for Greenlandic mining industry (McGwin, 2018). Kvanefjeld, by contrast, is still waiting for a green light to begin after their exploitation permit is accepted.

The recent interests of Beijing on islands have stimulated heated attention to potential Greenlandic independence, much of which suggests the economic contribution as a decisive factor to the possible result, however, miss the fact that there has been a persistent trend of greater autonomy pursued in the past few decades (Jacobsen & Gad, 2017:11), not to mention the ongoing postcolonialism consequences from the historical era in the Greenlandic society today. Moreover, as examined before, China is still being very cautious in approaching Greenland and trying to avoid challenging the nerve of Denmark and the US.

Regarding external labour in Greenland, there was a widespread rumor in 2013 that thousands of China workers were or would be introduced to the island when General Nice took over the remains at Isua from London Mining (Breum & Chemnitz, 2013; Ross, 2017). Actually, this was not reality-based, because, as discussed above, the project is still on hold, and most of foreign workers in Greenland are from Denmark, and those from China only represent a small percentage (Economic Council Greenland, 2018).

External factors, including China, seems to be playing a great and positive role in driving Greenland apart from the Kingdom of Denmark, especially considering its potential mining investment and other economic activities. However, it is not always the case. The Huawei incident between China and Canada in recent months has become globally known (Vaswani 2018). Actually, Greenland has been aware of cyber-security and the importance of cooperation within the kingdom and use it as a shelter. In February 2019, the Greenlandic government announce that “We have a full focus on cyber-security in Greenland”, and “We do not use Huawei in our infrastructure” (Government of Greenland, 2019). In the same year, Greenland is applying for the safe third country under the auspices of the EU, in order to cooperate on cyber security under NATO.
China’s overseas activities have aroused various discussion and debates and the Government of Greenland is in favor of Chinese mining investments directly and indirectly. In June 2017, the government released a statement with an introduction of assessment of the agreement between Greenland Minerals, an Australian company, and “a Chinese investor”, namely Shenghe Resources, suggesting that the latter didn’t have controlling interest in the venture (Government of Greenland, 2017). Furthermore, the Mineral Resources Act in 2009 also states ‘Direct or indirect transfer of a licence under this Greenland Parliament Act to a third party requires approval by the Greenland Government’ (Parliament of Greenland, 2009), which indicates that, legally, all participants in mining projects have to follow certain criteria in Greenland, and the government will conduct strict regulations over mining.

Besides improving ties with China, Greenland has also been actively explore chances of cooperation with other actors. In an interview with BBC in 2018, Kuupik Kleist, the former Prime Minister who served Greenland from 2009 to 2013, shared his opinion of foreign investment on the island that “what Greenland urgently needs from outside is investments from outside” (BBC, 2018), and implied that Europe and the US should take more active roles in this regard. Indeed, as discussed in the previous sections, Greenland is one of the “Overseas countries and territories” of the European Union (Government of Greenland, 2019) and has been enjoying a number of close cooperation with the EU, covering culture, education, politics and economy (European Commission, 2019). In 2018, a Greenlandic politician, Vivian, Motzfeldt stressed that “Greenland highly values the special partnership with the EU. It is a political priority for the new government to further our relations. We look forward to working together to confirm and strengthen this important partnership” (European Commission, 2018).

5.4 Postcolonialism, and Small States and Shelter Theory

The relations between Greenland and Denmark, and Greenland’s interested in strengthening the relationship with China can be interpreted with two theories. The first is postcolonialism. Colonialism can be defined as “the conquest, domination, subjugation, and exploitation of primarily non Western people and lands by European Powers” (Biswas, 2013:221), and post colonialism means the phase after colonialism, and also behaviors, thoughts, etc, from the colonial times and how it can affect the relationship between former masters and former colonies. Greenland has entered the post colonialism in 1953 when the nation was integrated
into the Kingdom of Denmark and Greenlanders have been started to entitled the same rights as Danish. However, Greenland is not treated equally in the Kingdom, and people are still suffering the consequences from the colonial era, such as their appeal to obtain independence is not fully respected, Denmark can still step in foreign policy related affairs, (which will be returned to in the next chapter), as the previous colonial practice still exists nowadays (Biswas, 2013: 221).

What’s more, the postcolonial thinking from Denmark has also driven Greenland to seek external sources of income, such as from China, in order to decrease reliance on Denmark and ultimately achieve independence.

The second approach is small states and shelter theory. Denmark provides a political, economic and societal shelter for Greenland (Bailes, Thorhallsson & Johnstone, 2013). By “political”, Greenland represents Greenland in many diplomatic occasions, such as taking care of visa issuing for foreigners who want to enter Greenland, sitting intergovernmental international organisations on behalf of, (and sometimes with Greenland). The Lomonosov Ridge case mentioned above is an excellent example of how Greenland is protected by its shelter, Denmark, in international affairs with other greater powers. Economically speaking, the reason that Greenland is still part of the Kingdom is that the island is not fiscally sufficient, and needs annual subsidies from Denmark, who is also the biggest destiny of Greenlandic exports. There are strong people-to-people (P2P) connections between Greenland and Denmark. Many Greenlanders choose to acquire education, job opportunities, etc. in Denmark.

