



Försvvarshögskolan

Självständigt arbete (30 hp)

Författare		Program/Kurs
Ida Molin		HOP2
Handledare		
		Antal ord: 14598
Stefan Silfverskiöld	Beteckning	Kurskod
	Självständigt arbete masteruppsats, försvarssystem	2UF033
China's soft power in the Arctic, a means or an end		

Sammanfattning:

Denna uppsats undersöker hur kinesisk mjuk makt i Arktis positioneras, främst som ett instrumentellt medel eller som ett mål i sig självt. Med utgångspunkt i Carol Bacchis WPR-ansats och systemteori analyseras Kinas arktiska policy från 2018 samt dess diskursiva representation på globala, regionala samt bilaterala och multilaterala nivåer. Resultaten visar att mjuk makt möjliggör institutionell tillgång och samarbete, samtidigt som den bidrar till att forma Kinas identitet som en ansvarstagande global aktör. Diskurser om hållbarhet, vetenskaplig objektivitet och ömsesidig nytta normaliserar Kinas närvaro och dämpar uppfattningar om strategiska intentioner. På global nivå verkar mjuk makt normativt och utgör en flernivåmekanism för arktiskt engagemang. Dessa globala narrativ operationaliseras på regional nivå, medan mjuk makt på bilaterala och multilaterala nivåer främst får en instrumentell funktion. På systemnivå integrerar mjuk makt diskurs, institutionella strukturer och materiellt engagemang. Instrumentellt möjliggör den vetenskapligt samarbete, institutionellt deltagande och bilaterala partnerskap. Som mål i sig bidrar den till att konstruera bilden av Kina som en ansvarstagande stormakt och stärker därigenom legitimitet och normativt inflytande. Sammantaget framträder mjuk makt huvudsakligen som ett instrumentellt verktyg på bilateral och multilateral nivå, medan dess identitetsskapande roll fungerar som ett strategiskt mål inom den normativa domänen.

Nyckelord:

Arktis, Kina, mjuk makt, nordostpassagen, vetenskap, styrning

Abstract:

This thesis investigates how Chinese soft power in the Arctic is positioned, primarily as an instrumental means or an end in itself. Employing Carol Bacchi's WPR approach and systems theory, it analyses *China's 2018 Arctic Policy* and its discursive representation at global, regional, and bilateral/multilateral levels. The findings indicate that soft power facilitates institutional access and cooperation, while simultaneously shaping China's identity as a responsible global actor. Discourses of sustainability, scientific objectivity, and mutual benefit normalise China's presence and attenuate perceptions of strategic intent. At the global level, soft power operates normatively, constituting a multilayered mechanism of Arctic engagement. These global narratives are operationalised regionally, whereas at the bilateral/ multilateral levels soft power functions primarily in instrumental terms. At systemic level, it integrates discourse, institutional structures, and material engagement. Instrumentally, it enables scientific collaboration, institutional participation, and bilateral partnerships. As an end, it contributes to constructing China's image as a responsible major power, reinforcing legitimacy and normative influence. Overall, soft power is predominantly instrumental at bilateral and multilateral levels, while its identity-building role functions as a strategic end within the normative domain.

Keywords:

Arctic, China, Soft power, Northern Sea Route, Science, Governance

- 1. Introduction6
 - 1.1. Purpose and research questions8
 - 1.2. Literature review9
 - 1.2.1. China’s Arctic engagement: historical roots and scientific expansion.....9
 - 1.2.2. Strategic ambitions and power projection10
 - 1.2.3. Technology, governance and influence14
 - 1.2.4. Debates on Soft power16
 - 1.2.4.1. Criticism towards soft power.....17
 - 1.3. Theoretical Framework17
 - 1.3.1. Systems Theory and Multi-Level Interaction.....18
 - 1.3.2. From Mechanistic to Dynamic Systems Thinking19
 - 1.3.3. Toward a circular and evolutionary understanding of systems19
 - 1.3.4. Systems Theory and Soft Power20
 - 1.3.5. Linking Systems Theory to WPR.....20
 - 1.3.6. Reflections on Theoretical Framework21
 - 1.4. Methodology22
 - 1.4.1. Approach and materials22
 - 1.4.2. Ethical Considerations.....23
 - 1.4.2.1. Artificial Intelligence24
 - 1.4.3. Delimitations24
 - 1.4.4. Analytical Models25
 - 1.4.4.1. Additional Analytical Question, linking WPR with systems theory.....26
 - 1.4.4.2. Systems Theory as Secondary Interpretive Framework26
 - 1.4.4.3. Interpreting WPR findings through systems theory.....26
 - 1.4.4.4. Criticism to chosen approach.....28
 - 1.4.4.5. Sources and Sources criticism.....28
 - 1.5. Outline of the thesis29
- 2. Analysis and findings30
 - 2.1. WPR analysis.....30
 - 2.2. Concluding analytical observation34
 - 2.3. Interpreting the Findings Through Systems Theory.....34
 - 2.3.1. Global level: Norm Construction and Legitimacy35
 - 2.3.2. Regional level: Embedding in Institutions and Governance Structures.....36
 - 2.3.3. Bilateral and Multilateral level: Material and Strategic Interfaces37
 - 2.3.4. Inter-Level Dynamics: A Reinforcing System.....39
- 3. Discussion of Results41

- 3.1. Limitations of the study.....42
- 3.2. Practical Implications for Arctic States.....43
- 4. Conclusion.....44
 - 4.1. Future research.....45
- 5. References46

Abbreviations and Acronyms

Term	Meaning	Remark
Artic Silk Road	Strategic concept	China's broader Arctic initiatives in trade, infrastructure and scientific cooperation
BRI (Belt and Road Initiative)	China's global connectivity and infrastructure strategy	Arctic components are framed as extensions of the BRI
CNARC	China-Nordic Arctic Research Centre	Network for scientific cooperation between Chinese and Nordic Institutions
Ice Silk Road	Informal/alternative term	Non-official expression referring to the same ideas as the Polar Silk Road. Term used by some scholars.
IMO (International Maritime Organisation)	UN agency regulating global shipping	Sets safety and environmental standards relevant for Arctic navigation
IASC (International Arctic Science Committee)	International non-governmental scientific organisation	Facilitates international Arctic research cooperation and provides scientific input to Arctic governance processes
LNG (Liquid Natural Gas)	Liquefied form of natural gas for transport	Central to Arctic energy projects, especially Yamal LNG
NSR (Northern Sea Route)	Shipping route along the Russian Arctic coast	Actual operational route between Europe and Asia through the Russian Arctic
Polar Silk Road	Official Chinese project	Term used in the <i>China's Arctic Policy</i> to describe Sino-Russian cooperation to develop the NSR as a trade corridor
UNCLOS	UN Convention of the Law of the Sea	Governs maritime rights, including continental shelf claims and navigational rights in the Arctic

1. Introduction

The weather was typical for an October day in Murmansk in 1987: cloudy with low precipitation,¹ when the then Soviet President, Mikhail Gorbachev, addressed political and military elites in Murmansk during a ceremonial event. The speech, later known as the Murmansk Initiative, became significant for its articulation of a new political vision for the Arctic. It was a groundbreaking attempt to redefine the Arctic from a zone of military tension into an international area of peace and cooperation.² As Gorbachev stated: “Let the North of the globe, the Arctic, become a zone of peace.”³ In his speech, he emphasised environmental, economic, and scientific cooperation in the Arctic.⁴ Gorbachev’s address can be interpreted as articulating a strategic shift in the Arctic’s geopolitical character, from a region governed by hard power, understood as military force and coercive strategies, to one increasingly shaped by soft power mechanism such as diplomacy, environmental cooperation and scientific exchange. These mechanisms rely on attraction and influence perceived as harmless or non-threatening.⁵ Nearly four decades later, the Arctic is increasingly characterised by strategic competition rather than cooperative. Remilitarisation in the Arctic has become a central feature of renewed great power rivalry.⁶

The strategic environment has changed substantially since the publication of *China’s Arctic Policy* in 2018. The 2019 proposal by Donald Trump to purchase Greenland, alongside renewed debate in January 2026 concerning Greenland and Chinese activity, has redirected global attention toward Arctic geopolitics.⁷ The Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has further accelerated militarisation and disrupted institutional cooperation. At the same time, China has expanded its scientific, commercial and strategic presence in the region. These developments underline the urgency of critically reassessing how China’s Arctic engagement is represented and understood.

¹ ‘Weather Data 1987’, n.d., <https://weatherspark.com/h/m/148669/1987/10/Historical-Weather-in-October-1987-at-Murmansk-Airport-Russia>.

² Elizabeth Buchanan, *Red Arctic: Russian Strategy under Putin* (Brookings institution press, 2023), 36; Mikhail Gorbachev, *The Speech in Murmansk, at the Meeting on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star Medal to the City of Murmansk October 1, 1987* (Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1987), 31.

³ Gorbachev, 1987, 28.

⁴ Gorbachev, 1987, 29-31; Kristian Åtland, ‘Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk Initiative, and the Desecuritization of International Relations in the Arctic’, *Cooperation and Conflict* Vol. 43 September 2008, no. 3 (2008): 289–311.

⁵ Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (PublicAffairs, 2009), 5–11.

⁶ Martin Kossa et al., ‘East Asian Subnational Government Involvement in the Arctic: A Case for Paradiplomacy?’, *The Pacific Review* 34, no. 4 (2021): 114, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2020.1729843>.

⁷ Connor Greene, ‘Why Is Trump So Intent on Acquiring Greenland?’, *TIME*, 9 January 2026, https://time.com/7344877/trump-greenland-annexation-threats-purchase-national-security-economic/?utm_source=copilot.com.

As a signatory to the Svalbard Treaty, and an observer in the Arctic Council, the People's Republic of China,⁸ has long emphasised peaceful cooperation.⁹ China portrays itself as a 'near-Arctic state',¹⁰ a self-designated status.

The Arctic's vast reserves of oil, gas, and rare earth metals, along with its strategic maritime routes, are seen as vital to China's future.¹¹ The modernisation of China's ice-capable fleet, military exercises in the region, and the integration of polar operations into the Belt and Road Initiative, BRI, signal a transition towards hard power. Scientific activity is increasingly of dual use, enhancing situational awareness for the People's Liberation Army Navy, PLAN,¹² and supporting long-term strategic positioning.

Today, China maintains an extensive Arctic presence through scientific research, resource extraction, and maritime development. It is also establishing a new sea route, the Polar Silk Road, as a part of the BRI,¹³ and upgrading both its naval and commercial fleets with improved ice capacity.¹⁴ Chinese officials argue that scientific presence constitutes a basis for political legitimacy in Arctic governance.¹⁵ This evolution of China's Arctic engagement illustrates how soft power can function simultaneously as an instrumental means and as a strategic end.

China's ambition to become a maritime great power, echoing the thoughts of Alfred Thayer Mahan,¹⁶ exemplifies a defence system in transformation. Xi Jinping's strategy extends beyond traditional naval capacity to encompass merchant shipping, shipbuilding and control over critical maritime domains as part of an all-encompassing national security concept.¹⁷ This integration can be interpreted through a systems-theoretical lens, in which interdependent subsystems co-evolve to support national security objectives.

⁸ People's Republic of China, hereafter stated as PRC or China

⁹ Anne-Marie Brady, *China as a Polar Great Power* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), 22; The Svalbard Treaty (1920), https://library.arcticportal.org/1909/1/The_Svalbard_Treaty_9ssFy.pdf.

¹⁰ *China's Arctic Policy*, vol. 2018 (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, n.d.), accessed 7 January 2025, https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm.

¹¹ Brady, 2017, 9.

¹² Martin Kossa, *The Arctic in China's National Strategy: Science, Security, and Governance*, 1st edn (Routledge, 2023), 23, <https://doi-org.proxy.annalindhbliblioteket.se/10.4324/9781003295112>.

¹³ The Arctic Silk Road, while framed as China's effort to integrate the Northern Sea Route into the BRI, is best interpreted as a conceptual and discursive construct rather than a concrete navigational route

¹⁴ Rush Doshi, Alexis Dale-Hung, and Gaoqi Zhang, *Northern Expedition, China's Arctic Activities and Ambitions*, Security, Strategy and Order (Foreign Policy at BROOKINGS, 2021), 12–13.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 14.

¹⁶ Brady, 2017, 7; Kossa, 2023, 24.

¹⁷ China, ed., *China's National Defence in the New Era*, First edition (Foreign Languages Press, 1019; Kossa, 2023, 24, 114.

Environmental changes, increased accessibility, and geopolitical competition have elevated the Arctic's global strategic significance.¹⁸ The expanding focus on non-traditional power forms underscores how defence systems increasingly depend on intangible assets. This complicates the benign reading of soft power and positions it as an embedded instrument of long-term strategic influence. Within a defence-systems framework, soft power constitutes an integrated component of a broader architecture of power projection. Recognising this interdependence is essential for designing resilient and adaptive systems suited to complex geopolitical conditions.

