

# An unlikely partnership? New Zealand–South Korea bilateral cooperation and Antarctic order

## Research Article

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### Abstract

While the Antarctic Treaty System intended to keep Antarctica an area of international cooperation and science free from militarisation and international conflict, the region has not been completely shielded from global power transitions, such as decolonisation and the end of the Cold War. Presently, emerging countries from Asia are increasingly willing to invest in polar infrastructure and science on the back of their growing influence in world politics. South Korea has also invested heavily in its Antarctic infrastructure and capabilities recently and has been identified as an actor with economic and political interests that are potentially challenging for the existing Antarctic order. This article first assesses the extent and performance of the growing bilateral cooperation between South Korea and one of its closest partners, New Zealand, a country with strong vested interests in the status quo order. How did the cooperation develop between these two actors with ostensibly diverging interests? This article finds that what may have been a friction-laden relationship, actually developed into a win-win partnership for both countries. The article then moves on to offer an explanation for how this productive relationship was made possible by utilising a mutual socialisation approach that explores socio-structural processes around status accommodation.

## Challenging the Antarctic status quo?

Sixty years ago, the Antarctic Treaty was signed with the intention to keep Antarctica an area of international cooperation and science, free from militarisation and international conflict. The Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) since has evolved to become one of the most successful multilateral agreements ever, weathering several regulatory and legitimacy crises alike, but it has never been totally shielded from the effects of global and regional power shifts. Most recently, emerging countries from Asia are increasingly willing to invest in polar infrastructure and science and aspire to contribute more actively to Antarctic affairs. This has been raising questions in the media about the interests of these new players (Romero, 2015), among political and strategic observers and in the capitals of some established Antarctic countries such as New Zealand and Australia (Bergin & Press, 2020; Field, 2011; Fogarty, 2011). Other than China, South Korea has been identified as an actor “with ambitions and with . . . strategic interests in the polar regions that may challenge the norms of the current ATS in the future” (Brady, 2013, p. 5). Like in other regions, these emerging powers raise questions about the stability of the Antarctic status quo order: Is South Korea’s emerging status indeed challenging the norms of the ATS, and, if so, how so?

After decades of limited Antarctic presence on the Antarctic peninsula since the 1980s, South Korea has invested heavily in its Antarctic infrastructure and capabilities in the last decade with the building of a new icebreaker in 2009, a second research station in Terra Nova Bay in 2014 and a 10-fold increase of the budget for the Korean Polar Research Institute (KOPRI) from 2004 to 2018. In one of the few academic publications focusing on South Korean Antarctic interests, Brady and Kim (2013) argue that Seoul’s interests are scientific and economic, as well as about political status and prestige. Additionally, South Korea has one of the largest distant water fisheries worldwide (Yozell & Shaver, 2019) and has become rather infamous for poor working conditions on board South Korean-flagged vessels (Thomas, 2014), as well as for cases of illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in Antarctic waters (Field, 2014; Mussen, 2012; Urbina, 2019). In 2013 and again in 2019, South Korea was called out by the European Union and by the USA as an “IUU fishing country” (*Korea Herald*, 2019). These polar interests raise the question of what these potentially challenging status aspirations mean for other actors and the maintenance of the existing Antarctic order. A good starting point for an analysis of South Korea’s role in and impact on Antarctic politics is to zoom in on the South Korean relationship with one of its most important bilateral cooperation partners regarding Antarctic science and logistics: New Zealand, an established Antarctic player with strong vested interests in the status quo order.

New Zealand is a major Antarctic player and a regional stakeholder, as well as a gateway for several national Antarctic programmes, but the country also maintains an Antarctic territorial claim and has most recently spearheaded the establishment of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the Ross Sea area. South Korea and New Zealand signed an Agreement on Antarctic Cooperation in 2012 in order to promote bilateral cooperation on Antarctic policy issues, scientific research and logistical activities. Since then, in 2014, South Korea opened its second permanent research station, Jang Bogo, in the Ross Sea area claimed by New Zealand, as well as establishing a representative office for the Korean Antarctic Programme in Christchurch, New Zealand's "gateway city" to Antarctica.