Anders Wivel (2010:15) points out that “a small state is by definition the weaker part in an asymmetric relationship”, which precisely describes the equality in the connection between Greenland and Denmark, which is part of the reason that the former has been pursuing independence.

Greenland receives yearly grants from Denmark, and uses Denmark as a political, economic and societal shelter, however, it does not mean there are no costs along with benefits (Thorhallsson 2018). The Self Rule Act defines that foreign policy and defense are still the responsibilities of Denmark. With increasing foreign ties, such as via political presence and trades between Greenland and other countries, these qualifications actually place hurdles for Greenland in many ways. For example, Denmark can interfere in various sectors, even those
which are technically under Greenlandic auspices, and claim they are foreign policy related by its standards, such as the dispute over uranium between the two entities, and future issuing entrance visas for external labourers hired by Greenlandic companies.

As warned by Lars Løkke Rasmussen, a former Prime Minister of Denmark, Greenland would lose the annual grant if it decided to leave the Kingdom (KNR, 2018). As Bailes, Thayer and Thorhallsson (2016: 9-10) argued, “more vulnerable to external, as well as internal, shocks, because there are few domestic buffers that can share the burden of an economic setback,”. As a small nation on its way to full independence, which currently is still heavily dependent on fisheries and subsidies from its “shelter”, Greenland has to enlarge the origins of earnings, to compensate for the future losses from disengagement from Denmark.

Summary

Greenland became a colony of Denmark in 1721, and was incorporated into the Kingdom in 1953, and under the shelter of the latter in many ways. In 2009, the Self-rule Act enforced, which, by legislation, has allowed Greenland to obtain greater autonomy. The ongoing independence movement combines the factors such as a brutal colonial history, growing national identity, pursuing more economic prosperity, etc. Nuuk has embraced the interests of China and demonstrated willingness for further cooperation, however, there are also voices questioning possible negative effects regarding the presence of China.
6 How Do Other Important Stakeholders Perceive the Presence of China in Greenland?

This chapter aims to analyze the perception of China’s presence in Greenland by two key external actors, namely Denmark and the US. The reasons that these two entities are incorporated into the discussion include, first, Denmark and the US are two crucial stakeholders on the island, especially when it comes to foreign affairs. Second, legitimate, Denmark has the right to interfere in the activities between Greenland and China, especially out of the consideration of “security”. Third, given the ties of Greenland with the other actors, possible Greenlandic independence might cause unexpected new challenges, such as more complicated multilateral relationships, less Danish dominance over Greenland, etc.

6.1 Perception of Denmark

6.1.1 General Relationship between Denmark and China

Generally speaking, China and Denmark have enjoyed a smooth relationship since their diplomatic ties was formed in 1950, and the latter was one of the first European state to break ranks with the US and recognize the People’s Republic of China, and supported the membership of the latter in the United Nations in 1971 (Sørensen, 2016:226). In the past few decades, the bilateral relationship between the two states has been stably developed in numerous ways, such as in respect to mutual high level governmental visits, people-to people exchange, increasing trade, cultural dialogues, etc. For Denmark, China is their biggest trading partner in Asia (MFA China 2019). Indeed, “partnership” or “伙伴关系” (huoban guanxi) in Chinese, has been one of the most common phrases in China’s foreign relations since the 1990s (Zhang & Ma, 2014, Ding, 2017).

Beijing has constructed diversified levels of partnership with other states region and international organisations, where the levels of partnership suggests how tight mutual relationships are. In 2008, a joint statement on comprehensive strategic partnership between the two states was announced (People, 2008), which has provided a platform for Denmark to deepen and widen its cooperation with China based on previous outcomes and to implement the China-EU 2020 Strategic Agenda (MFA of Denmark, 2019). That is to say, Denmark has been playing an important role in connecting China and Europe, and will probably continue the
trend in the future. In 2012, the three-day state visit of Hu Jintao to Denmark was the first time a Chinese President undertook such a high-level diplomatic event, and marked a milestone in the relationship for both states for future cooperation (People, 2012). During his visit, a number of documents on cultural, trade, investment cooperation were signed (MFA of China, 2012). Subsequently in 2014, Her Majesty the Queen of Denmark paid the “biggest ever” (Sørensen, 2016) national visit to China and met with her Chinese counterpart, President Xi Jinping. In April 2019, a pair of pandas from China were presented to Denmark, agreed to by Xi as gift during the meeting (Embassy of China in Denmark, 2017), were delivered to Denmark in a fifteen year research project (Xinhua, 2019), which actually demonstrated the willingness of the two countries to preserve their connections. So far, Denmark still remains the only Nordic state to have a “comprehensive strategic partnership” with China, since 2008 (Forsby, 2018).