1.1. Purpose and research questions

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how China employs soft power in the Arctic and to determine whether it functions primarily as a means to achieve strategic objectives or as an end in itself aimed at strengthening China's legitimacy and influence. Using Carol Bacchi's 'What Is the Problem Represented to Be?', WPR, approach,¹⁹ the study examines how soft power is represented in *China's Arctic policy* and what assumptions underpin this representation. Systems theory is subsequently used to analyse how these representations operate across interconnected levels within China's broader strategic framework.

Main research question:

How is Chinese soft power in the Arctic positioned, primarily as an instrumental means or as an end in itself?

Supporting question:

How is soft power represented in China's 2018 Arctic policy, and what assumptions underpin this representation?

How do these representations interact across different systemic levels within China's Arctic engagement?

This study combines WPR approach with systems theory to move beyond conventional discourse analysis. While WPR enables a critical examination of how soft power is represented and legitimised in *China's Arctic Policy*, systems theory makes it possible to analyse how these representations function across interconnected strategic levels. The study thus contributes to existing scholarship by demonstrating how soft power operates not only as rhetoric but as an integrated component of China's evolving security system, bridging the gap between representation and strategic effect.

¹⁸ Kossa, 2023, 3-5.

¹⁹ Carol Bacchi, 'Analyzing Policy: What Is the Problem Represented to Be?', *Pearsons Australia Press. Chapter 1* 2014 (2014): 1-25.

1.2. Literature review

This section situates the thesis within research on China and the Arctic. A deliberately wide-ranging review provides context, traces how earlier scholarship informs conceptual and methodological choices, and highlights the study's contributions.

1.2.1. China's Arctic engagement: historical roots and scientific expansion

China's formal Arctic engagement dates to the 1925 Svalbard treaty, though substantive involvement emerged later. Limited scientific participation in the 1990s gradually evolved into a strategic presence during the 2010s, marked by accession to the International Arctic Science Committee, IASC (1996), the launch of the icebreaker Xue Long (1999), and the Yellow River Station at Svalbard (2004),²⁰ domestically framed as scientific achievements.²¹

China's expanding scientific footprint supports its self-identification as a 'near-Arctic state' since 2012.²² Scholars diverge on the intent: some view Arctic science as a tool for resource access, transport diversification, and status-building,²³ others emphasise institutional constraints, portraying China as cautious and status-quo-oriented.²⁴ Several studies link the engagement to shifts in China's broader strategic thinking, frequently citing the 1991 Gulf War,²⁵ and later symbolic events such as Russia's 2007 flag-planting on the seabed at the North Pole.²⁶

A substantial body of research highlights how scientific activity has enhanced China's operational capabilities through data collection on ice conditions, seabed mapping, and meteorology, supporting forecasting systems and navigational assessments for routes such as Northern Sea Route, NSR. Concrete examples include the installation of a BeiDou satellite reference station at Yellow River Station in 2016 and the deployment of underwater robots to monitor sea-ice dynamics. Although officially framed as scientific, these activities are often emphasised for their the dual-use potential, though this literature

²⁰ Kossa, 2023, 5-6,9; Martin Kossa, Marina Lomaeva and Juha Saunavaara, 'East Asian Subnational Government Involvement in the Arctic: A Case for Paradiplomacy?' *The Pacific Review* 34, no.4, 2021, 669–70; Brady, 2017, 49–50; China refers to the agreement as the Spitsbergen Treaty and not Svalbard Treaty, rather than the Svalbard Treaty. However, in this thesis, the later term will be used, as it is the most accepted name in contemporary discourse. China's use of the older designation may reflect a deliberate choice, potentially linked to its reluctance to fully acknowledge Norway's sovereignty over the archipelago.

²¹ Doshi et al., 2021, 33–34.

²² Kossa, 2023, 7.

²³ Brady, 2017, 61,64.

²⁴ Matti Puranen and Sanna Kopra, 'China's Arctic Strategy – a Comprehensive Approach in Times of Great Power Rivalry', *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 6, no. 1 (2023): 240, <https://doi.org/10.31374/sjms.196>.

²⁵ David Kilcullen, *The Dragons and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West*, Oxford Scholarship Online Political Science (Oxford University Press, 2020), 25–26, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190265687.001.0001>.

²⁶ Almén and Weidacher Hsiung, *China's Economic Influence in the Arctic Region, the Nordic and Russian Cases*, 2022:23.

sometimes risk conflating technological capability with actual strategic deployment.²⁷ Automatic weather stations, on drifting ice and at Svalbard, are similarly interpreted as contributing to both scientific research and the development of Arctic shipping routes.²⁸

Research platforms such as Xue Long fulfil both scientific and symbolic functions,²⁹ while other vessels, including Xiang Yang Hong 01, are frequently highlighted for their clear dual-use capabilities.³⁰ China's Arctic acoustic research programme, initiated in 2014, is similarly interpreted as illustrating the blurred boundary between civil research and military relevance.³¹ Chinese officials themselves describe Arctic engagement as evolving through three phases: capacity-building (1980-2000); increased regional presence and institutional participation (2000-2015); and an ambition to establish China as a polar great power (2015-2030).³² While this self-periodisation provides insight into official strategic narratives, it also reflects an internally constructed storyline that warrants critical examination rather than uncritical adaption.

The literature consistently notes that China frames its Arctic engagement differently for domestic and external audiences. Internally, it is presented as necessary for securing long-term resources and strategic advantages, whereas externally it is portrayed as peaceful, cooperative, and beneficial.³³ Official policy documents emphasise the Arctic as the common heritage of humanity and the compatibility of environmental protection and economic development.³⁴

The literature converges on the view that Arctic science functions as geopolitical tool enabling China to gain legitimacy, facilitate cooperation, and accumulate operational experience.³⁵ Yet existing research has focused mainly on material capabilities, infrastructure, and strategic motivations, devoting far less attention to the discursive construction of soft power and its operation across interconnected systemic levels. This study addresses that gap.

1.2.2. Strategic ambitions and power projection

A substantial body of literature situates China's Arctic engagement within its broader strategic ambitions. Brady's *China as a Polar Great Power* remains a foundational contribution, arguing China's polar activities are not ad hoc but embedded in a long-term strategy aimed at enhancing international

²⁷ Kossa, 2023, 1, 86; Doshi et al., 2021, 31–32.

²⁸ Brady, 2017, 152–53; Kossa, 2023, 57, 84.

²⁹ Brady, 2017, 43.

³⁰ Kossa, 2023, 85.

³¹ *Ibid.*: 94.

³² Doshi et al., 2021, 6.

³³ Kossa, 2023, 122.

³⁴ Brady, 2017, 34, 201; Stéphanie Pézard, Stephen J. Flanagan, Scott Harold, et al., *China's Strategy and Activities in the Arctic: Implications for North American and Transatlantic Security*, with Rand Corporation, Research Report, RR-A1282-1 (RAND Corporation, 2022), 18, <https://doi.org/10.7249/RRA1282-1>.

³⁵ Doshi et al., 2021, 23, 31–32.

status, access, and influence. Since Xi Jinping articulated the ambition of becoming both a maritime and great power, Arctic engagement has increasingly been interpreted as part of China's wider rise as global actor.³⁶ Within this literature, scientific capacity, sustained presence, and institutional participation are commonly identified as prerequisites for polar great power status. Arctic shipping routes are therefore widely regarded as strategically significant, while polar research is interpreted as enabling both knowledge and long-term presence.³⁷ Several scholars emphasise the dual-use potential,³⁸ although evidence of coordinated military application remains limited.

China's polar ambitions are linked to its broader vision of global leadership. Xi Jinping's ambition for China is "... become a global leader with significant international influence",³⁹ and has argued that Chinese technologies and capital can contribute to resolving gaps in global governance.⁴⁰ Brady, among others, suggests that China faces a credibility gap in Arctic affairs, making narrative construction particularly important. By framing the Arctic as a global rather than exclusively regional concern, China seeks to reshape international perceptions and legitimise its growing involvement.⁴¹

China's Arctic Policy is frequently analysed in relation to broader initiatives such as the BRI and China's expanding commercial and diplomatic footprint. The policy frames China's engagement as constructive, and stabilising, emphasising compatibility between environmental protection and economic development. By portraying itself as both affected by Arctic climate change and capable of contributing to global solutions, China seeks to legitimise its participation and normalise its presence in regional governance.⁴²

Although the ambition to become a 'polar great power' is not explicitly stated in the policy itself,⁴³ it is widely interpreted as embedded within China's broader maritime strategy. Statements by former President Hu Jintao in 2012 linking maritime great power to national development, and subsequently references connecting maritime and polar ambitions, are frequently cited as evidence for this

³⁶ Brady, 2017, 3-6.

³⁷ Brady, 2017, 67; Kieran Mulvaney, *Arctic Passages: Ice, Exploration, and the Battle for Power at the Top of the World* (Island press, 2025), 147.

³⁸ Brady, 2017, 84; Mulvaney, 2025, 147.

³⁹ Kossa, 2023, 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 3.

⁴¹ Brady, 2017, 35, 243; Karin L. Johnston, *Cooperation and Competition in the Arctic* (Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2023), 9–10, <https://www.kas.de/documents/283221/283270/Cooperation+and+Competition+in+the+Arctic.pdf/32e79b2a-e97d-1ec0-bcd4-3c951d262954?version=1.1>.

⁴² Doshi et al., 2021, 17.

⁴³ *Ibid.*: 8.

continuity.⁴⁴ Within this literature, scientific activity is commonly interpreted as a key geopolitical tool that facilitates access, presence, and long-term influence.⁴⁵

China's growing participation in polar governance is also seen widely interpreted as a mechanism for protecting long-term interests. Scholars argue that increased status and presence enhance China's ability to shape emerging norms and institutional frameworks.⁴⁶ The Arctic's relatively fragmented legal order, aside from the Svalbard Treaty requirement of peaceful activity,⁴⁷ creates a governance gap that China seeks to fill through strategic engagement and institutional participation.

The NSR features prominently in this literature and is widely portrayed as offering shorter distances and potential economic advantages compared to traditional routes such as the Suez and Panama Canals.⁴⁸ Beyond shipping, the Arctic is also framed as strategically valuable for scientific research related to energy, minerals, and advanced technologies.⁴⁹ Studies illustrate how Chinese investments in ports, logistic infrastructure, and transport networks connected to the NSR are gradually expanding, including Chinese involvement in the development of a deep-water port along the route.⁵⁰

Chinese officials increasingly view the Arctic as strategically important, with regional influence offering geographical reach that affects long-term great power competition. China's expanding global trade dependence is seen as extending its naval reach, with Arctic activities signalling strategic intent. As the protection of overseas assets and national gains prominence in China's security thinking, Arctic engagement becomes increasingly tied to national-security concerns.⁵¹

A recurring theme in the literature is that scientific research functions as a strategic instrument for expanding China's presence.⁵² Engagement in the Arctic is frequently linked to broader objectives, such as regime stability, national cohesion,⁵³ and long-term project of 'great rejuvenation'.⁵⁴ Within this framework, the construction of China as a 'near-Arctic state' can therefore be understood as a discursive strategy that challenges the traditional dominance of Arctic states.⁵⁵ However, while many scholars

⁴⁴ Patrik Andersson, 'The Arctic as a "Strategic" and "Important" Chinese Foreign Policy Interest: Exploring the Role of Labels and Hierarchies in China's Arctic Discourses', *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 3 August 2021, 3–4, <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681026211018699>.

⁴⁵ Doshi et al., 2021, 9, 23.

⁴⁶ Brady, 2017, 185.

⁴⁷ Tianliang Xiao, ed., *The Science of Military Strategy* (National Defence University Press, 2020), 164.

⁴⁸ Charles Emmerson, *The Future History of the Arctic*, 1. ed (Public Affairs, 2010), 160–61; Xiao, 2020, 162–63.

⁴⁹ Xiao, 2020, 163-164.

⁵⁰ Patrik Andersson, *Sino-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic: Implications for Nordic Countries and Recommended Policy Responses*, no. 5 (Swedish National China Centre, 2024), 5.

⁵¹ Rush Doshi et al., 2021, 12-13; Kossa, 2023, 23, 77, 79; Puranen and Kopra, 2023, 241–42.

⁵² Johnston, 2023, 10.

⁵³ Brady, 2017, 42; Kossa, 2023, 147.

⁵⁴ Doshi et al., 2021, 11.

⁵⁵ Kossa, 2023, 67.

recognise the importance of discourse in this process, relatively few studies systematically analyses how such representations operate within policy texts.