In the first part, this article assesses the extent and performance of the bilateral cooperation between New Zealand and South Korea with regard to Antarctic science, logistics and policy. How did the cooperation develop between these two actors with ostensibly diverging interests? And how did Wellington respond to Seoul's potentially challenging interests in the Antarctic? It finds that what may look at first like a relationship with a great deal of friction has developed into a win-win situation for both countries. The article then moves on to a second analytical section to make a case for the ATS as a stratified or hierarchical order where status accommodation and state socialisation occur to maintain the status quo. Further, a role theoretical approach from constructivist International Relations theory will be utilised to explain how the unlikely partnership between New Zealand and South Korea was able to develop as a productive relationship. Finally, the article briefly discusses what can be learned from this episode about the accommodation of the status aspirations of further emerging powers within the ATS.

The main sources for this analysis consist of textual analyses of publicly available information and 20 semi-structured interviews with government officials from the respective foreign ministries, embassies and logistics teams, as well as polar scientists from South Korea and New Zealand. The interviews took place in Wellington, Christchurch, Seoul and Incheon from 2018 to 2019. Not all interviewees agreed to speak "on the record" for this article, but the information shared with the researcher was in every case highly appreciated and very helpful in understanding detailed technical processes and the bigger picture alike.

### Assessing Antarctic cooperation

New Zealand, as an original signatory to the Antarctic Treaty maintaining a territorial claim to the Ross Dependency, has been an established and influential player at the centre of the ATS from the start, while South Korea only entered Antarctica in the 1970s, mostly because of fishing interests (see Brady and Kim [2013] for a history of South Korea's Antarctic programme). Seoul joined the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) in 1985 and signed the Antarctic Treaty in 1986. The country further acquired decision-making rights as consultative party (CP) within the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings (ATCMs) in 1989 during a period of increased treaty membership, especially from the developing world. The first permanent Korean research station, King Sejong, had been built one year earlier in 1988 on King George Island in the Antarctic Peninsula region, in an area claimed by Argentina, Chile and the United Kingdom. The scale of these early research activities was relatively limited in scope, until the mid-2000s when the South Korean government decided to approve the construction

of a state-of-the-art polar icebreaker, Araon, which became operational in 2009. Another major investment came in 2014 with the construction of the second permanent, year-round Jang Bogo Station in Terra Nova Bay near the Italian Mario-Zucchelli Station and not far from where the fifth Chinese permanent research station will be built on Inexpressible Island. Further stations in the Ross Sea area are the main US station, McMurdo, as well as New Zealand's Scott Base. Currently, a second Korean icebreaker is awaiting government funding and there are longer-term plans for a third permanent station further inland along the "K-route" expedition track over the Transantarctic Mountain Range and further inland to the South Pole. As a member of the K-route Unit at KOPRI put it: "A second icebreaker will be crucial for the next stage of the K-route inland, to organize the whole construction and material transfer there" (Interview with KOPRI K-route Unit in Incheon, September 2018).

KOPRI is fully funded by the South Korean government but acts as an independent agency driving national polar policy, science and logistics. Related to the construction of the icebreaker Araon and the research second, the South Korean government had increased the budget for KOPRI dramatically from USD 10 million in 2004 (Brady & Kim, 2013) to USD 54 million in 2010 (KOPRI, 2010, p. 9) and around USD 84 million in 2019 (KOPRI, 2019, p. 90). These rather ambitious plans also have to be seen in the context of South Korea's presence in the other polar region, the Arctic, where Korea's science and economic interests demand another icebreaker or ice-strengthened ship for logistical reasons (Interview with KOPRI Policy Unit in Incheon, September 2018). Furthermore, the overall Korean economic development strategy has been to turn the country from a follower to a global leader in science and technology (Dayton, 2020).