6.1.2 The Concerns of Denmark

In terms of Arctic affairs, Danish attitudes towards China’s activities in the Arctic are multifaceted. On one hand, Copenhagen understands that China wishes to increase its influence in the region, such as via Denmark (DDIS, 2017), and welcomes and encourages China’s participation in the Arctic, while on the other hand, it holds its own concern over Beijing’s presence in Greenland, including the Arctic opening up to international attention, the possibilities of resource scramble, greater pull of Greenlandic independence. In the past few decades since the diplomatic relationship was established, Copenhagen has sought to maintain smooth ties with Beijing, and was positive and supportive towards the application of China, the most controversial applicant to acquire its observer status in the Arctic Council in 2013. (Reuters, 2011; BBC, 2013)

Regarding the perceptions in Western states of the Asian countries in the Arctic Council, the admission of these actors, especially China, has received mixed reactions from the media and scholars in Western countries (Willis & Depledge, 2014; Babin & Lasserre, 2019). China, along with other Asian potential observers, are imagined as “greedy states ready to challenge Arctic States’ sovereignty to get access to Arctic resources’ (Babin & Lasserre, 2019). Indeed, in the case of China’s interest in Greenland, and possible mining operations and other activities, some voices in Denmark have warned that China may place security risks for the Kingdom.
Some scholars argue that Greenland and the whole Arctic started to become a priority for Denmark from around in late 2000s (Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2017: 56-7) in the wake of more international attention to the region, such as interest from China, and the topic has been gaining more weight in Denmark since then.

Governmentally, when it comes to Greenlandic issues, Denmark demonstrates more concerns and tends to play an active role and manage to act as a mediator and organiser in China-Greenland affairs, asserting its rights in addressing Greenland’s foreign relations, since Denmark is primarily worried about Greenland’s economic security, and whether Beijing is hoping to drive a wedge between Copenhagen and Nuuk. In 2014, the Danish Arctic ambassador, along with the deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greenland paid a joint visit to China (Embassy of Denmark in China, 2014), discussing strengthening China and Denmark’s cooperation. Denmark is tending to view any and all China contact with Greenland as a potential security risk, given China’s rising power status. For example, in the Danish Defense Intelligence Service Intelligence Risk Assessment 2017, an Assessment of Developments Abroad Impacting on Danish Security, China was described more confident in its foreign affairs, and increasing interest in the Arctic, mainly in raw materials and sea routes, and, when it comes to Greenland, the report demonstrated the worries that “As a result of close connections between Chinese companies and China’s political system, there are certain risks related to large-scale Chinese investments in Greenland due to the effect that these investments would have on an economy of Greenland’s size. In addition, the risk of potential political interference and pressure increases when investments in strategic resources are involved” (DDIS, 2017).

Besides the government of Denmark, some Danish scholars have also expressed their vigilance over China in the Arctic. Peter Viggo Jakobsen, an associate professor at the Center for War Studies at the University of Southern Denmark, believed that the mounting engagement of China in the Arctic placed threatening in the area, and pointed out that “China's investments and ambitions in the Arctic have grown in line with the country's political, economic and military rise”, and suggested that the five Arctic Coastal States should cooperate in term of security policy in order to curb China (Turnowsky, 2019).

Danish stresses over China’s presence in the Arctic, especially in Greenland, has not only been revealed in policy documents or debates in academia of the country, but also in actions. There
are two examples of how Denmark has curtailed China’s interest on the island in recent years, one is an unsuccessful Chinese attempt of an old naval base, the other is the withdrawal of a Chinese company in bidding for the airport expansion project.

A few years ago, General Nice, a Chinese company, attempted to purchase an old naval base in Grønnedal, South Greenland. However, this was blocked by Denmark, and the base was reopened afterwards (MFA of Denmark, 2016). Some Danish scholars believed that there was no governmental sources showing that the reopening was directly because of Denmark’s wanting to keep China away (Jakobsen & Veirum, 2016), and some analysts claimed that it would be a security concern for Denmark if a foreign great power place itself in a former military location, and Denmark did not want to upset the US given the military value of the base (Sørensen, 2016; Matzen, 2017).

Greenland has been mulling over an airport expansion project as mentioned in the previous chapters, partially to make better access for visitors in order to increase revenue in tourism, and China Communication and Construction Company (CCCC Zhongguo Jiaotong Jianshe Gongsi 中国交通建设公司), a Chinese state owned company, was one of the candidates bidding for the project. However, in the middle of 2019, the Chinese company withdrew its bid (Reuters, 2019). Actually, in 2018, Denmark was chosen to finance the project, instead of Chinese or other partners from other nations (Matzen & Daly, 2018).

Some researchers believed that the move of Denmark was because it wanted to prevent large scale investment from China, but was unwilling to reveal the real intention, in order not to damage the relationship with Beijing, and also didn’t want to upset the US, its ally in NATO (Veirum, 2018; Matzen & Daly, 2018).

Besides the “paternalistic” thinking of Denmark on Greenland as discussed in the previous chapters, as the former colonial master and current “protection”, there are several other geopolitical reasons that Denmark is highly concerned about China’s ties with Greenland, to which will return in the following sections.
6.2 Perspectives from the US

6.2.1 General Relationship between the US and China

In the past few years, especially since becoming the second largest economy in the world, Chinese scholars and diplomats have expressed (Xinhua, 2013; MFA of China, 2018), in many occasions, its stance of not seeking hegemony or replacing the US, a current global superpower. For example, in 2018, Wang Yi, the Foreign Minister of China, reasserted that “China will not repeat the old path in which a strong power would surely seek hegemony, and that China will neither become another US, nor challenge or replace the US,” (MFA of China, 2018). However, debates over China’s ambitions have never ceased. Some argue that Beijing is not attempting to replace the status of a super power, but wishes to displace it (Mastro, 2018). In other words, China is more interested in becoming a great power alongside with the US, rather than surpass it.