Military modernisation forms an important backdrop in much of this research. Sørensen and Buschard highlight the goal of achieving a ‘world-class military’ by 2049, supported by extensive organisational reforms, and technological development. Since the 1990s, China has undertaken a sustained military build-up, driven not only by external pressure but also by domestic nationalism and rising public expectations.⁵⁶ As Doshi et al. further argue that China communicates differently to internal and external audiences; internally emphasising strategic competition, while externally promoting narratives of cooperation and responsibility.⁵⁷

Scholars’ emphasis that China’s Arctic engagement advances both economic and strategic objectives while supporting its broader rise as global power. The strategy is commonly described as combining infrastructure development, science diplomacy, and long-term influence building.⁵⁸ At the same time scholars such as Sørensen point to the structural constraints China faces as a ‘non-Arctic state’, highlighting a tension between ambition and limitation.⁵⁹

China’s Arctic engagement is closely linked to food security, access to fisheries, and prolonged icebreaker operations that enable sustained presence without territorial control.⁶⁰ The concept of structural power is frequently employed, where influence is understood to derive from participation in governance frameworks rather than control. A polar *great* power is thus defined not only by material capability, but by sustained engagement in international institutions and norm-setting processes.⁶¹

Maritime theory, particularly Alfred T. Mahan’s concept of sea power, is often used to contextualise China’s ambitions. From this perspective, becoming a *polar* power is understood as a step toward becoming a *maritime great power*, which in turn is central to China’s long-term project ‘national rejuvenation’ by 2049.⁶²

The literature increasingly suggests that Arctic engagement contributes not only to material capability but also to legitimacy, recognition, and norm-shaping. Although China’s overt military presence in the

⁵⁶ Camilla T. N. Sørensen and Adam Buschard, *Kina som global militær stormagt - militærstrategiske perspektiver for dansk forsvar*, vol. 2025 (Forsvarsakademiet, 2025), 9, 11–15, 19, 21, 23.

⁵⁷ Doshi et al., 2021, 1.

⁵⁸ Johnston, 2023, 9–10; Kossa, 2023, 96.

⁵⁹ Camilla T. N. Sørensen, ‘The Evolving Chinese Strategy in the Arctic: Entering the Grey Zone?’, in *Hybrid Threats and Grey Zone Conflict: The Challenge to Liberal Democracies*, ed. Milton C. Regan and Aurel Sari, The Oxford Series in Ethics, National Security, and the Rule of Law (Oxford University Press, 2024), 271, 274–77, 287, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197744772.003.0013>.

⁶⁰ Brady, 2017, 91, 97, 104, 155.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*: 6, 137.

⁶² A. T. Mahan, *Mahan on Naval Strategy: Selections from the Writings of Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan*, First Naval Institute Press paperback edition, ed. John B. Hattendorf (Naval Institute Press, 2015), 28, 31; Brady, 2017, 225, 236–38; Kilcullen, 2020, 192.

region remains limited,⁶³ scholars emphasise the strategic significance of dual-use vessels, satellite systems, and communication infrastructure. The Polar *Silk Road* exemplifies how material capability, narrative framing, and strategic ambition converge, deliberately invoking the Silk Road to signal trade, connectivity, and knowledge exchange.⁶⁴ Limited research explores the discursive construction of soft power in policy texts and its operation across systemic levels; this study addresses that gap.

1.2.3. Technology, governance and influence

Advanced technology, including icebreakers, satellites, and autonomous sensors, extends operational reach and underpins governance strategies. Since joining the Arctic Council as an observer in 2013, China has expanded regional cooperation and multilateral participation such as the China-Nordic Arctic Research Centre, CNARC, and participation in scientific Arctic Council working groups.⁶⁵ Between 2010 and 2013, China also pursued an active diplomatic outreach toward Arctic states. These developments coincided with increased interest in Arctic shipping routes and resource potential following assessments concerning Arctic oil and gas reserves.⁶⁶

China seeks to promote a more inclusive Arctic governance framework and actively builds support among ‘non-Arctic states’.⁶⁷ Kossa argues that science and science diplomacy function as key enablers of Chinese influence by facilitating increased participation in regional governance.⁶⁸ This interpretation is reinforced by *China’s Arctic policy*, which explicitly links Arctic engagement to the BRI and frames the ‘Polar Silk Road’ as a platform for joint development.⁶⁹

Scholars explain China’s emphasis on peaceful and constructive narratives as a strategic response to its structural position as ‘non-Arctic state’. The need to maintain access and avoid political resistance is therefore seen as shaping official discourse. At the same time, limited transparency surrounding the full scope of China’s objectives has contributed to persistent scepticism among external observers.⁷⁰ Doshi et al. highlight a clear contrast between external narratives emphasising cooperation and internal discourse, particularly within military writing, which increasingly frame the Arctic as an arena of future strategic competition and view investment in Arctic science as supporting long-term strategic

⁶³ Johnston, 2023, 9.

⁶⁴ Andersson, 2024, 5–10; Johnston, 2023, 9; Kossa, 2023, 9, 97; Puranen and Kopra, 2023, 248.

⁶⁵ Kossa, 2023, 115; Camilla T. N. Sørensen and Christopher Weidacher Hsiung, ‘The Role of Technology in China’s Arctic Engagement: A Means as Well as an End in Itself’, in *Arctic Yearbook 2021* (2021), 5–6.

⁶⁶ Buchanan, *Red Arctic: Russian Strategy under Putin* (Brookings Institution Press, 2023), 97; Martin Breum, *Cold Rush* (McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018), 111–12; Doshi et al., 2021, 25–26; Kossa, 2023, 7.

⁶⁷ Andersson, 2024, 11.

⁶⁸ Kossa, 2023, 8.

⁶⁹ *China’s Arctic Policy*, vol. 2018.; Doshi et al., 2021, 35.

⁷⁰ Puranen and Kopra, 2023, 240.

positioning.⁷¹ This duality is widely noted in the literature, yet relatively few studies systematically examine how such discursive differences operate within concrete policy texts.

Technological investment is often understood as a component of long-term strategies aimed at securing legitimacy, influence, and access. Initiatives such as Arctic Connect, a proposed subsea communication cable along the NSR, and Chinese investments in LNG, infrastructure illustrate the interdependence of technology, infrastructure, and governance.⁷² Plans to expand icebreaker fleets, including the potential deployment of nuclear-powered vessels, further underscore the strategic framing of Arctic engagement.⁷³

Since the Polar Silk Road was incorporated into the BRI in 2017, Chinese state-owned enterprises have expanded their participation in Arctic initiatives. Such investments are widely interpreted as elements of long-term strategic positioning, despite their formal presentation as commercial or scientific undertakings.⁷⁴ Arctic science likewise operates as a geopolitical instrument, facilitating access and influence within a region increasingly framed as a strategic maritime frontier.⁷⁵

Scholars interpret the *China's Arctic Policy* itself as a strategic response and clarification to earlier criticism. Prior to its publication, the concept of China as a 'near-Arctic state' attracted significant scepticism. As Brady notes, China has never issued an official policy strategy concerning regions beyond its immediate geographical sphere.⁷⁶

Puranen and Kopra further argue that scientific cooperation has, in some cases, functioned as a cover for projects with clear dual-use purposes, linking this practise to China's broader strategy of "military-civil fusion". This perspective reinforces a broader tendency in the literature to interpret Arctic science as embedded within national security structures rather than as politically neutral activity.⁷⁷

While multidisciplinary Arctic observation initiatives are officially presented as supporting environmental protection and rational planning, they also serve broader strategic purposes. In the Arctic context, sustained military presence can be enabled indirectly through civil-military integration: scientific expeditions generate logistical experience, infrastructure, and data that support long-range power projection without overt militarisation.⁷⁸ Although these dual-use dynamics are widely acknowledged, systemic analysis of how they are legitimised within policy discourse remains limited.

⁷¹ Doshi et al., 2021, 1–3.

⁷² Sörensen and Weidacher Hsiung, 2021, 1–4,6–9, 12.

⁷³ Kossa, 2023, 93.

⁷⁴ Puranen and Kopra, 2023, 245–46.

⁷⁵ Andersson, 2021, 5–6.

⁷⁶ Brady, 2017, 222, 226.

⁷⁷ Puranen and Kopra, 2023, 247.

⁷⁸ Xiao, 2020, 165–66.

1.2.4. Debates on Soft power

This thesis builds on Nye's concept of soft power but treats it as an analytical rather than prescriptive concept, focusing on how it operates within specific political contexts.⁷⁹ As Nye states, power depends on the context in which the relationship exists.⁸⁰ He continues "Power is the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one wants and that can be accomplished by attraction as well as coercion or payments".⁸¹ Chinese academic engagement with the concept of soft power began in 1993 but expanded markedly after the 2001 launch of 'going global' strategy, when President Hu Jintao foregrounded cultural promotion as a strategic priority.⁸² More needed to be invested in soft power. When a country's hard power grows, it can frighten the neighbours and partners, and therefore it should soften its image with attraction. And in 2014, Xi Jinping stressed the need for China to emphasise its soft power.⁸³ The concept is incorporated into the new 'China Dream' discourse launched by Xi Jinping.⁸⁴ Soft sources of power, culture, values and diplomacy, are part of what makes a great power.⁸⁵ In the Arctic context, soft power assumes a distinct configuration, rather than relying on cultural appeal, it is predominantly exercised through scientific authority and the provision of diplomatic reassurance as key modalities of influence.

Since China declared that peaceful development would be the cornerstone of its foreign policy, its public diplomacy has adapted a new mission, promoting the idea that China poses no threat to other nations. Through diplomatic efforts, China continues to reinforce the principle of the peaceful development as a central tenet of its international image.⁸⁶

The components of Chinese soft power encompass, according to Kurlantzick, not only popular culture and public diplomacy, but also coercive economic and diplomatic instruments such as foreign aid, investment and active participation in multilateral organisations. However, official Chinese discourse

⁷⁹ Nye, 2009, 5–11.

⁸⁰ Ibid.: 2.

⁸¹ Joseph S. Nye, 'Foreword', in *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: China's Campaign for Hearts and Minds*, ed. Kingsley Edney et al. (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), xviii, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315208671>.

⁸² Kingsley Edney et al., 'Introduction', in *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: China's Campaign for Hearts and Minds*, ed. Kingsley Edney et al. (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 2, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315208671>.

⁸³ Nye, 2020, xx.

⁸⁴ Edney et al., 2020, 3.

⁸⁵ Suisheng Zhao, 'Projection of China's Soft Power in the New Century, Reconstruction of the Traditional Chinese World Order', in *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: China's Campaign for Hearts and Minds*, ed. Kingsley Edney et al. (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 25, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315208671>.

⁸⁶ Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World* (Yale university press, 2007), 62.

tends to frame soft power solely in terms of cultural elements.⁸⁷ Brady analyses how China leverages political influence to advance its interest states; "...officially embraced Joseph Nye's theory of soft power, using it both as a justification and a new euphemism, for the Chinese government's expanded and revised overseas Chinese and foreigner management techniques and propaganda offensive."⁸⁸

The prevailing literature tends to treat soft power either as a normative resource or as an auxiliary instrument to material power. By contrast, this thesis conceptualises soft power as a systemic mechanism whose effects emerge through interactions across global, regional, and bilateral/multilateral levels. In doing so, it contributes a multilevel analytical perspective that bridges discourse, governance, and strategic practice.

1.2.4.1. Criticism towards soft power

Several scholars question the applicability and effectiveness of soft power. Li argues that Nye's concept was rooted in US post-Cold War dominance and has since then lost appeal, suggesting that China could revitalise by offering an alternative development and governance model.⁸⁹ Wilson introduces the concept of smart power, emphasising the strategic integration of hard and soft power to achieve sustainable influence.⁹⁰

In *The problem with soft power*, Seymor critiques soft power for being politically difficult to prioritise, as its effects are indirect, slow and hard to measure. Unlike hard power, which produces visible outcomes, soft power operates through perceptions and attitudes, creating a mismatch between political incentives and long-term influence building.⁹¹ The critique is directly relevant to the question of whether Chinese soft power in the Arctic functions as a means or an end, since its indirect and elite-targeted nature complicates assessments of its actual impact.

1.3. Theoretical Framework

This thesis adopts a combined theoretical framework drawing on Bacchi's WPR approach and systems theory to analyse *China's Arctic Policy*. The framework is designed to capture both how meaning and legitimacy are discursively constructed in policy texts and how these constructions operate within a broader, multi-level strategic context.

⁸⁷ Zhan Zhang, 'The Dilemma of China's Soft Power in Europe', in *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: China's Campaign for Hearts and Minds*, ed. Kingsley Edney et al. (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 156, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315208671>.

⁸⁸ Anne-Marie Brady, *Magic Weapons: China's Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping*, 2017 (2017): 5, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/magic-weapons-chinas-political-influence-activities-under-xi-jinping>.

⁸⁹ Eric X. Li, 'The Rise and Fall of Soft Power', *Foreign Policy* 2018 (August 2018), <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/20/the-rise-and-fall-of-soft-power/>.

⁹⁰ Ernst J Wilson, 'Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 2008, no. Vo. 616 (2008): 110–24.

⁹¹ Margret Seymor, *The Problem with Soft Power*, 2020, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/09/the-problem-with-soft-power/>.

Rather than treating discourse and structure as separate analytical domains, the framework conceptualises them as mutually constitutive. WPR enables an examination of how problems, responsibilities, and solutions are represented and normalised through policy discourse, while systems theory situates these representations within a dynamic environment characterised by interaction across global, regional, and bilateral/ multilateral levels.