At the 2018 ATCM in Buenos Aires, the South Korean delegation shared a working paper about the third five-year joint ministerial plan for Korea's activities in the Antarctic (Republic of Korea ATCM Delegation, 2018). The vision fleshed out is to "become a leading nation of Antarctic research, which contributes to the resolution of the global changes faced by humanity" (Republic of Korea ATCM Delegation, 2018, p. 3). It also shows that the Korean Antarctic strategy has had the priorities of "capability building" from 2007 to 2016, "leaping forward" from 2017 to 2021 and "playing a leading role" from 2022 onwards. Regarding Antarctic governance, the article also clearly shows the aspiration to first only "participate" but later "lead Antarctic governance agenda through science" (ibid.). This leadership ambition is hardly surprising as it has become a main feature of South Korean global foreign policy in general, whether in climate diplomacy or international peacekeeping (Flamm, 2019). When asked in an interview about the reasons for the increase in funding of the last two decades, a member of KOPRI's Policy Unit answered: "Overall, the drivers behind the government's decision to increase KOPRI's budget so exceptionally are prestige and important science as contribution to international efforts to better understand climate change" (Interview with KOPRI Policy Unit in Incheon, September 2018). A Korean scientist sees this in a similar way: "We are an economically developed country, so our government may want to show that we are a global and responsible country that contributes important knowledge" (Interview with KOPRI oceanographer in Incheon, September 2018). The prestige of polar research, especially for a recently developed country, also becomes apparent in the following quote from another Korean scientist (Interview with KOPRI biologist II in Incheon, September 2018):

We were a small country, but we developed quickly and now the Antarctic program is a way of gaining a proper international status. It's also about contributing to the international community in a responsible way. They don't think about economic resources that can be gained from Antarctica but about status and our national brand. A good reputation will have economic effects as well.

The earlier mentioned Korean paper submission from 2018 is also clear about economic and commercial interests in the Antarctic (Republic of Korea ATCM Delegation, 2018):

Korea will promote the convergence in Antarctic research with bioscience and biotechnology by utilizing genetic characteristics of Antarctic organisms. In doing so, Korea will explore possibilities to commercialize biological resources of Polar Regions (e.g. potential use of substances for antibiotics, cryopreservation of for blood and stem cells, improving the resistance to agricultural produce to cold-weather damage, etc.) (p. 4).

What has to be mentioned here for context is that the commercialisation of biological resources from the Antarctic is not an uncontested issue legally and politically. Bioprospecting is neither clearly defined nor regulated in the Antarctic and the corresponding responsibilities of bioprospecting states have not been determined as international norms; in this case, the Nagoya Protocol of the Convention on Biological Diversity does not automatically apply to Antarctica (Barros-Platau, Costa de Oliveira, Lima Moraes, & Mazzega, 2019). On the contrary, Hemmings (2010a) has described the development of Antarctic governance as a separate regional and only partly internationalised sphere, which continues to serve predominantly the interests of the established few Antarctic players, as “Antarctic exceptionalism” (p. 6). Hemmings (2010b) further points to related ethical and political reservations about who is to profit from these biological scientific discoveries: industry or the science programmes, all of humankind or the selected few nations active in the Antarctic?

Antarctic cooperation between New Zealand and South Korea is a fairly recent development. When South Korea announced the intention to establish a presence in the Ross Sea area, some New Zealand observers were quite sceptical of Korean interests in the Antarctic. According to Field (2011), the “[c]onstruction of a startling new base on the Ross Sea coast will bring millions of dollars to Christchurch but raises questions over possible rival bids over New Zealand's potentially oil-rich Antarctic claim”. Field further refers to a 2011 policy brief for the Australian Lowy Institute think tank where the patriotic names of Chinese and Korean stations are seen as expressions of nationalism and thus are potential challenges to territorial claims (Fogarty, 2011).

The New Zealand government and the science community were more open to pro-active engagement with a new Antarctic player, however, which was due to the key features of the New Zealand's Antarctic interests; as an original signatory, territorial claimant and regional stakeholder, Wellington benefits politically from the stability and privileges provided by the status quo of the ATS. As a small state, New Zealand has limited resources available for its well-established Antarctic programme and thus has always relied on close international cooperation, especially with the US programme through the Joint Logistics Pool, as well as with Germany and Italy in terms of scientific cooperation. The close geographical proximity to the Antarctic continent also offers economic benefits for the “gateway city”, Christchurch, which is hosting the American, Italian and South Korean programmes. On the other hand, New Zealand also has strategic interests in a stable and open Ross Sea area, as exemplified in the 2018 Strategic Defence Policy Statement (Ministry of Defence, 2018). Here, increased interest in the region is expected to “lead to congestion and

crowding, as well as pressure on key elements of the Antarctic Treaty System, such as prohibition of mineral extraction” (Ministry of Defence, 2018, p. 22).