6.2.2 The Arctic: A New Arena?

The Arctic matters to the the United States in multiple ways (Bloom, 2016:223-4), including natural resources, the scientific understanding of climate change and other geographic knowledge, national security, indigenous peoples (in Alaska), and relationships with other Arctic counterparts and non Arctic stakeholders. The US has tended to be more confrontational after Donald Trump came to power.

In April 2019, the United States Coast Guard published its Arctic Strategic Outlook (2019), which warned the consideration in the Arctic by linking cases of the diplomacy of the country in other regions that “China’s pattern of behavior in the Indo-Pacific region and its disregard for international law are cause for concern as its economic and scientific presence in the Arctic grows.” Indeed, it tends to connect Chinese policy in the South China Sea (Nanhai 南海) to the Arctic and assume that it follows the same strategy. However, Beijing is not borrowing its policy in the Arctic from its experience of dealing with the peripheral affair which is based on the concept of “historical waters” (Lanteigne, 2019), not to mention that there is no territory in the Arctic region which China is claiming. Additionally, it is almost impossible for China to challenge the international law in the Arctic without risking a massive backlash from the Arctic states. Beijing has specifically claimed historical waters and sovereignty over the Spratly,
Paracel Islands, etc. This has not been done in the Arctic, and China’s 2018 White Paper confirms that Beijing seeks no territory or waters in the Arctic.

Also, during the ministerial meeting of the Arctic Council from 6th-7th May 2019, in Rovaniemi, Finland (Arctic Council, 2019b), a fifteen minute long speech was delivered by Michael R. Pompeo, the Secretary of the US, on “Looking North: Sharpening America’s Arctic Focus”. China was mentioned sixteen times by the Secretary and was accused of its self claim as a “Near-Arctic state” that “yet the shortest distance between China and the Arctic is 900 miles. There are only Arctic States and Non-Arctic States. No third category exists, and claiming otherwise entitles China to exactly nothing”, which was a strong suggestion that all non Arctic states should not have roles in Arctic governance. He also warned that Russia, another North polar that the US was “concerned about Russia’s claim over the international waters of the Northern Sea Route, including its newly announced plans to connect it with China’s Maritime Silk Road,” (Government of US, 2019), and was dodging the topic of climate change in the region (Lanteigne, 2019).

Confusingly and contrarily, Pompeo added that “That’s not to say Chinese investment is unwelcome- indeed, quite the opposite. The United States and Arctic nations welcome transparent Chinese investments that reflect economic interest and national security ambitions”. This was vague and seemingly suggested that the standards to examine how ‘transparent’ of China’s economic activities are determined by the US and its Arctic neighbors. Instances regarding the attitude one China’s Arctic engagement will be brought in the next subsection of Greenland.

According to an Admiral in the US Navy, “Challenges are posed by the increased involvement of non-Arctic states: China, France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, the United Kingdom, and others. This involvement has thus far been in accordance with customary international law, but it is vital to ensure this continues” (Foggo, 2019). This is the first time that the US has taken a direct swing at non-Arctic states, not only China, but also its Western alliance. Now the Trump government has taken on a more militaristic view of the Arctic, and sees China as challenging the regional order.
6.2.3 The Case of Greenland

The US is now trying to upgrade its own relations with Greenland, especially given that Trump’s idea of purchasing Greenland in 2019 (Menezes, 2019). Interest from the US in Greenland has manifested itself over one hundred years ago, which has never perished throughout time, but reinforced, especially with intensified engagement of China since the last decade. In 1867, William H. Seward, the sitting Secretary of the US, revealed the acquisition of States of Greenland as part of the Alaska purchase package (Petersen, 2011). The reason Greenland was interested was its abundant natural resources recognized by Americans (Menezes, 2019). However, the bid to include Greenland failed. In 1951, the US signed a joint agreement with Denmark on Defense of Greenland, to deepen the military presence of the States on this Arctic island.

The US has been aware of possible independence of Greenland due to utilization of raw materials on the island related to climate change, which was “dated at least as early as 2007” (Wilson, 2017), given a document on “Shaping Greenland’s Future” prepared in 2007 and leaked a few years later (Wikileaks, 2007).

As discussed above, the denial of China’s acquisition to the old naval base in Southern Greenland, was just only because of Denmark, but also the US. ‘The government does not want to sell the naval base to China, as we have a long, close partnership with the US and a defense agreement for Greenland with the US from April 1951 to think about’ to use a quote on the matter from a source of direct knowledge (Matzen, 2017), which suggested the rejection was not only decided by Denmark, but also affected by the pressure from Washington.