By integrating these perspectives, the framework allows the analysis to move beyond describing policy narratives toward interpreting how soft power operates as a strategic resource within the Arctic political system. The following sections outline the two approaches and clarify how they are combined methodically in the subsequently analysis.

1.3.1. Systems Theory and Multi-Level Interaction

Systems theory provides a framework for understanding how political phenomena consists of interconnected and dynamic subsystems. Instead of viewing actions as isolated events, it highlights how they form part of larger structures that evolve over time.⁹² This perspective is particularly relevant for analysing China's Arctic engagement, which spans scientific research, economic initiatives, diplomacy and governance.

A central concept in systems theory is hierarchical and interconnected levels. Each level, in this thesis global, regional and bilateral/ multilateral, should not be interpreted as purely geographical. Each level possesses its own functions, reflecting the structure inherent in all systems. Higher levels tend to regulate or guide lower levels, while lower levels generate information and outcomes that feed into an reshape higher-levels strategies.⁹³ This allows us to identify how China positions itself simultaneously within multiple arenas.

Within systems theory, interfaces are structured points of interaction across system boundaries.⁹⁴ In the Arctic, scientific cooperation, shipping routes, and diplomatic forums function as interfaces that enable China to participate in Arctic governance without formally belonging to the Arctic system. Through sustained engagement at these interfaces, China incrementally reshapes boundaries of legitimacy, and inclusion, illustrating how soft power operates as a system-level mechanism rather than a purely normative force.

In this thesis, systems theory is operationalised through three analytical concepts: levels, interfaces and systemic functions. The analysis distinguishes between global, regional and bilateral/ multilateral levels to examine how China positions itself across arenas. Scientific cooperation, shipping routes and governance forums are analysed as interfaces through which China gains access and legitimacy. Soft

⁹² Oscar Öquist, *Systemteori i Praktiken: Konsten Att Lösa Problem Och Nå Resultat*, Femte upplagan (Gothia kompetens, 2024), 9.

⁹³ Ibid.: 11–12.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

power is analysed as a systemic function that support legitimacy, stability and long-term influence within China's broader strategic system. These concepts guide how empirical material is interpreted in the analysis.

1.3.2. From Mechanistic to Dynamic Systems Thinking

Classic systems theory relied on static, mechanistic models, assuming stable structures and predictable outcomes. Contemporary systems theory, in contrast, views systems as open, dynamic, and adaptive. Open systems exchange information, resources, and norms with their environment, making them responsive but also unpredictable. The strength of systems theory lies in its ability to explain how living systems evolve and renew themselves through interaction with their environment.⁹⁵

Applying this distinction to China's Arctic strategy highlights the importance of change over time, rather than fixed intentions. Scientific research, shipping initiatives, and governance activities are not merely discrete actions, they evolve as China interacts with regional institutions, Arctic states and global governance frameworks. This dynamic perspective avoids deterministic interpretation of China's strategy, situating China's actions within processes of co-evolution, where China both shapes and is shaped by the Arctic system.

1.3.3. Toward a circular and evolutionary understanding of systems

Contemporary systems theory rejects linear cause-effect thinking, emphasising circularity, interdependence and long-term evolution.⁹⁶ Mele et al. distinguish between open, closed and isolated systems; in social and geopolitical contexts, the relevant units are almost always open systems, entities that continuously exchange information, resources, and meaning with their environments. From this perspective, systems are not static containers but networks of interlinked components whose boundaries shift as they interact with other systems.⁹⁷ Because systems adapt by absorbing new elements and reorganising internally, the whole becomes more than the sum of its parts. Each system is simultaneously a subsystem of a larger configuration and a container for its own subsystems; multilevel interaction is therefore inherent rather than exceptional. Systems theory offers not only an analytical vocabulary, but also a worldview for studying complexity, interdependence and emergent behaviour. In geopolitics, systems approach explores how spatial, technological and sociocultural conditions shape political dynamics across levels of organisation.⁹⁸ Rather than viewing the world as affixed hierarchy, modern systems theorist reveal a functionally differentiated global society in which domains such as economy,

⁹⁵ Öquist, 2024, 25–27.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 24.

⁹⁷ Cristina Mele, Jacqueline Pels, and Francesco Polese, 'A Brief Review of Systems Theories and Their Managerial Applications', *Service Science* 2010 (2010): 129.

⁹⁸ Lars Skyttner, *General Systems Theory: Problems, Perspectives, Practice*, 2nd ed (World Scientific Publishing Co Pte Ltd, 2014), 54, 67–68, 118, 156–60.

law, science and politics operate autonomously yet remain mutually interdependent. Global order thus emerges from communication flows within and across system, not from a single central authority.⁹⁹

Within international relations, systems theory provides a multi-level analytical framework and scholars like Buzan, from the English School tradition, apply systems theory at the global level to understand how systematic factors shape political and world order. Different levels interact and shape the global order, and systems theory can be seen as a bridge between traditional International Relations theories and a more holistic understanding of the global world.¹⁰⁰

1.3.4. Systems Theory and Soft Power

Soft power is often conceptualised as an attractive or benign form of influence.¹⁰¹ Systems theory allow us to understand soft power differently: as a functional subsystem that interacts with economic, political, and strategic subsystems. Within China's Arctic engagement, soft power initiatives, scientific cooperation, environmental research, participation in governance forums, are not separate from strategic interest. Instead, they form essential components of a larger system aimed at securing long-term influence, legitimacy and access.

Through this lens, soft power becomes both:

- A means: supporting strategic objectives such as resource access, shipping security and regional presence, and
- An end: enhancing China's legitimacy and identity as a responsible actor.

Systems theory therefore helps uncover how soft power initiatives at different levels reinforce one another within China's broader strategic architecture.

1.3.5. Linking Systems Theory to WPR

While systems theory provides a structural understanding of interconnected levels, Bacchi's WPR approach focuses on how problems are represented in policy and how these representations shape actions. Together, they offer complementary theoretical perspectives:

- WPR identifies how China constructs the Arctic as a space of cooperation, science and global responsibility.
- Systems theory shows how these representations function across multiple systemic levels and contributes to China's long-term strategic positioning.

⁹⁹ Mathias Albert, '“Modern” Systems Theory', in *New Systems Theories of World Politics*, by Mathias Albert et al., Palgrave Studies in International Relations Series (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 56–57.

¹⁰⁰ Barry Buzan, 'The English School as a New Systems Theory of World Politics', in *New Systems Theories of World Politics*, by Mathias Albert et al., Palgrave Studies in International Relations Series (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 198–99.

¹⁰¹ Nye, 2009, 5–11.

In the practical analysis, the two perspectives are integrated sequentially. WPR is first used to identify how problems, responsibilities, and forms of legitimacy are constructed in *China's Arctic Policy*. These discursive representations are then situated within the systems-theoretical level structure, which makes it possible to analyse how they function as mechanism within a broader, multi-level system. This analytical ordering clarifies how meaning-making processes identified through WPR are operationalised within a system-theoretical interpretation of interaction and long-term positioning. Together, these approaches enable an analysis of both discursive construction and structural implications and how this discourse operates across levels.

A purely WPR-based analysis would interpret China's emphasis on scientific cooperation as a discursive strategy to construct the Arctic as a depoliticised space and legitimise China's presence. However, without systems theory, the analysis would not capture how this narrative functions as a systemic interface that enables long-term access, information flows and strategic positioning across levels. Conversely, a systems-theoretical analysis alone would identify cooperation as a functional mechanism within China's broader strategic architecture, but it would overlook how the very definition of 'cooperation' is discursively produced and normalised through policy texts. The combined approach therefore reveals both how meaning is constructed and how these meanings operate as mechanisms within a multi-level system. Systems theory conceptualises how interaction across levels generate legitimacy, access, and long-term influence within complex political systems.

1.3.6. Reflections on Theoretical Framework

In sum, systems theory enables an understanding of China's Arctic engagement as a multilayered and interconnected strategic system, while the WPR methodological approach reveals the discursive mechanism through which China legitimises its presence. The combined theoretical framework makes it possible to analyse whether Chinese soft power in the Arctic functions primarily as a means to achieve strategic objectives, or as an end in itself aimed at achieving recognition, legitimacy and influence. There is, however, a theoretical tension between the two approaches. This thesis addresses this tension by adopting an analytical rather than ontological integration. WPR is employed to illuminate how meanings and problem representation are produced, while systems theory provides the structural lens through which these meanings circulate, interact, and acquire functional significance across levels. The combination therefore rests on a division labour between the approaches rather than a full theoretical synthesis.

This clarification strengthens the coherence of the framework by specifying what is gained through the combination: the analysis can trace how discourse construction identified through WPR not only shape China's Arctic narrative but also operate as functional components within a multilevel system.

1.4. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological and epistemological foundations of the study. It explains the analytical approach, material selection, ethical considerations, delimitations and the analytical models used to interpret the empirical material.

1.4.1. Approach and materials

The methodological approach for this study is interpretive, as it is well suited for analysing how political actors construct meaning through policy discourse. This approach enables an examination of how language and discourse shape perceptions of reality, which is central to this study. It also facilitates an understanding of how soft power is portrayed as legitimate and non-threatening, and how discourse shapes perceptions of China's actions. Since the study is based on a policy text, it is essential to interpret the function and content of the language, focusing on discursive practice rather than an empirical chain of events. The intention is to examine how soft power operates within a broader strategic system, which requires understanding of how different components relate to one another instead of explaining individual factors in isolation. Rather than establishing causal explanations, the aim is to examine how the policy constructs problems, solutions and legitimate roles and how these representations shape broader strategic narratives.¹⁰² A challenge with interpretive approach is the difficulty of reproducing results, as it involves a subjective interpretation in which the researcher and her pre-understanding play a significant role.¹⁰³

The primary empirical material is China's official *Arctic Policy* from 2018, published by the State Council Information Office in English. This document is suitable for interpretive analysis because it communicates China's intended narrative externally and contains explicit discursive framings of the Arctic, its governance and China's own role. To support interpretation, the study draws extensively on relevant academic literature to provide contextual depth, which justifies the relatively comprehensive literature review and strengthens the overall analysis.

To analyse the policy, the study combines:

1. Bacchi's "What's the Problem Represented to Be?" approach¹⁰⁴

WPR is used to uncover:

- How the policy constructs the 'problem' of the Arctic,
- What assumptions underpin these representations,

¹⁰² Jonathon Moses, *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research*, 3rd ed, with Torbjørn L. Knutsen (Macmillan Education UK, 2019), 153, 164–66, 200–201.

¹⁰³ Peter Esaiasson et al., *Metodpraktikan: Konsten Att Studera Människor, Organisationer Och Samhällen*, Sjätte upplagan (Norstedts Juridik, 2024), 51.

¹⁰⁴ Bacchi, 2014, 2–21.

- Which aspects are silenced or left unproblematic,
- What effects these representations produce.

WPR focuses on linguistic meaning-making and enabling an examination of how China legitimises its presence in the Arctic by constructing the region as one characterised by cooperation, research and stability.¹⁰⁵

2. Qualitative text analysis

A close reading of *China's Arctic Policy* and other relevant literature complement WPR by identifying recurring themes, silences, and discursive patterns. The two approaches reinforce each other, WPR provides the structure, while qualitative analysis capture nuance and interpretation.

3. Systems theory as a secondary analytical lens

Following the WPR analysis, systems theory is employed to interpret how the identified representations operate across global, regional and bilateral/multilateral dimensions. This refers not to geographical distinctions but to functional systemic contexts. Systems theory does not inform the coding of the material; rather it serves as an analytical framework for interpreting the findings. This combination constitutes a form of methodological triangulation, thereby enhancing the study's validity by approaching the material from complementary analytical perspectives.

In practise, the WPR analysis was conducted through repeated close readings of the policy document. Relevant passages were identified and organised into thematic categories such as cooperation, legitimacy, responsibility, development, and security. These themes were subsequently analysed in relation to the selected WPR questions. The process was qualitative and interpretive yet applied systematically across the entire document.

1.4.2. Ethical Considerations

In this study there is no major ethical concerns foreseen.¹⁰⁶ Key ethical considerations relate to reflexivity. As a researcher situated within a Western academic context, there is a risk of interpreting Chinese policy discourse through ethnocentric assumptions.¹⁰⁷ To mitigate this, the analysis explicitly focuses on linguistic representations rather than normative judgements about China's behaviour. All interpretations are grounded in the text itself and supported by secondary literature.

Another consideration concerns the use of a translated policy document. *China's Arctic Policy* is officially published in English for international audience. Translation may involve subtle shifts in

¹⁰⁵ Bacchi, 2014, 2–21.

¹⁰⁶ 'God forskningsed (2017)', text, 12–14, 23, accessed 2 September 2025, <https://www.vr.se/analys/rapporter/vara-rapporter/2017-08-29-god-forskningssed-2017.html>.

¹⁰⁷ Marilys Guillemin and Lynn Gillam, 'Ethics, Reflexivity, and "Ethically Important Moments" in Research', *Qualitative Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (2004): 262–63, 275, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360>.

meaning, but given the policy's communicative purpose, the English version is analytically valid. However, key concepts such as 'win-win cooperation' or 'community of shared future' may carry different meanings in Chinese political discourse than in English. This may affect how representations of legitimacy and responsibility are interpreted and is therefore acknowledged as limitation.