Accordingly, New Zealand has a strong interest in maintaining the status quo by ensuring that new players buy into the current political order and contribute to international cooperation, preferably through Christchurch. One historic example for this has been the inclusion of a long-standing critic of the ATS, Malaysia, to finally accede to the Antarctic Treaty in 2012. Between 1982 and 2005, the postcolonial leadership of Malaysia had regularly raised the “Question of Antarctica” at the General Assembly of the United Nations, claiming that the Treaty partners had formed an exclusive club of rich countries that controlled a whole continent, a “common heritage to mankind” (Hamzah, 2010), which should better be managed through the United Nations. After New Zealand had started inviting Malaysian scientists to Scott Base in 1996 and, in 2002, even the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir, the South-East Asian country finally signed the Antarctic Treaty in 2012. Further, New Zealand claims environmental stewardship as a main political interest and was instrumental in setting up the Ross Sea MPA in 2014 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.). One has to keep in mind here though that, first, New Zealand also has ongoing fisheries interests in the Southern Ocean and, second, at least for some established observers (Dodds & Brooks, 2018) the establishment of MPAs has the potential to raise questions related to sovereignty, such as who might have an interest and benefit in monitoring and enforcing its rules.

So how to make sense of the nascent bilateral cooperation between these two rather dissimilar Antarctic players? How did the cooperation unfold and develop, and how challenging to the status quo political order is the growing South Korean presence and influence in Antarctic matters from a New Zealand perspective? In the 2012 Agreement between the Government of New Zealand and the Government of the Republic of Korea on Antarctic Cooperation, both governments aimed “to promote cooperation between the two countries on Antarctic policy issues, scientific research and logistical activities” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012). These three areas are a fitting starting point to assess the development of this bilateral cooperation, before trying to explain its outcome in the next section.

### Logistics

With regard to logistics, in 2014 the Korean programme established a representative office at the International Antarctic Centre in Christchurch (Antarctica New Zealand, 2014) and has since coordinated very closely every season with Antarctica New Zealand and the National Antarctic Programmes through the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programmes, which is also based in Christchurch. Practically, the national logistics teams coordinate closely around June/July each year to determine which capacities are available, for example, in terms of boat time on the Korean icebreaker or seats on New Zealand or American aircraft bound for the Antarctic. These capabilities are pooled in a quid-pro-quo fashion among the nations active in the Ross Sea region, building upon the formal Joint Logistics Pool between the US programme and Antarctica New Zealand.

Over the last few years, there has been some pressure, however, from the USA, as well as from Korean partners, that New Zealand will have to invest more in its limited national capability in this context. The Royal New Zealand Navy's newest and largest-ever ship, the ice-strengthened logistics support vessel HMNZS



*Aotearoa*, which was commissioned in mid-2020, can be seen as an effort to strengthen New Zealand's capability to assist with Southern Ocean monitoring and logistics in the Ross Sea region (Global Security, 2020). Related plans about a specialised Southern Ocean patrol vessel to monitor Southern Ocean fisheries more effectively have been announced in the 2019 Defence Capability Plan by the New Zealand Government (Ministry of Defence, 2019). This new patrol vessel will also be able to refuel at sea from the HMNZS *Aotearoa* (Ministry of Defence, 2019). An additional partner providing logistical support in the Ross Sea area, such as the Korean icebreaker, is thus generally welcomed by the New Zealand side, as shown in the following statements from a New Zealand diplomat and a New Zealand scientist:

Certainly for New Zealand, and maybe that's a slightly different approach than from some others, we are so small, we always see opportunity in new players, particularly the ones that have a bit of resource behind them, China and Korea being good examples of that, that really does represent an opportunity for our scientists to do more (Interview with CCAMLR and Antarctica Desk Officer, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in Wellington, June 2018).