6.3 Geopolitical Thinking of Denmark and the US

In March 2019, the Greenlandic government has approved an exploration and exploitation permit for Greenland Gas and Oil Limited (Government of Greenland, 2019), which is a company based in the UK. As we can see that Greenland has been actually embracing different kinds of sources of economic investment interests, rather than depending on China. However, Denmark, and the US are reacting with more concern than China, first given the perception that large Chinese firms are closely connected to the Chinese government, and second, China’s
Arctic interests appeared very rapidly in recent years. As well, no state is completely clear on where Beijing is going in the region even through with the publication of the Arctic White Paper.

Additionally, both Denmark and the US’s reactions to China’s engagement in Greenland can be explained from the perspective of geopolitics. Geopolitics refers to “a method of foreign policy analysis which seeks to understand, explain and predict international political behavior in terms of geographical variables, such as location, size, climate, topography, demography, natural resources and technological development and potential” (Evans & Newnham, 1998:197).

As the biggest island on the globe, abundant in natural resources, having a vast ice cap, and located in the High North region, Greenland is the center of the Arctic policy of Denmark (Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2016: 348) and remains an indispensable part of the military relevant arrangement of the US in the region.

There are some intentions behind the hesitation and even obstruction from Denmark against China’s engagement in Greenland, that China will be seen as the alternative partner to Denmark and the US, and increase public support for eventual independence, as Greenland matters to Denmark in numerous ways.

First, Greenland is extremely valuable real estate, and getting more so. It offers Denmark entrances into Arctic governance (Rahbek-Clemmensen & Thomasen, 2018), such as a member of the Arctic Council, position as an Arctic Coastal State and had the chance to present its idea in Arctic administration via the Ilulissat Declaration (Breum, 2018), which it would not otherwise have. Second, it gives Denmark a massive EEZ and over ninety percent of its full territory (Sæhl, 2018). Third, it offers Denmark an exclusive relationship in Arctic affairs, with other great powers, such as the US (Rahbek-Clemmensen 2016:348). As Rahbek-Clemmensen (2016:349) argues, “Greenland remained important for Denmark’s position within the Western alliance, as the American Thule Air Base and the adjacent radar installations in Northwest Greenland continued to be a vital part of the United States”.

Even the US does not have any territory claims in the island, in spite of the unsuccessful suggestion of Trump’s Greenland purchasing, however, considering the long term presence of the US in Greenland, mainly through military facilities such as Thule, the most significant
Arctic base on the island under US control, scientific diplomacy, economic cooperation and governmental ties, it is not hard to assume that the US is highly hesitant to include the activities of China, no matter in the form of scientific research, investment or diplomatic connections.

Summary

The involvement of China in Greenland has sparked reaction from Denmark and the US, whose concerns over the issue are different. Generally, Denmark has remained a smooth relationship with China and welcomes it to participate in Arctic affairs, however, when it comes to Greenland, Beijing is perceived in Denmark as a challenger to its sovereignty of the Kingdom. While Washington, who has been a competitor against Beijing globally, has produced a strong backlash over the interests of China on the island.
7 The Future

This chapter seeks to analyse the future interactions between Greenland, Denmark, the United States and China on the question of Greenlandic independence. Additionally, examining this from the central governmental level is insufficient and does not reveal the full story, therefore, a few sub-state factors that may affect the course are also taken into account, including domestic social problems, various views on independence, etc.

7.1 Domestic Opinions over Possible Independence

In July 2018, Emi Furuya, the Canadian ambassador to Denmark, remarked on the Greenlandic independence movement (Sørensen, 2018), noting that “if you live in Greenland, do you worry most about independence or about your children’s school and the opportunity to get to the hospital? Compared to Nunavut, it sometimes seems like you spend more time discussing independence than other citizen-related issues.” Subsequently, in August, a commentary by Vittus Qujaukitsoq, the leader of the Greenlandic political party, Nunatta Qitarnai, was published to clarify his viewpoint on pursuing independence for the nation, especially in response to international debates over whether the Greenlandic independence movement was outweighed by the solving of other social problems at present. He both defended the necessity of independence for Greenland, and argued that this agenda “does not take up too much” as a direct disavowal to Furuya while criticizing the misinformation and false impressions of Greenlandic politicians at their daily work (Qujaukitsoq, 2018).

Additionally, the concept of “independence” is unclear and open to interpretation in Greenland society. On Hammond’s statement on independence for Greenland, to use the comments of Finn Lynge, a former representative of Greenland in the European Parliament, “I have no idea what she is talking about. Independence from what? The dollar exchange rate? What is she talking about? Will that mean that the Danish navy will withdraw its fleet? Who’s going to enforce our territorial sovereignty at sea or keep foreign fishing boats out of our waters? It just doesn’t make any sense…” (Wilson, 2017). Some local politicians have even envisioned that the future ties between Greenland and Denmark, such as Hammond. She has promoted the notion of ‘free association’, in short, meaning that Greenland would become an independent state from the
Kingdom of Denmark but still remain a very close relationship with Copenhagen. (Sørensen, 2016)

Actually, there is a notion that Greenland should pursue quick and radical independence from Denmark, on the grounds that it would be economically better for the island. If this is going to happen, it may indicate that independence is more a result of people’s determination rather than economic development. During the Greenlandic election campaign in 2018, Hans Enoksen, a former Prime Minister of Greenland, as well as the head of Partii Naleraq, claimed that they wanted independence from Denmark in 2021 (Finne, 2018; McGwin, 2018), and argued that “They say it should happen when we are ready, but when are we ready? We’re ready when we want to be” (McGwin, 2018). The timing will be exactly the three hundredth anniversary when Greenland started its colonial era (until 1953), however, he retracted this statement shortly afterwards (Fievé & Høegh, 2018).