1.4.2.1. *Artificial Intelligence*

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools (CoPilot & ChatGPT) were used solely for linguistic refinement. They did not generate data, alter sources, conduct analysis, or shape theoretical or methodological choices. All interpretations and conclusions are the author's own, and the use of AI adhered to established standards for responsible and transparent research practice.¹⁰⁸

1.4.3. Delimitations

The study is subject to the following delimitations:

- Analysis focuses exclusively on the *China's Arctic Policy*,¹⁰⁹ although other strategic documents exist.
- China refers to polar regions more broadly, however the study focuses on the Arctic, and not the Antarctic.
- China's activity in Sweden is not investigated, as the ESRANGE facility is no longer in use by China, and its present location of operation in Sweden is unconfirmed.
- Systems theory is applied only to the findings of the WPR analysis, not directly to the policy text.
- The study does not aim to assess whether China's representations are "true" or "accurate", only how they are constructed and their potential effects.

Analysing a single policy document does not aim to capture policy evolution over time, but rather to examine how meaning and legitimacy are produced within an authoritative discourse moment. The value of this approach lies not in representativeness, but in analytical depth, enabling a close examination of silences, assumptions, and effects that might be diluted in a broader corpus.

These delimitations ensure analytical coherence and maintain focus on the research questions. Concretely, each WPR findings are examined in relation to (1) which level it primarily operates on (global, regional or bilateral/multilateral), and (2) what systemic function it performs, such as legitimacy-building, access or influence.

¹⁰⁸ 'God forskningsssed (2017)'.

¹⁰⁹ The *China's Arctic Policy* lacks pagination, and further references will be made to chapters and paragraphs.

1.4.4. Analytical Models

Bacchi's WPR framework is the primary analytical method, consisting of six questions. Selected questions are used to enhance analytical depth; not all questions are necessary, but exclusions are justified.

WPR questions used:¹¹⁰

1. What's the problem?

Identifies how China's actions in the Arctic are framed as solutions to a perceived 'problem'.

2. What presuppositions or assumptions underly this representation of the 'problem'?

Examines underlying assumptions, e.g., that climate change constitutes the core problem.

4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?

This question is highly relevant to this study. It highlights absences with implications for soft power and security.

5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?

Explores consequences of the representation, who benefits, and who might be framed.

Two WPR questions are excluded:

3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?

Excluded because it requires a historical genealogical method beyond the scope of this study.

6. How/where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defined? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

Excluded as a dissemination mechanism fall outside the core research questions.

Although 'audience' is not a key concept in Bacchi's framework, it can be considered implicitly relevant in relation to effects, silences and dissemination. WPR can support an analysis of how different groups or audiences are affected by and participate in the construction of political problems. To further clarify and strengthen the reception of the policy, the study will include an additional question beyond Bacchi's framework:

7. Who is the intended audience of this policy?

Identifies internal and external audiences, showing how the policy communicates both globally and domestically.

¹¹⁰ Bacchi, 2014, 2-21.

1.4.4.1. Additional Analytical Question, linking WPR with systems theory

As the WPR framework does not incorporate a level-of- analysis dimension and given the central role of systems theory in this thesis, an additional question is required. This question examines whether *China's Arctic policy* can be understood as operating across distinct systemic levels.

How do the identified representations function across global, regional and bilateral/multilateral levels?

The question is not part of Bacchi's WPR model, and it should not be seen as a research question. Instead, it acts as a bridging question designed to link findings of the WPR analysis to systems theory. By treating it as a separate analytical step rather than as a modification of WPR, methodological clarity is maintained. Therefore, this multilevel question is addressed *after* the WPR results, in a dedicated section of the Analysis and findings.

1.4.4.2. Systems Theory as Secondary Interpretive Framework

Systems theory contextualises WPR findings across interconnected levels.¹¹¹ The theory enables an understanding of how China's discursive framings operate at:

- Global: norms, legitimacy, global commons
- Regional: Arctic governance institutions, scientific networks
- Bilateral/multilateral: cooperation with Russia, Nordic research partnerships, maritime routes.

Systems theory is not used to code but as an interpretive lens in the second analytical stage. This sequential design strengthens the scientific robustness of the study by clarifying boundaries between method and theory. WPR is used strictly as a method of discursive analysis, while systems theory operates as a secondary interpretive lens applied to findings, not to the empirical material itself.

1.4.4.3. Interpreting WPR findings through systems theory

While Bacchi's WPR framework enables a systemic analysis of how problems are represented, which assumptions underpin these representations, and which silences are produced, it does not provide analytical tools for examining how these representations operate across different levels. For this reason, systems theory is introduced as a secondary interpretive framework applied after the WPR analysis. In practice, this means that the findings generated through WPR, such as the framing of the Arctic as a space of cooperation, the construction of China as a responsible stakeholder, and the silencing of strategic and security concerns, are subsequently analysed by situating them across three analytical levels: global, regional, and bilateral/multilateral. By way of illustration, a potential finding, such as the framing of the Arctic as a global concern, may be interpreted, through the lens of systems theory, as operating primarily at the global dimension. This may, in turn, have implications for China's

¹¹¹ Global, regional and bilateral/multilateral are mentioned as different levels in the Arctic Policy

participation in regional institutions and bilateral cooperations. In this way, systems theory allows the analysis to move beyond identifying representations to explaining how these representations function within a dynamic and interconnected strategic system. This sequential analytical design ensures methodological clarity: WPR structures the identification of discursive patterns in the policy text, while systems theory provides the conceptual framework for interpreting the broader strategic implications of these findings.

The figures 1 and 2 illustrate the sequential analytical design of the study. First Bacchi’s WPR framework is applied to *China’s Arctic Policy* to identify key problem representations, underlying assumptions, silences and effects. Second, these findings are interpreted through systems theory by situating them across three interconnected analytical levels. The design clarifies how discursive construction identified through WPR are understood as functioning within a broader strategic system.

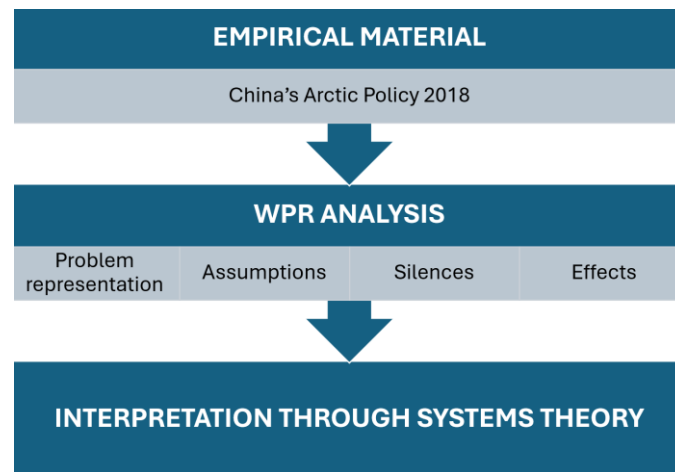


Figure 1 Bacchi’s WPR framework is applied to *China’s Arctic Policy* to identify key problem representations, underlying assumptions, silences and effects

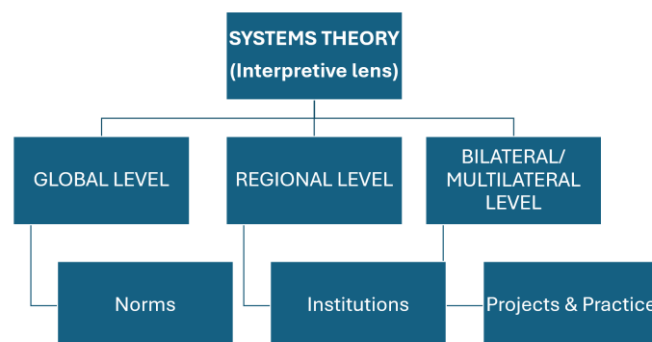


Figure 2 The findings are interpreted through systems theory by situating them across three interconnected analytical levels.

1.4.4.4. *Criticism to chosen approach*

Other methods, e.g., narrative analysis, could examine China's self-representation as a 'near-Arctic state'.¹¹² A conceptual-historical approach could track the evolution of this concept over time.¹¹³ Analysing the concept of 'near-Arctic state' would have been highly interesting, particular in terms of how expectations and visions of the future influence concepts. This is relevant given the term's controversial status, as global political figures such as the then US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo have expressed strong opinions about China's self-ascribed role.¹¹⁴ WPR is preferred as it is directly aligned with governance and power, fitting the research questions.

1.4.4.5. *Sources and Sources criticism*

When using the WPR approach, it is important for the researcher to be aware of its own position and preunderstanding.¹¹⁵ The process requires openness and transparency, where the researcher must act reflexively in relation to their role and position that may hold.¹¹⁶ Pre-understanding aids critical reflection on omission and silences in the policy.¹¹⁷ In qualitative research, reflexivity is essential, it means that the researcher actively engages in reflection and critically examines the entire research process where preunderstanding plays a significant role.¹¹⁸ Although nuances may be lost in a translated version of the Arctic Policy, this version is intended to communicate China's message internationally. Additional literature will be examined to better understand the broader context surrounding China and the Arctic. In doing so it is important to consider the principles of authenticity, independence, simultaneously and bias.¹¹⁹ Secondary literature is used for context, but the core analysis is anchored in the primary text.

This delimitation has important implications. By analysing only one policy document, the study captures how China seeks to present its Arctic engagement, but not how this discourse evolves over time or how it is implemented in practice. Other materials, such as speeches or internal documents, could have related contradictions or shifts. The findings should therefore be understood as an analysis of discursive positioning rather than of actual behaviour.

¹¹² Alexa Robertson, 'Narrativanalys', in *Textens Mening Och Makt: Metodbok i Samhällsvetenskaplig Text- Och Diskursanalys*, Fjärde [omarbetade och aktualiserade] upplagan, ed. Kristina Boréus and Göran Bergström (Studentlitteratur, 2018), 221.

¹¹³ Jan Ifversen, 'About Key Concepts and How to Study Them', *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6, no. 1 (2011): 75–79, 82, <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2011.060104>.

¹¹⁴ Marc Lanteigne, 'Great Powers in the Arctic: Changing Perspectives', *Global Asia* Vol 15 2020, no. No.4 (2020), https://www.globalasia.org/v15no4/cover/great-powers-in-the-arctic-changing-perspectives_marc-lanteigne; Michael R. Pompeo, 'Looking North: Sharpening America's Arctic Focus', Arctic Council, Rovaniemi, 6 May 2019, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/looking-north-sharpening-americas-arctic-focus/>.

¹¹⁵ Carol Bacchi, 'Why Study Problematizations? Making Politics Visible'. *Open Journal of Political Science* 02, no. 01 (2012) 2012, 7. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2012.21001>.

¹¹⁶ 'Thinking about Ethical Consideration', in *Practitioner Research at Doctoral Level: Developing Coherent Research Methodologies* (Routledge, 2011), 2011:47–57.

¹¹⁷ Moses, 2019, 186.

¹¹⁸ Guillemin and Gillam, 2004, 262–63, 275.

¹¹⁹ Esaiasson et al., 2024, 135–43.

1.5. Outline of the thesis

Chapter 1 presents the research problem, research questions, and the theoretical and methodological choices of the study. It explains why WPR, and systems theory are combined and how they guide the analysis. Chapter 2 contains the analysis. It first applies the WPR approach to *China's Arctic Policy* and then interprets the findings through a systems theoretical lens across global, regional and bilateral/multilateral levels. Chapter 3 discusses the findings in relation to the research questions and relevant literature, highlighting how Chinese soft power in the Arctic functions both as a means and an end. Chapter 4 concludes the thesis by summarising the main findings and reflecting on the study's contribution and limitations.

2. Analysis and findings

In line with the sequential methodological design outlined above, the analysis proceeds in two steps. The section first presents the findings from the WPR analysis of China's Arctic Policy, after which these findings are viewed through a systems-theoretical lens.

2.1. WPR analysis

1. What's the problem?

In *China's Arctic Policy*, the 'problem' is primarily represented as a set of global challenges requiring cooperative governance. Environmental change, scientific uncertainty, and insufficiently inclusive governance frameworks are framed as the central issues. Environmental concerns form the main framework through which China justifies its engagement in the Arctic, situating the region within a broader narrative of global responsibility to preserve an ecologically sensitive area. "China is actively engaged in improving the Arctic environment... respects the environmental protection laws and regulations of the Arctic States and calls for stronger environmental management and cooperation."¹²⁰ This representation constructs the Arctic as a technocratic governance problem rather than a geopolitical arena, thereby legitimising China's participation while marginalising strategic contestation. "The Arctic situation now goes beyond its original inter-Arctic States or regional nature, having a vital bearing on the interests of States outside the region and the interests of the international community as a whole..."¹²¹ China is positioned as a responsible actor seeking to safeguard environmental stability, promote sustainable development, and strengthen international cooperation. A governance deficit is subtly invoked, as existing mechanisms are portrayed as inadequate because they do not fully reflect the interest of 'non-Arctic states': "There is no single comprehensive treaty for all Arctic affairs."¹²² Thus, the problem is not Arctic militarisation or geopolitical competition, but as insufficient global participation and fragmented governance. This perspective implies that 'non-Arctic states' hold legitimate rights and responsibilities in the region. Environmental change is framed not only as a concern, but also as a catalyst for economic opportunity.