We benefit from [the] fact that the Koreans have to go there because they have to service their base. We often can fly out some of the people through Antarctica NZ. ... South Korean per capita investment in research and development is so high. They have the resources and the ambition. Building a road to the South Pole for example. Whereas from a NZ perspective, we're just duct taping and everything. ... New Zealand is a tiny economy and we're lucky that the Americans are there, but we support Scott Base there and run a viable science program (Interview with New Zealand oceanographer in Wellington, February 2019).

## Science

With regard to science, there were early efforts to explore opportunities for research collaboration between New Zealand and South Korea. In 2012, initial seed money of over NZD 174,000 from the New Zealand Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) enabled Korean and New Zealand Antarctic scientists to come together in a number of workshops to explore common research interests and future cooperations (Turner, 2012). The New Zealand project leader said that "to work collaboratively with a country that's prepared to invest so heavily in a new ice-breaker and station is a great opportunity" (cited in Turner, 2012) because of New Zealand's limited capabilities. Subsequently, in 2015, the New Zealand–Korea Strategic Research Partnership Fund was set up, where both governments agreed to provide funding for "Environment/Antarctica" as a priority area. This strategic fund was jointly administered by MBIE and the National Research Foundation of Korea and enabled several New Zealand science agencies to collaborate with KOPRI for three years (Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, 2015). In this context, an involved New Zealand scientist explained:

South Korea has just opened a new permanent state-of-the-art research base called Jang Bogo in Victoria Land, so that is a big investment in New Zealand's backyard. It's just awesome. They are the new kids on the Antarctic block and are very keen to collaborate with New Zealand in all aspects of research as we've been there for the past 60 years (University of Waikato, 2015).

The New Zealand scientists interviewed described the cooperation in its early stages of the relationship as very complementary or "symbiotic" (Interview with NZ oceanographer in Wellington,

February 2019). New Zealand scientists had decades of Ross Sea area experience while Republic of Korea scientists contributed important resources, such as boat time on their icebreaker: "At first the cooperation was complementary, they had the gear and we had the science knowledge and experience in the system" (Interview with NZ oceanographer in Wellington, February 2019). Where some personal connections between New Zealand and Korean researchers already existed, as for example between geologists who knew each other from the multinational Antarctic Drilling Project (ANDRILL), successful research cooperation got off the ground more easily – "organically", as one New Zealand scientist put it (Interview with NZ geologist in Wellington, June 2018) – compared to researchers meeting each other for the first time at a workshop organised to explore research collaborations: "These meetings were forced, they were constructed, whereas our collaboration developed from a mutual connection from the Koreans to us through ANDRILL, and then we grew it with bilateral efforts of our governments" (Interview with NZ geologist in Wellington, June 2018). One New Zealand researcher even stated positive surprise about how successfully the research collaboration developed (Interview with NZ oceanographer in Wellington, February 2019):

Overall, if I had known how well the cooperation went, I thought of it more like a trial, short lived thing, so I think in hindsight I would have tried to get a student, a PhD student involved. What has also impressed me, is that this all actually worked, we had no previous contacts, and it worked so well.

In addition, the effectively complementary and personally successful New Zealand–South Korea cooperation in science and logistics even led to further international collaboration with third nations and it enabled New Zealand scientists to come together to lay the groundwork for what became the new domestic funding framework for Antarctic science in 2019, the Antarctic Science Platform. This platform is now the new central node in the polar science network in New Zealand and, by explicitly encouraging international collaboration, it provides much-needed funding avenues to further cooperation also with Korean partners:

With the Koreans then, it was quite fruitful also for the American connection. The Koreans have an expansive approach to all this, they are not only going to us but they also have American teams on their ship doing other work, teams that I worked with and knew from before. So the Koreans there acted as a catalyst for wider international collaboration, that has since extended through to the [newly established New Zealand Antarctic Science] platform. We're quite a collaborative bunch of people, you know, and these are people you like to work with (Interview with NZ oceanographer in Wellington, February 2019).