Regarding Greenlandic public opinion on independence, Kevin McGwin, a journalist on Arctic affairs, wrote in 2017 that younger generations in Greenland prefer a more steady, gradual process for this change (McGwin, 2017), there is data from an article written in January 2019 by Martin Breum, who is a longstanding Greenlandic affairs journalist from Denmark. He tells that a new poll shows that “67.7% of all adult Greenlanders support the vision of Greenland as an independent state at some point in the future”, a small percentage are “pro-independence in ten years”, but most believed 2034 will be best-suited for a radical shift (Breum, 2019).

Even though several critical historic decisions were the result of Greenlandic referenda, such as withdrawing from the European Communities (the precursor to the EU) in 1985, forming a self-rule government, etc, however, voices on full independence are diverse. Some observers insist that can Greenland negotiate and conclude economic cooperation with external investors without any obstacles from Denmark only when it becomes an independent state (Breum, 2018: 151).

On the way to independence, there are numerous social challenges need to be addressed. Even though local companies, such as Royal Greenland mentioned above, may be very interested in bringing in Chinese workers, Greenlandic politicians may have other considerations (Elkjær & Olsen, 2016). As pointed out in the previous chapters, Greenland has been suffering from
emigration at a high rate (Statistics Greenland, 2018), as well as other social problems, such as high suicide and unemployment rates (BBC, 2009; BBC, 2019).

As a statement calling for Greenlanders to return home by *Inuit Ataqatigiit* is an excellent instance of the urgency of the topic that “In these years, more and more Greenlanders are moving to Denmark. We cannot live with the fact that we are fewer and fewer people. We will work to ensure that several Greenlanders in Denmark move back home. Because we need you!” (IA, 2019)

### 7.2 Denmark: Preserving Greenland vs New Prime Minister, New Policy?

Even though Greenland has been granted the right to gain independence according to the Self-Rule agreement, and a number of Danish academics and politicians have openly envisioned the future of Greenland as a full independent state (Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2017). However, there are still insistent voices from that the Kingdom should be preserved. The former Prime Minister of Denmark, who stepped down in the mid 2019, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, expressed his wishes to maintain the Kingdom despite his understanding of Greenlandic independence wishes (Rasmussen, 2017), and even resorted to the Danish Constitution in order to justify the stance of not surrendering the full right regarding foreign security policy that “no Danish government can go beyond the Constitution, even out of goodwill” (Rasmussen, 2017; Sørensen, 2017).

Indeed, the Danish Constitution claims that:

“The King shall act on behalf of the Realm in international affairs, but, except with the consent of the Folketing, the King shall not undertake any act whereby the territory of the Realm shall be increased or reduced, nor shall he enter into any obligation the fulfilment of which requires the concurrence of the Folketing or which is otherwise of major importance; nor shall the King, except with the consent of the Folketing, denounce any international treaty entered into with the consent of the Folketing” (Parliament of Denmark, 2009).

However, in the wake of enhanced economic activates between Greenland and China in the future, such as mining investments, potentially subsequent labour issues etc, more direct communications between the two sides would probably be more urgently required, which might aggravate the nerves of the Danish government and the authority of the Danish Parliament in
terms of foreign policy. As well, some Greenlandic politicians, such as Hammond, have called for fighting for an independent foreign policy for the nation (Altinget, 2019).

As a contrast to the former Prime Minister, some Danish scholars have more positive thoughts on how Greenland would obtain independence from Denmark. Rahbek-Clemmensen, in an interview in 2018 argued that without an external threat from the East, namely Russia, “the role of Greenland” has been declining for Denmark when it comes to affairs with the US and NATO, which may imply that Greenland would be more likely to gain greater freedom in extending its foreign relations, including with China (Rahbek-Clemmensen, 2018).

In the same interview, Rahbek-Clemmensen also shared his opinion on Denmark’s future reaction to Greenlandic independence, noting that “I think that if Greenland wants to become independent, I don’t think Copenhagen would do very much to stop it,” given the arrangement of the Self-Rule Act.

In the light of current smooth relationship between the new Prime Minister of Denmark, Mette Frederiksen, and Greenland under Kim Kielsen, Denmark seems to be more relaxed with Greenlandic independence pursuing. Before the Danish Parliament election, Ms Frederiksen, one of the campaigners who actually became the Prime Minister, had expressed her sympathy for Greenland, and her wishes to offer it more elbow room regarding foreign policy within the Danish constitution (Sørensen, 2019). Compared to her predecessor, Frederiksen seems to be more comfortable with public comments on the political future of Greenland. In her visit to the island in late August 2019, she reconfirmed her understanding to the independence movement and her wishes that the two entities could maintain close connections in the future (Sermitsiaq, 2019).