2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?

Several assumptions underpin China's framing of the Arctic.

- a) The Arctic is a global common

The policy assumes that developments in the Arctic affect all states, thereby justifying non-Arctic participation. China explicitly frames itself as a legitimate stakeholder based on

¹²⁰ *China's Arctic Policy*, 2. Protecting the eco-environment of the Arctic and addressing climate change, section, (1) Protecting the Environment.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*: Foreword.

¹²² *Ibid.*: I. The Arctic Situation and Recent Changes.

geographic proximity and environmental impact: “China is an important stakeholder in Arctic affairs. Geographically, China is a ‘near-Arctic State’ ... the Arctic and their changes have a direct impact on China’s climate system...”¹²³ Environmental protection and resources development are compatible objectives: “...all stakeholders — including States from both inside and outside the Arctic... are encouraged to take part in cooperation on climate change, scientific research, environmental protection, shipping route development, resource utilization ...”¹²⁴

b) Multilateralism as the legitimate governance mode

China assumes that Arctic governance should be inclusive and global rather than regionally exclusive: “China is committed to ... building and maintaining a just, reasonable and well-organized Arctic governance system.”¹²⁵

c) China as a responsible and capable actor

The policy presupposes that China has both the capacity and responsibility to contribute: “China, as a responsible major country, is ready to cooperate with all relevant parties ... build a community with a shared future for mankind and contribute to peace, stability and sustainable development ...”¹²⁶

”A champion for the development of a community with a shared future for mankind, China is an active participant, builder and contributor in Arctic affairs who has spared no efforts to contribute its wisdom to the development ...”¹²⁷

3. -

4. **What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences?**

A central finding is what the policy does not address. The Arctic is portrayed primarily as a space of scientific cooperation, environmental protection, and economic development, while its role as a site of strategic rivalry is left unproblematic.

a) Strategic and military dimension are absent

The policy omits China’s interest in dual-use technologies, civil-military fusion, and the strategic value of Arctic Sea routes.

b) China’s ambition as a ‘polar great power’

Despite being present in Chinese domestic discourse, ambitions to become a polar great power or frame the Arctic as a new strategic frontier are absent from the policy.

c) Geopolitical competition

¹²³ *China’s Arctic Policy*, II. China and the Arctic.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*: III. China’s Policy Goals and Basic Principles on the Arctic.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*: Conclusion.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*: Foreword.

The Arctic is described as a space of harmony rather than rivalry. The policy avoids discussing how China's growing presence might be perceived as a security concern by Arctic states, particularly in the context of intensifying great power competition.

d) Economic statecraft

Infrastructure investments, resource extraction, and technological capabilities are framed purely as cooperative and developmental. Broader economic and geopolitical motivations are downplayed.

These silences depoliticise China's Arctic engagement and present it as apolitical, scientific, and universally beneficial. In doing so, the policy constructs soft power as benign, while obscuring how it contributes to broader strategic positioning. However, it states "China calls for the peaceful utilization of the Arctic and commits itself to maintaining peace and stability, protecting lives and property, and ensuring the security of maritime trade, operations and transport in the region."¹²⁸

5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?

The policy produces both discursive and material effects.

a) Discursive effects

China's participation is normalised as part of global governance rather than framed as an external strategic interest. By emphasising shared challenges, China positions itself as a necessary and legitimate partner in Arctic affairs. This framing depoliticises strategic interests and presents China's engagement as technocratic rather than geopolitical, while reinforcing its image as a normative actor committed to international law and sustainability.

b) Material effects

The narrative legitimises investments in research stations, shipping routes and infrastructure by embedding them within a cooperative framework. This supports China's long-term access to resources, data and operational experience, tangibly strengthening its regional presence.

c) Governance effects

By advocating broader participation, the policy challenges the exclusivity of existing Arctic institutions and strengthens China's position in multilateral forums." As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China shoulders the important mission of jointly promoting peace and security in the Arctic."¹²⁹

¹²⁸ *China's Arctic Policy*, 5. Promoting peace and stability in the Arctic.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*: II. China and the Arctic.

In the terms of governance, by advocating for broader participation in Arctic affairs, China challenges existing institutions such as the Arctic Council, where it holds observer status. This may contribute to shifting power dynamics in regional governance.

“...China takes an active part in the international governance of the Arctic. China upholds the current Arctic governance system with the UN Charter and the UNCLOS as its core, plays a constructive part in the making, interpretation, application and development of international rules regarding the Arctic, and safeguards the common interests of all nations and the international community.”¹³⁰

Overall, these effects reinforce China’s soft power while enabling expansions of long-term influence without triggering overt geopolitical resistance. An alternative interpretation is that the policy’s cooperative framing is not primarily strategic but reflects a genuine preference for stability and predictability in a region where China lacks hard power. From this perspective, the emphasis on science and multilateralism may be understood as risk-avoidance rather than instrumental strategy. However, the consistency between discourse and material expansion suggests that the narrative also performs a strategic legitimising function.

6. -

7. Who is the intended audience of this policy?

The Arctic Policy addresses both internal and external audiences.

a) External audience

International actors are reassured that China is a peaceful, science-driven, and law-abiding participant. Arctic governance institutions are encouraged to accept China’s involvement as legitimate, while non-Arctic developing states may view China as a champion of inclusive governance. The policy also targets research institutions by emphasising China’s contribution to climate science and polar research.” China always gives top priority to resolving global environmental issues, earnestly fulfils its obligations under relevant treaties, and discharges its responsibility of environmental protection.”¹³¹“...commits itself to maintaining a peaceful, secure and stable Arctic order.”¹³² The policy also states the Arctic as a region belonging to the global common with a shared heritage: “...China will work with all other countries to build a community with a shared future for mankind in the Arctic region.”¹³³

There is also an implicit exhortation regarding how other states are expected to conduct themselves in relation to China. “‘Respect’ is the key basis for China’s participation in Arctic

¹³⁰ *China’s Arctic Policy*, 4. Participating Actively in Arctic governance and international cooperation.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*: 2. Protecting the eco-environment of the Arctic and addressing climate change, section, (1) Protecting the Environment.

¹³² *Ibid.*: IV. China’s Policies and Positions on Participating in Arctic Affairs.

¹³³ *Ibid.*: III. China’s Policy Goals and Basic Principles on the Arctic.

affairs. Respect should be reciprocal... as well as respect the rights and freedom of non-Arctic States to carry out activities in this region in accordance with the law and respect the overall interests of the international community in the Arctic.”¹³⁴

b) Internal audience

Domestically, the policy demonstrates that the leadership is securing future resources, technological advancement, and global prestige. It reinforces narratives of national rejuvenation and China’s role as a major power, while “...encourages its enterprises to participate in the infrastructure construction for these routes...”¹³⁵ “...Chinese scientists to carry out international academic exchanges and cooperation ... and encourages Chinese higher learning and research institutions to join the network of the University of the Arctic.”¹³⁶

The dual messaging supports both external legitimacy and internal political stability. China’s framing of the Arctic as a peaceful, and cooperative domain downplays the strategic dimensions of its engagement.

2.2. Concluding analytical observation

The findings suggest that China’s soft power strategy in the Arctic is only partially successful. While the policy constructs a coherent narrative of responsibility and cooperation, external scepticism towards China’s intentions persists. This limits the effectiveness of soft power in generating legitimacy, resulting in cooperation that is often conditional or cautious. The implication is that soft power functions both as a strategic tool and as an aspirational goal, rather than as fully consolidating influence.

2.3. Interpreting the Findings Through Systems Theory

This section applies systems theory to the WPR findings by analysing how identified representations function across global, regional and bilateral/multilateral levels.

China’s Arctic Policy demonstrates three interconnected levels of engagement: the global, regional and bilateral/multilateral level. Systems theory allows China’s discourse to be understood not as isolated statements, but as components of a dynamic system in which these levels mutually reinforce one another. China’s Arctic strategy thus emerges as a layered structure, where global narratives legitimise regional engagement, and bilateral and multilateral cooperation translates broader strategic claims into practice.

Viewed through systems-theoretical lens, China’s soft power in the Arctic appears as a product of interactions across these three levels. In the following section, the *China’s Arctic Policy* is used as

¹³⁴ *China’s Arctic Policy*, III. China’s Policy Goals and Basic Principles on the Arctic.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*: 3. Utilizing Arctic Resources in a Lawful and Rational Manner, (1) China’s participation in the development of Arctic shipping routes.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*: IV. China’s Policies and Positions on Participating in Arctic Affairs, 1. Deepening the exploration and understanding of the Arctic.

primary analytical lens to examine how the levels intersect and sustain China's overall approach to the Arctic.

2.3.1. Global level: Norm Construction and Legitimacy

At the global level, the Arctic is represented as a space defined by shared challenges and collective responsibility. By framing the region through themes such as climate change, environmental stewardship and the global commons, China's positions itself as a responsible international actor with legitimate standing in Arctic affairs. The Arctic is presented as a matter of concern of all humanity, as environmental changes in the region are portrayed as having global repercussions that require broad international cooperation.

Within this framing, China emphasises its commitment to global governance mechanism. The *Arctic Policy* highlights support for international cooperation and stresses China's participation in different negotiations." China advocates stronger international cooperation in maritime technology and a globally coordinated... under the International Maritime Organization framework. China takes an active part in negotiations ... calls for a legally binding international agreement."¹³⁷ Respect for international law, particularly the UN Charter and UNCLOS, is presented as the foundation for fair and sustainable Arctic governance." China upholds the current Arctic governance system with the UN Charter and the UNCLOS as its core..."¹³⁸

Through this global narrative, China not only underscores collective responsibility and knowledge-sharing but also asserts that 'non-Arctic states' have both the right and the obligation to participate in Arctic affairs. "China's policy goals on the Arctic are to understand, protect, develop and participate in the governance of the Arctic... to safeguard the common interests of all countries and the international community in the Arctic, and promote sustainable development of the Arctic."¹³⁹ Chinese participation in international scientific cooperation further facilitates integration into global governance frameworks, while simultaneously legitimising its broader engagement in the region. "...at the global level, China actively participates in the formulation of rules concerning the global environment, climate change, international maritime issues, and high seas fisheries management, and fulfils all its international obligations in accordance with the law."¹⁴⁰

This framing normalises China's Arctic presence by aligning it with widely accepted global norms.

At the global level, three mechanisms are particularly visible:

¹³⁷ *China's Arctic Policy*, 4. Participating Actively in Arctic governance and international cooperation.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*: III. China's Policy Goals and Basic Principles on the Arctic.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*: 4. Participating Actively in Arctic governance and international cooperation.

- **Universalisation**, whereby Arctic developments are presented as affecting all states, legitimising non-Arctic participation.
- **Norm alignment**, emphasising multilateralism, sustainability and peaceful cooperation, norms that carry wide international legitimacy.
- **Depoliticisation**, as geopolitical competition and strategic interest are downplayed.

Together, these representations establish a normative foundation that renders China's Arctic presence natural, apolitical, and internationally acceptable.

2.3.2. Regional level: Embedding in Institutions and Governance Structures

At the regional level, the global representations identified in the *Arctic Policy* are translated into China's efforts to embed China within existing Arctic governance structures. Here, the narrative of shared responsibility is adapted to the ecological and institutional realities of the Arctic. By emphasising environmental protection, scientific research, and sustainable development, China positions itself as a 'near-Arctic state' whose interest are directly affected by regional environmental change. The regional framing bridges global responsibility and concerns with regional needs, allowing China to argue that its presence is not external interference but a legitimate response to shared ecological risks.

China's regional engagement is visible through its role as an observer in the Arctic Council, which it recognises as the primary forum for addressing environmental and sustainable development issues. The policy expresses strong support for the Council's work and acknowledges its central role in Arctic governance, while simultaneously calling for enhanced cooperation, particularly in relation to Arctic shipping routes." ... highly values the Council's positive role in Arctic affairs and recognizes it as the main intergovernmental forum ..." ¹⁴¹ "... calls for stronger international cooperation on infrastructure construction and operation of the Arctic routes." ¹⁴² "At the regional level, China takes an active part in Arctic intergovernmental mechanisms." ¹⁴³

China also aligns itself with key agreements developed under the Arctic Council, such as those on search and rescue and international scientific cooperation, and participates in broader regional platforms, including the Arctic Science Ministerial.

China's discourse of cooperation, science and sustainability allows it to:

- Participate in Arctic Council working groups,
- Engage with scientific research networks,

¹⁴¹ *China's Arctic Policy*, 4. Participating Actively in Arctic governance and international cooperation.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*: 3. Utilizing Arctic Resources in a Lawful and Rational Manner, (1) China's participation in the development of Arctic shipping routes.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*: 4. Participating Actively in Arctic governance and international cooperation.