All interviewed New Zealand scientists planned to build on and improve the research links with their Korean colleagues, who in turn came to a similar assessment of how the relationship had developed successfully into a win-win arrangement. This is illustrated by the following statement by a Korean polar scientist (Interview with KOPRI paleo-climatologist in Incheon, September 2018):

The cooperation really is very good and win-win, we get their help and very good expertise about the Ross Sea area and they need our ship. The cooperation is working very well also on the personal level, so it's great. Right now, the Kiwis are our biggest partner also because we travel through Christchurch. There aren't any problems really. It's an ideal case how it all worked out, we had the initial contact, then the opportunity and it worked out very well.

One Korean scientist who had personal connections with New Zealand scientists from the earlier ANDRILL collaboration in the late 2000s hinted at what can be described as mentor–student relationship for the first few years when Korean scientists were very

new to the Ross Sea region: “Back in 2009 we were very new to the Ross Sea region, so we wanted to be a ‘good student’ and follow NZ and learn from them” (Interview with K-route Unit in Incheon, September 2018).

What about any issues or frictions experienced by New Zealand and Korean scientists, though? New Zealanders as well as Koreans reported that both sides had to navigate different cultural norms and expectations, as well as the differently organised science structures in both countries: a centralised main agency in KOPRI on the one hand and a decentralised science network in the New Zealand Antarctic Research Institute on the other. The interviews did not expose any politically driven reservations with regard to the bilateral science and logistical cooperation between scientists, who generally saw themselves as internationally active scientists, sometimes even affiliated with different national Antarctic programmes during their research careers. One Korean scientist made this point (Interview with KOPRI paleo-climatologist in Incheon, September 2018):

I think when scientists are aware all the time that they are also national ambassadors, that they are scientists in a national program, that must be very tiring. I am not thinking about being an actor of the Korean government, it's their job, it's not my business.

Further, when asked about the perception of the Korean government's expectations about Korean research outcomes and the related domestic research-funding context, the same KOPRI researcher spoke of the freedom of not working in a research field that has caught strategic government attention (Interview with KOPRI paleo-climatologist in Incheon, September 2018):

With regard to governmental funding contexts, in the Antarctic context we are really quite free. It's not like in the IT sector, for example, where the taxpayer, the government want a specific technology developed. In our case the government doesn't demand anything, on the contrary, we suggest expenses and investments to the government and if it is reasonable the government will lend support.

This aspect is supported by a statement from a representative from the KOPRI policy unit, who claims that Korean Antarctic policy is really science-driven and with, in contrast to the Arctic, few strategic motivations: “Antarctic strategy is mostly about research, 99%, whereas Arctic strategy and policy is more diverse including infrastructure, climate change, economics, Arctic governance” (Interview with KOPRI Policy Unit in Incheon, September 2018). The picture emerging here is that of a centralised research institute that is driving science-orientated policy, but there remain questions about how well connected the Korean research and policy spheres are. On the one hand, several of the main policy initiatives submitted to ATCMs (“Inspections under the Antarctic Treaty and the Environmental Protocol, WP040”) and CCAMLR meetings (“Marine ecosystems in the Marine Protected Area (MPA) in Antarctica's Ross Sea”) by the South Korea delegations originated from KOPRI, according the 2017 KOPRI Annual Report. On the other hand, with regard to fishery issues, a New Zealand diplomat reported that “KOPRI is not the Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries and they do not necessarily connect their Antarctic activities closely, i.e. between Antarctica activities and Southern Ocean fisheries” (Interview with CCAMLR and Antarctica Desk Officer, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in Wellington, June 2018). This impression is supported by a representative from the KOPRI policy unit, who states that even while the Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fishery is a domestically leading institution on policy and has ministerial oversight over KOPRI since 2012, “KOPRI is engaged in advising the

government on the science and how to protect marine life focused on the whole ecosystem under the Ross Sea MPA, we have no relationship with the fishing industry and the related fishery policy” (Interview with KOPRI Policy Unit in Incheon, September 2018). So, what does the bilateral cooperation in the final of the three areas, policy, look like between New Zealand and South Korea, especially with regard to fishery issues?