Additionally, to respond to Trump’s purchase attempt of Greenland, PM Frederiksen stated that “Greenland is not for sale. Greenland is not Danish. Greenland belongs to Greenland. I strongly hope that this is not meant seriously” (Reuters, 2019), which showed a firm stance to respect and defend Greenland, even though the end result was Trump canceling a planned summit in Copenhagen in September 2018 in the wake of Ms Frederiksen’s comments.

So far, Denmark is capable of enjoying an exclusive political and economic relationship with China while maintaining its traditional ties with the US (Sørensen, 2016). However, the
question lies in how Denmark can play balance between these two great powers in the light of the more aggressive stance from the US towards China on Arctic affairs, especially when it comes to Greenland? If both of the powers decided to upgrade their engagement in the region, would it be a dilemma for Denmark? After the incident of Trump’s purchase attempt of Greenland and the cancelation of the visit to Denmark, Frederiksen clarified that “This does not change the character of our good relations and we will continue our dialogue on how we can deal with the challenges we are facing,” and that the invitation to the president “remains open” (BBC, 2019). How will the relationship between Copenhagen and Washington proceed from here, and would Denmark prefer more influence from the US or not? Moreover, how would Greenland be a variable in the Sino-Danish Strategic Partnership? Finally, how would Ms Frederiksen and her government deal with domestic pressure to maintain Greenland, such as from other domestic political parties?

7.3 Trends of China’s Engagement

So far, Beijing tends to stay non-confrontational to the criticism of Chinese Arctic policy from the US. This may become more of a challenge after the US Secretary of State’s combative remarks at the May 2019 Arctic Circle Ministerial in Rovaniemi. Gao Feng (高风), the Special Representative for Arctic Affairs of China, noted that “We will continue to work with our partners for the bilateral and multilateral interest, upgrade local well-being, and it will be the best answer to his (Pompeo’s) remarks,” as a response (Xinhua, 2019).

In a regular press conference on 7 May 2019, Geng Shuang (耿爽), a spokesperson of China’s Foreign Ministry, to the question of comment on the speech, responded that the accusation by the US was made by a “certain individual” (gebie renshi 个别人士), and asserted that China “will not overstep the mark to meddle in inter-Arctic States affairs” but “will not be absent from Arctic affairs of a trans-regional or global nature” (MFA of China, 2019). Both answers indicate that Beijing is endeavouring to show its gesture of aspiration to participate in the Arctic in a low profile and as a cooperative partner.

Compared to the reserved stance of Beijing, some Chinese media preferred to take a more radical attitude. Guangming Daily (Guangming Ribao 《光明日报》), implied criticism over
nonfeasance of environmental policy of the US, and soundly affirmed the contribution of China in the Arctic by borrowing the comments from experts on international affairs, such as Marc Lantigene and Timo Koivurova (Guangming, 2019).

A commentary, “Pompeo Stands in Way of Stable China-US relations” publishes one day after the speech, in *Global Times*, (《环球时报》Huanqiu Shibao), placing blunt criticism over the way of thinking of Pompeo that “has never quite aligned with his new position (as the Secretary)”, and “reflecting his obsession with extreme geopolitics” by comparing the Arctic Ocean and South China Sea (*Global Times* 2019), indicating that Beijing is now worried the US is playing a more zero-sum game in the Arctic.

Moreover, even though Nuuk has expressed its diplomatic interests with Beijing, the latter is more likely to be careful with this wish. Currently, there is no sign that China will build up a representation in Greenland, but has released signals that it regards the island as an internal affair of Denmark (Turnowsky, 2019).

One trend of China’s future involvement which be assumed is that skepticism from Denmark and the US, and failed attempt of the naval base purchase or bidding for the airport project, are only minor barriers in China’s Arctic plan. As with other ongoing ventures in Greenland, such as Kvanefjeld, China is on its way to strengthen its presence on the island.

### 7.4 Greenland: A critical Role in the Question of National Independence

The world has witnessed that Greenland has had a stronger awareness of its autonomy in foreign affairs. Exactly as Ane Hansen pointed out in the incident of China’s being denied in buying the naval base on the island, that “Everything that involves Greenland, the Danish government must discuss with Greenland, they cannot make the decision alone” (Veirum 2016).

Greenland has noted the increasing pressure from Denmark since the developing interactions between Greenland and China in recent years, if Denmark and the United States are opposed to China’s interests in the future as what they have been before, the way that Nuuk would react would be critically important. No matter if it chose to “aim to cooperate and avoid conflicts with others”, “chose neutral position”, or “rely on superpowers for protection, partnership and
resources” (Marleku, 2013) as some scholars view the behaviors of small nationals in terms of foreign policy, or be more tough and demonstrate more autonomy, the attitude of Greenland weighs more than the willingness of China.

It has been a few years since the discussion about Nuuk having a representative office in Asia, and China is top on the list. However, there are some voices on whether China would be the optimal option or not, as Sofia Geisler from Inuit Ataqatigiit considered that there are also other choices in Asia that Greenland can take into consideration before any decision can be made (Wallach, 2018).