- Contribute to environmental monitoring,
- Support existing legal frameworks such as UNCLOS.

These activities reinforce the cooperative framing identified through the WPR analysis: presenting China as a constructive partner rather than a strategic competitor. The regional level thus functions as the practical arena where global narratives are operationalised.

Through regional institutional embeddedness, China gains:

- Access to scientific data,
- enhance scientific credibility,
- proximity to regional decision-making,
- and greater visibility within Arctic governance

At the regional level, global narratives are operationalised, allowing China to gain access to scientific data, enhance scientific credibility, increase proximity to regional decision-making, and strengthen its visibility within Arctic affairs.

2.3.3. Bilateral and Multilateral level: Material and Strategic Interfaces

At the bilateral and multilateral level, China's representations function as entry points for concrete cooperation with specific states and institutions. Bilateral agreements with Arctic states produce tangible outcomes, including scientific collaboration, infrastructure development, and resource access, while also building trust and demonstrating respect for national sovereignty.

China promotes cooperation across a wide range of Arctic-related fields, including scientific research, environmental protection, shipping routes and capacity building. It seeks to build partnerships between Arctic and 'non-Arctic states.' "Since 2013, China and Russia have been conducting dialogues on Arctic issues. In 2012, China and Iceland signed the Framework Agreement on Arctic Cooperation, which was the first intergovernmental agreement on Arctic issues between China and an Arctic State".¹⁴⁴ These initiatives anchor China's involvement in practical, mutually beneficial projects.

At the multilateral level, China reinforces its role through participation in collective frameworks such as the Arctic Council and other international platforms. Engagement in working groups, ministerial meetings strengthen the narrative of inclusivity and 'win-win' cooperation. China frames its approach around:

On the basis of the principles of 'respect, cooperation, win-win result and sustainability', China, as a responsible major country, is ready to cooperate with all relevant parties...

¹⁴⁴ *China's Arctic Policy*, 4. Participating Actively in Arctic governance and international cooperation.

the development of the Arctic, to address the challenges... jointly understand, protect, develop and participate in the governance of the Arctic, and advance Arctic-related cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, so as to build a community with a shared future for mankind and contribute to peace, stability and sustainable development in the Arctic.¹⁴⁵

Multilateralism thus normalises non-Arctic participation and gradually shifts governance dynamics towards broader international development. “At the bilateral and multilateral levels, China promotes practical cooperation in all fields...”¹⁴⁶

A key example is cooperation with Russia on the development of the ‘Ice Silk Road’ and the NSR. China’s involvement includes infrastructure assessments, scientific research, and technological support aimed at transforming the NSR into a reliable shipping corridor. If the concept succeeds, it can have great impact on the economic and social development in the Arctic and probably change the economic patterns and the global trade.¹⁴⁷ Scientific research plays a central role in this process, providing data on sea ice, meteorological conditions, and seabed characteristics. Russia has supported China’s Arctic ambitions by offering cold-weather training and naval drills,¹⁴⁸ and China has evaluated Russian ports along the NSR to improve infrastructure and operational capacity.¹⁴⁹ The NSR needs further development, including improved infrastructure and real-time meteorological information in order to function as a more regularised shipping route.¹⁵⁰ Although framed as technical cooperation, these projects deepen China’s embeddedness in regional networks and gradually expand its influence.

While framed as civilian and cooperative, such activities also carry potential dual-use implications. Scientific expeditions, satellite installations, and autonomous monitoring technologies enhance navigational and operational capacities that may serve both civilian and strategic purposes. These developments illustrate how soft power discourse legitimises material engagement while remaining consistent with the benign framing articulated at the global and regional levels.

Examples of bilateral and multilateral cooperation include:

- Collaboration with Russia on the NSR, energy projects, and the ‘Polar Silk Road’.
- Partnerships with Nordic states on scientific research stations and joint expedition.
- Participation in multilateral forums that address environmental and maritime issues.

¹⁴⁵ *China’s Arctic Policy*, Conclusion.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: 4. Participating Actively in Arctic governance and international cooperation.

¹⁴⁷ Doshi et al., 2021, 35–36. In *China’s Arctic Policy* the term Polar Silk Road is used. Doshi et al. use Ice Silk Road.

¹⁴⁸ Kossa, 2023, 127.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*: 125.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*: 91.

On this level, soft power intersects with material interests. The cooperative discourse legitimises:

- Infrastructure investments,
- Long-term scientific presence,
- Joint technology development
- And expanded maritime activities

Together this engagement provides China with concrete strategic benefits, while remaining consistent with the benign framing articulated globally and regionally.

At this level, soft power intersects with material capabilities. Cooperative narratives legitimise infrastructure investments, long-term scientific presence, joint technological development, and expanded maritime activities, providing China with concrete strategic benefits while maintaining consistency with its cooperative discourse.

Concrete examples illustrate how the soft power narrative translates into practice. China's funding of the Yellow River Station, its participation in CNARC, and investments in Arctic-related infrastructure along the NSR are all framed as scientific and cooperative initiatives, while simultaneously enabling long-term presence, access to data and influence. These cases demonstrate how discourse and practice reinforce each other.

2.3.4. Inter-Level Dynamics: A Reinforcing System

Systems theory highlights how the three levels are interpreted as interacting dynamically. The global level constructs legitimacy through norms and universal frames. The regional level operationalises these norms within existing governance structure. The bilateral and multilateral level translates legitimacy and presence into practical cooperation and long-term influence. Each level reinforces the others. Global discourse facilitates regional access, regional engagement legitimises bilateral cooperation, and bilateral successes strengthens China's global image as a responsible stakeholder. Soft power thus functions both as a means, facilitating access, cooperation and influence, and as an end, promoting China's identity as a constructive great power. This multilevel analysis demonstrates that China's Arctic strategy is systematically interconnected rather than fragmented, and that the discursive representations identified through WPR approach are to how China advances its strategic presence in the Arctic. The levels are interpreted as reinforcing one another, global legitimacy grants regional access, regional cooperation enables local projects, and local projects enhance global standing and national interest. This demonstrates that *China's Arctic Policy* is systematically constructed, with each layer contributing to and amplifying the others.

At the same time, the relationship between the *Arctic Policy* and China's broader strategic frameworks remains largely unaddressed. This silence underscores how the policy emphasises legitimacy and cooperation while leaving broader strategic linkages implicit.

'Cooperation' is an effective means for China's participation in Arctic affairs... relationship of multi-level, omni-dimensional and wide-ranging cooperation... Through global, regional, multilateral and bilateral channels, all stakeholders... are encouraged to take part in cooperation on climate change, scientific research, environmental protection, shipping route development, resource utilization and cultural activities...¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ *China's Arctic Policy*, III. China's Policy Goals and Basic Principles on the Arctic.

3. Discussion of Results

This chapter discusses the findings of the WPR analysis and the multilevel-theoretical framework in relation to the research questions and existing literature on China's Arctic engagement. Rather than reiterating existing accounts of China's Arctic engagement, the findings refine how influence is exercised: through discursive normalisation and institutional embeddedness rather than overt power projection.

It argues that Chinese soft power in the Arctic operates as a dual-function strategy. On the one hand, soft power functions instrumentally by facilitating access, cooperation and institutional embeddedness across global, regional and bilateral/multilateral levels. On the other hand, it operates as an end in itself by constructing legitimacy, identity and status, positioning China as a responsible and indispensable Arctic stakeholder. This dual-function perspective resonates with literature emphasising China's ambition to become a 'polar great power' and the dual-use potential of Arctic technologies, which simultaneously serve scientific and strategic purposes.

The significance of these findings lies not primarily in what the policy says, but in what this reveals about how non-Arctic powers can reshape governance without formal authority. China's Arctic engagement demonstrates how influence can be accumulated gradually through legitimacy-building, institutional embeddedness and narrative control rather than through coercive power, this has broader implications for how power operates in contemporary global governance. This supports previous observations that China leverages participation in Arctic governance structures to enhance legitimacy and influence, despite its non-Arctic status.

Although the Arctic Policy presents China as cooperative and non-threatening, the analysis reveals that strategic silences, particularly regarding security considerations, dual-use capabilities, and geopolitical competition, play a central role in sustaining this representation. These strategic silences reflect what scholars have noted about dual-use technologies, where Arctic research supports both civilian scientific objectives and strategic, capabilities, aligning with broader goals of operational preparedness and global influence. Taken together, the findings demonstrate how soft power is mobilised across systemic levels to normalise China's presence in the Arctic and consolidate its long-term influence.

The findings indicate that Chinese soft power in the Arctic cannot be understood as a single, isolated strategy. The WPR analysis reveals that the Arctic is discursively framed as a space of global responsibility and shared challenges, which frames China's participation. At the same time, strategic silences, particularly regarding security concerns, dual-use technologies, and the domestic discourse of becoming a 'polar great power', demonstrate how the policy constructs a seemingly apolitical and cooperative presence. These omissions are not accidental; they play a central role in how soft power functions, both as a means to achieve strategic objectives and as an end in itself.

Viewed through the lens of systems theory, it becomes clear that Chinese soft power operates as a multilevel, interconnected system. At the global level, normative narratives position China as a responsible and necessary actor in Arctic governance, framing the region as a shared global common that demands cooperative engagement. At the regional level, these narratives are operationalised through institutional participation, scientific collaboration, and environmental monitoring, demonstrating China's integration into existing governance frameworks. At the bilateral and multilateral level, partnerships, infrastructure projects, and joint scientific initiatives translate legitimacy into tangible influence. Across these levels, soft power reinforces itself: global norms facilitate regional access, regional cooperation legitimises bilateral projects, and bilateral successes enhance China's global standing. The multilevel perspective complements literature highlighting China's strategic use of narrative construction to normalise presence, build legitimacy, and align domestic and international perception.

This multilevel perspective highlights that soft power is not detached from material and strategic considerations. By embedding cooperative narratives in scientific, technological, and infrastructural initiatives, China secures access to resources data, shipping routes, and operational expertise, while maintaining the appearance of a benign, responsible actor. Internally, these initiatives support the narrative of national rejuvenation, technological advancement, and global prestige, thereby consolidating domestic legitimacy and political support for Arctic engagement. In this sense, soft power functions both instrumentally and intrinsically, demonstrating that discursive construction and strategic interest are mutually reinforcing.

The analysis also provides new insight into the role of soft power in 'non-Arctic states' engagement. By combining WPR and systems theory, it becomes evident that soft power should be understood not merely as a normative or persuasive tool but as a systemic mechanism that functions across interconnected levels. *China's Arctic Policy* normalises its presence, fosters institutional and scientific embeddedness, and gradually reshapes governance dynamics to its advantage, all while maintain the appearance of cooperative, technocratic engagement. The policy's silences, particularly regarding security and strategic rivalry, are integral to this process, enabling China to advance its long-term influence without provoking overt resistance.

Overall, the findings show that Chinese soft power in the Arctic operates as a dual-function strategy: it facilitates practical access and cooperation while simultaneously producing legitimacy and identity. Conceptualising soft power as a systemic mechanism rather than a singular tool clarifies how these functions reinforce one another across levels of engagement.

3.1. Limitations of the study

The study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based on a single policy document, which limits the ability to capture changes over time in China's Arctic discourse. Second, WPR focuses on discourse

rather than the decision-making processes, meaning that conclusions about strategic intent remain interpretive rather than empirically verifiable. Third, the study relies primarily on English-language sources, which may overlook nuances present in Chinese-language material. These limitations suggest that findings should be understood as analytically plausible rather than definitive.

Rather than being contradictory, these functions reinforce one another within a deliberate multilevel approach. The *Arctic Policy* positions soft power as both instrumental and intrinsic, adapting to different audiences and systemic levels while maintaining coherence through shared themes of cooperation, environmental stewardship, and mutual benefit.

3.2. Practical Implications for Arctic States

These implications follow directly from the analysis, which shows that China's influence in the Arctic is accumulated less through overt power projection than through gradual institutional embeddedness and discursive normalisation. The findings carry practical implications for Arctic states. If China's soft power operates through long-term embeddedness rather than overt confrontation, Arctic actors must evaluate cooperation not only in technical terms but also in strategic terms. Scientific collaboration, infrastructure partnerships and data-sharing arrangements may generate mutual benefit, but they also deepen dependency and asymmetrical knowledge advantages. For small Arctic states, this underscores the need to ensure transparency, diversify partners, and anchor cooperation in multilateral frameworks. This includes conducting strategic risk assessments, limiting single-actor control over critical infrastructure, and coordination positions within regional institutions when engaging with China.

4. Conclusion

When Gorbachev in 1987 envisioned the Arctic as a ‘zone of peace and cooperation’, he framed the region as both a collective international responsibility and an area of enduring strategic relevance. Decades later, Xi Jinping’s discourse on China’s rise as a maritime and polar great power reflects how the Arctic has become central to narratives of national rejuvenation and global leadership. Within this context, soft power, emerges as a key mechanism through which China legitimises its presence, expands influence, and positions itself as a responsible Arctic stakeholder.

Returning to the question: *How is Chinese soft power in the Arctic positioned, primarily as an instrumental means or as an end?*

This thesis has examined how soft power is represented in *China’s Arctic Policy* and how these representations operate across different systemic levels. Using Carol Bacchi’s WPR approach, the study analysed how problems, roles, and responsibilities are discursively constructed in the policy. Systems theory was then applied to interpret how these representations function across global, regional, and bilateral/multilateral levels of China’s Arctic engagement.

The findings demonstrate that Chinese soft power in the Arctic functions both instrumentally, facilitating cooperation, and as an end, constructing legitimacy. These dynamics operate across global, regional, and bilateral/multilateral levels, forming an interconnected system. Strategic silence in the policy, particularly regarding security and geopolitical competition, reinforce this dual function. Overall, soft power is a central mechanism through which China consolidates its presence and influence in the Arctic.

Regarding the first supporting question: *How is soft power represented in China’s 2018 Arctic policy, and what assumptions underpin this representation?* *China’s Arctic Policy* presents soft power through narratives of cooperation, sustainability, scientific objectivity, and mutual benefit. These representations rest on several key assumptions: that the Arctic constitutes a global space affecting all states; that environmental protection and resource development are compatible; that ‘non-Arctic states’ have legitimate roles in Arctic governance; and that China’s presence is peaceful, stabilising, and science driven. These assumptions normalise China’s engagement while downplaying strategic and geopolitical considerations. Soft power is thus constructed as benign, necessary, and aligned with prevailing international norms.

The systems-theoretical analysis addresses the second supporting question by demonstrating how these representations operate coherently across multiple levels. *How do these representations interact across different systemic levels within China’s Arctic engagement?*

At the systemic level, soft power integrates discourse, institutions, and material engagement. Instrumentally, it facilitates access to scientific collaboration, institutional participation, and bilateral partnerships. As an end, it shapes China’s image as a responsible major power, reinforcing legitimacy

and normative influence. Overall, soft power is primarily instrumental at bilateral/multilateral levels, while its identity-building functions operates as a strategic end at the normative level.

In conclusion, Chinese soft power in the Arctic is a multifunctional, multilayered strategy: it supports practical engagement and long-term access while enhancing legitimacy, identity, and status as a responsible global actor. The interaction between discourse and systemic dynamics demonstrates that soft power is central to China's Arctic ambitions, not peripheral. These insights provide a framework for policymakers, researchers, and Arctic stakeholders to anticipate non-Arctic engagement, design inclusive yet secure governance strategies, and align scientific, infrastructure, and commercial initiatives with broader strategic considerations.

Unlike previous studies that focus on material capabilities or strategic intent, this thesis advances a discursive-systemic understanding of soft power. It demonstrates how policy representations actively shape the condition under which influence becomes possible, thereby extending the analytical scope of Arctic security beyond traditional power metrics.

4.1. Future research

Future research could deepen understanding of China's evolving Arctic role by examining two dimensions: the potential shift from soft power instruments to harder modalities, and the responses of other states to China's Arctic engagement. Together, these avenues would clarify the systemic interaction underpinning China's Arctic strategy.

5. References

- Albert, Mathias. “‘Modern’ Systems Theory”. In *New Systems Theories of World Politics*, by Mathias Albert, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Alexander Wendt. Palgrave Studies in International Relations Series. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Almén, Oscar, and Christopher Weidacher Hsiung. *China’s Economic Influence in the Arctic Region, the Nordic and Russian Cases*. Vol. 2022. FOI-R-5326-SE. 2022.
- Andersson, Patrik. *Sino-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic: Implications for Nordic Countries and Recommended Policy Responses*. No. 5. Swedish National China Centre, 2024.
- Andersson, Patrik. ‘The Arctic as a “Strategic” and “Important” Chinese Foreign Policy Interest: Exploring the Role of Labels and Hierarchies in China’s Arctic Discourses’. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 3 August 2021, 186810262110186. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681026211018699>.
- Bacchi, Carol. ‘Analyzing Policy: What Is the Problem Represented to Be?’ *Pearsons Australia Press. Chapter 1* 2014 (2014): 1–25.
- Bacchi, Carol. ‘Why Study Problematizations? Making Politics Visible’. *Open Journal of Political Science* 02, no. 01 (2012): 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2012.21001>.
- Brady, Anne-Marie. *China as a Polar Great Power*. Cambridge University Press, 2017.
- Brady, Anne-Marie. *Magic Weapons: China’s Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping*. 2017 (2017). <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/magic-weapons-chinas-political-influence-activities-under-xi-jinping>.
- Breum, Martin. *Cold Rush*. McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2018.
- Buzan, Barry. ‘The English School as a New Systems Theory of World Politics’. In *New Systems Theories of World Politics*, by Mathias Albert, Lars-Erik Cederman, and Alexander Wendt. Palgrave Studies in International Relations Series. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- China’s Arctic Policy*. Vol. 2018. The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, n.d. Accessed 7 January 2025. https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm.
- China, ed. *China’s National Defense in the New Era*. First edition. Foreign Languages Press, 1019.
- Doshi, Rush, Alexis Dale-Huang, and Gaoqi Zhang. *Northern Expedition, China’s Arctic Activities and Ambitions*. Security, Strategy and Order. Foreign Policy at BROOKINGS, 2021.
- Edney, Kingsley, Stanley Rosen, and Ying Zhu. ‘Introduction’. In *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: China’s Campaign for Hearts and Minds*, edited by Kingsley Edney, Stanley Rosen, and Ying Zhu. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315208671>.
- Emmerson, Charles. *The Future History of the Arctic*. 1. ed. Public Affairs, 2010.
- Esaiasson, Peter, Mikael Gilljam, Henrik Oscarsson, Anders Sundell, Ann Towns, and Lena Wängnerud. *Metodpraktikan: Konsten Att Studera Människor, Organisationer Och Samhällen*. Sjötte upplagan. Norstedts Juridik, 2024.

- 'God forskningssted (2017)'. Text. Accessed 2 September 2025.
<https://www.vr.se/analys/rapporter/vara-rapporter/2017-08-29-god-forskningssted-2017.html>.
- Gorbachev, Mikhail. *The Speech in Murmansk, at the Meeting on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star Medal to the City of Murmansk October 1, 1987*. Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1987.
- Greene, Connor. 'Why Is Trump So Intent on Acquiring Greenland?' *TIME*, 9 January 2026.
https://time.com/7344877/trump-greenland-annexation-threats-purchase-national-security-economic/?utm_source=copilot.com.
- Guillemin, Marilys, and Lynn Gillam. 'Ethics, Reflexivity, and "Ethically Important Moments" in Research'. *Qualitative Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (2004): 261–80.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403262360>.
- Ifversen, Jan. 'About Key Concepts and How to Study Them'. *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 6, no. 1 (2011). <https://doi.org/10.3167/choc.2011.060104>.
- Johnston, Karin L. *Cooperation and Competition in the Arctic*. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2023.
<https://www.kas.de/documents/283221/283270/Cooperation+and+Competition+in+the+Arctic.pdf/32e79b2a-e97d-1ec0-bcd4-3c951d262954?version=1.1>.
- Kilcullen, David. *The Dragons and the Snakes: How the Rest Learned to Fight the West*. Oxford Scholarship Online Political Science. Oxford University Press, 2020.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190265687.001.0001>.
- Kossa, Martin. *The Arctic in China's National Strategy: Science, Security, and Governance*. 1st edn. Routledge, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003295112>.
- Kossa, Martin, Marina Lomaeva, and Juha Saunavaara. 'East Asian Subnational Government Involvement in the Arctic: A Case for Paradiplomacy?' *The Pacific Review* 34, no. 4 (2021): 664–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2020.1729843>.
- Kurlantzick, Joshua. *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*. Yale university press, 2007.
- Lanteigne, Marc. 'Great Powers in the Arctic: Changing Perspectives'. *Global Asia* Vol 15 2020, no. No.4 (2020). https://www.globalasia.org/v15no4/cover/great-powers-in-the-arctic-changing-perspectives_marc-lanteigne.
- Li, Eric X. 'The Rise and Fall of SoftPower'. *Foreign Policy* 2018 (August 2018).
<https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/08/20/the-rise-and-fall-of-soft-power/>.
- Mahan, A. T. *Mahan on Naval Strategy: Selections from the Writings of Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan*. First Naval Institute Press paperback edition. Edited by John B. Hattendorf. Naval Institute Press, 2015.
- Mele, Cristina, Jacqueline Pels, and Francesco Polese. 'A Brief Review of Systems Theories and Their Managerial Applications'. *Service Science* 2010 (2010): 126–35.
- Moses, Jonathon. *Ways of Knowing: Competing Methodologies in Social and Political Research*. 3rd ed. With Torbjør L. Knutsen. Macmillan Education UK, 2019.
- Mulvaney, Kieran. *Arctic Passages: Ice, Exploration, and the Battle for Power at the Top of the World*. Island press, 2025.

- Nye, Joseph S. 'Foreword'. In *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: China's Campaign for Hearts and Minds*, edited by Kingsley Edney, Stanley Rosen, and Ying Zhu. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315208671>.
- Nye, Joseph S. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. PublicAffairs, 2009.
- Pézard, Stéphanie, Stephen J. Flanagan, Scott Harold, et al. *China's Strategy and Activities in the Arctic: Implications for North American and Transatlantic Security*. With Rand Corporation. Research Report, RR-A1282-1. RAND Corporation, 2022. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RRA1282-1>.
- Pompeo, Michael R. 'Looking North: Sharpening America's Arctic Focus'. Arctic Council, Rovaniemi, 6 May 2019. <https://2017-2021.state.gov/looking-north-sharpening-americas-arctic-focus/>.
- Puranen, Matti, and Sanna Kopra. 'China's Arctic Strategy – a Comprehensive Approach in Times of Great Power Rivalry'. *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 6, no. 1 (2023): 239–53. <https://doi.org/10.31374/sjms.196>.
- Robertson, Alexa. 'Narrativanalys'. In *Textens Mening Och Makt: Metodbok i Samhällsvetenskaplig Text- Och Diskursanalys*, Fjärde [omarbetade och aktualiserade] upplagan, edited by Kristina Boréus and Göran Bergström. Studentlitteratur, 2018.
- Seymour, Margret. *The Problem with Soft Power*. 2020. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/09/the-problem-with-soft-power/>.
- Skyttner, Lars. *General Systems Theory: Problems, Perspectives, Practice*. 2nd ed. World Scientific Publishing Co Pte Ltd, 2014.
- Sörensen, Camilla T. N. 'The Evolving Chinese Strategy in the Arctic: Entering the Grey Zone?' In *Hybrid Threats and Grey Zone Conflict: The Challenge to Liberal Democracies*, edited by Milton C. Regan and Aurel Sari. The Oxford Series in Ethics, National Security, and the Rule of Law. Oxford University Press, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197744772.003.0013>.
- Sörensen, Camilla T. N., and Adam Buschard. *Kina som global militär stormagt - militärstrategiske perspektiver for dansk forsvar*. Vol. 2025. Forsvarsakademiet, 2025.
- Sörensen, Camilla T. N., and Christopher Weidacher Hsiung. 'The Role of Technology in China's Arctic Engagement: A Means as Well as an End in Itself'. In *Arctic Yearbook 2021*. 2021.
- The Svalbard Treaty (1920). https://library.arcticportal.org/1909/1/The_Svalbard_Treaty_9ssFy.pdf.
- 'Thinking about Ethical Consideration'. In *Practitioner Research at Doctoral Level: Developing Coherent Research Methodologies*, vol. 2011. Routledge, 2011.
- 'Weather Data 1987'. n.d. <https://weatherspark.com/h/m/148669/1987/10/Historical-Weather-in-October-1987-at-Murmansk-Airport-Russia>.
- Wilson, Ernst J. 'Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power'. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 2008, no. Vo. 616 (2008): 110–24.
- Xiao, Tianliang, ed. *The Science of Military Strategy*. National Defence University Press, 2020.
- Zhang, Zhan. 'The Dilemma of China's Soft Power in Europe'. In *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: China's Campaign for Hearts and Minds*, edited by Kingsley Edney, Stanley

Rosen, and Ying Zhu. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315208671>.

Zhao, Suisheng. 'Projection of China's Soft Power in the New Century, Reconstruction of the Traditional Chinese World Order'. In *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics: China's Campaign for Hearts and Minds*, edited by Kingsley Edney, Stanley Rosen, and Ying Zhu. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315208671>.

Åtland, Kristian. 'Mikhail Gorbachev, the Murmansk Initiative, and the Desecuritization of International Relations in the Arctic'. *Cooperation and Conflict* Vol. 43 September 2008, no. 3 (2008): 289–311.

Öquist, Oscar. *Systemteori i Praktiken: Konsten Att Lösa Problem Och Nå Resultat*. Femte upplagan. Gothia kompetens, 2024.