Summary

China will continue to deepen its relationship with Greenland. However, the future methods of its participation on the island, and how it will play a role in Greenlandic independence, is full of uncertainties, including hurdles from Denmark and the US, domestic politics in Greenland and other related factors.
8 Conclusion

China’s involvement in the Arctic started in the 1920s when the country joined the Svalbard Treaty. However, it only started its diplomacy in the region in earnest 1980s with scientific research. At present, the Arctic is still not a priority in China’s foreign policy (Su & Lanteigne, 2015) and will not be, but it is growing more important. In addition, the Arctic is becoming a major component in (improving) China-Russia relations (Røseth, 2014; Zhou, 2019), which is pushing the Arctic higher on the list of Beijing's foreign policy priorities. Also, China needs to maintain a political, economic and strategic presence in a region which is growing in importance globally.

China has a strong set of interests in Greenland, including natural resources, mining investments, scientific diplomacy, and other areas. There are several projects that Chinese companies have participated in, such as raw material exploration and exploitation, airport expansion, etc. Withdrawing the bid from the airport projects and suspending the research station plan are only a small setback in its Arctic diplomacy, and China will continue in a more cautious vein towards Greenland, which means that it will need to avoid alienating Denmark, but also may need to deal with more direct US competition in Greenland, as well as a more overt zero-sum approach to Arctic policy by the Trump administration.

In Greenland, pursuing greater autonomy, and ultimately independence, has taken place before China entered the scene. National emotion plays a role. The difference being that China has positioned itself as the 'alternative partner' for Greenland, in addition to Denmark/EU. This strengthens the hand of pro-independence forces, especially if Greenland is able to successfully diversify its economy and its trade partners. China will continue to be an economic driver for possible Greenlandic independence even though it does not want to challenge the sovereignty of Denmark, and Denmark and the US, another two critical stakeholders and influential players in Greenlandic affairs, will probably put obstacles for their own purposes respectively and Greenland will try to play balance and diversify the sources of income, meaning, not just from China. China is still a newcomer in the Arctic, and has to be very careful about not appearing revisionist in any way, especially since the US is starting to push back on China in the region much harder as of this year. And also that the current Greenlandic government is fragile at best.
The way Denmark (and the US) treats Greenland and China may be an acid test in terms of their willingness to fulfill the Self-rule agreement. and chances are good Denmark will continue to attempt to ‘securitise’ various issues, going around the self-rule agreement when necessary. Because Denmark is worried about Greenland losing its economic sovereignty to China, and Denmark and the US are stressed about the potential for Beijing to develop a strategic foothold in Greenland.

As the Self-rule act was granted in 2009, Greenland’s right to obtain independence has been acknowledged, and in the past few decades, Nuuk has strengthened its economic and political abilities at home and abroad. The way that Greenland reacts to China’s interests is way more important than the interests of China themselves, in terms of how well Chinese engagement is welcome on the islands, such as how much the government and people are willing to include Chinese investors. Dealing with China has given a valuable lesson to Greenland that how many difficulties, including how to craft an independent foreign policy and the question of neutrality or non-alignment, to overcome and to learn in the way to independence.

Greenland needs external fiscal injections, such as in the mining sector, and quickly and effectively diversify its economy away from seafood and the Denmark grant. However, it does not mean Greenlanders will take every offer desperately, or independence will take place overnight. It still needs Denmark, (and the US), as a shelter, given geographically, and traditionally even though one day it achieves independence, where China will not likely to be an alternative.

As the only part of the Arctic with a potentially changeable political status in the short term, which makes it a specific target for outside influence. Greenland can play it assets thanks to its geographical significance, natural resources, etc., despite its smallness when dealing with Denmark, the US and China. It will take time to see how Ms Mette Frederiksen, the new Prime Minister of Denmark, who has expressed to give Greenland bigger elbow room in foreign policy before the election, will handle the multiple relationships between Denmark, Greenland, China, the US and other stakeholders in the future.

In terms of theory development, the case study of “The Role of China in the Questions of Greenlandic Independence” mainly contributes to the study of the theories of small states and shelter, postcolonialism, and geopolitics, as Greenland has not been well-researched from these
angles, as it does not fall easily into traditional categories of developing states or post-colonial states. The case proves that these three theories can be intertwined, since as a small nation who experienced colonial period and has been pursuing greater autonomy, Greeland needs external economic and political shelters, such as from Denmark, however, at the same time, it is also suffering the costs in exchange for shelters. As a small economy with a limited domestic market, Greenland has been actively seeking more sources of income, including from China, the second biggest economy in the world. The Greenland case deepens and supplies further understanding of the theories applied.

Moreover, another theory which may be applicable in future research to examine the relationship between Greenland and Denmark is “neocolonialism”. Compared to colonialism, refers to a greater external power maintains its influence over former colonies, including via economic dependency. Much current literature on the subject in IR and comparative politics has focussed on former European colonies in Africa, but many of its aspects are also useful in describing the Denmark-Greenland relationship in indirect ways, for example instead of occupying a territory, Denmark still has strong control over the local Greenlandic economy, influencing politics of the land. From this perspective, Denmark seems to have conducted a variation of neocolonialism over Greenland, even though the latter has been entitled to retrieve all the jurisdiction items of responsibilities and obtain full independence when the Self rule act was granted. However, from economics to politics, Denmark continues to have a heavy influence on Greenland.
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