### Policy

According to a diplomat from the Antarctic desk in the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, on a practical basis the 2012 agreement matters most for logistical cooperation, whereas in the policy sphere issues are dealt with by stakeholders on an ad hoc basis (Interview with CCAMLR and Antarctica Desk Officer, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in Wellington, June 2018). The area that stands out for South Korea's Antarctic diplomacy is about fisheries within CCAMLR. Here, the New Zealand diplomat observed (Interview with CCAMLR and Antarctica Desk Officer, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in Wellington, June 2018):

... clear issues to work through, and again they have been done on a case by case basis. Whether that's the MPA, poor compliance or SAR [Search and Rescue]. I think we have a general commitment to consult and cooperate, but that's a process that takes many years. ... [W]hat we have seen is Korea listening and making an effort, absolutely, to raise the standards, when something does go wrong, use the tools available to them to address that as best they can.

When New Zealand made a bid within CCAMLR for establishing an MPA in the Ross Sea, in an area where New Zealand and Korean vessels are fishing for Antarctic toothfish, the New Zealand diplomats were glad this proposal found early support from their Korean counterparts (Interview with CCAMLR and Antarctica Desk Officer, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in Wellington, June 2018):

I am not sure the extent to which they [the Koreans] engaged in the science, as that happened as a separate process but on the high level they appreciated the fact that the fishing was moved rather than stopped. This was the main concern which was managed and then they supported the environmental goals of it. I don't think we ever got to a point where we needed to have major negotiations about it, because they supported it from the start essentially. ... Korea is one of the biggest players in the fishery and that's where you tend to get the resistance to an MPA.

These observations point to an awareness on the Korean side that the issues around reported IUU fishery in the Southern Ocean come at a reputational cost that is not aligned with the intended status projection of a “responsible international member”. Accordingly, the Korean government has been actively trying to raise the standards, compliance and education of their Southern Ocean fishery (Maritime Executive, 2019), a fact that is also referred to by one of the Korean scientists (Interview with KOPRI biologist II in Incheon, September 2018):

The Korean fishery interest has been historically there, but the situation has changed. The fishery vessels, their captains, they didn't really know and care in the past. But this has changed, they have been educated and there is a will to comply with the rules now. Our government also wants to improve the knowledge of our fishery industry.

In addition, one of the first science projects initiated in context of the monitoring of the Ross Sea MPA is a Korean study looking at penguins and krill at Cape Hallett. One of the involved Korean scientists (Interview with KOPRI biologist I in Incheon, September

2018) draws a clear line here to the political dimension of this research, which is funded through a competitive grant from the Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fishery:

It is important to understanding maritime ecology in context of krill in the Southern Ocean. There were some events in 2012 with illegal fishing by Korean vessels that drew criticism from CCAMLR, so the government wants to show that Korea contributes responsibly to knowledge about the Southern Ocean.

The New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade also acknowledges this political dimension: “The research they are doing, which is good, they are one of the first countries saying, look, here is a research program that we are doing under the MPA research and monitoring plan” (Interview with CCAMLR and Antarctica Desk Officer, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in Wellington, June 2018).

Further, while the bilateral policy coordination overall may have been ad hoc, New Zealand showed a willingness to engage with South Korea practically by offering help with the crafting of proposals within CCAMLR to strengthen the status quo system, as well as South Korea’s role within, as exemplified by the following statement from a New Zealand diplomat (Interview with CCAMLR and Antarctica Desk Officer, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in Wellington, June 2018):

So we might work with that and help them making a stronger proposal, with the MPA now we have even more, we can guide things further, look at this, these are the objectives we want to achieve. How is your proposal going to do that?

This is in line with Wellington’s strategic interest in maintaining the status quo system by, first, keeping it separate from other regulatory regimes and, second, keeping it working for all stakeholders:

We are really big advocates for the system and we kind of protect the system against external, other external regulatory regimes that might look to have an influence on how things will go down there. We are very staunch on the ATS that regulates everything and should regulate everything down there. . . . If we start seeing that areas within the system are under pressure we’ll work to relieve that pressure in ways where we can, sometimes you have more ability to do that, sometimes you have less (Interview with CCAMLR and Antarctica Desk Officer, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in Wellington, June 2018).

The starting point for this investigation into New Zealand–South Korea cooperation was the view present in academic literature, as well as media outlets, that Korea, like other new players from Asia, is exhibiting potentially challenging interests in Antarctica. The picture emerging from this assessment of the bilateral cooperation between South Korea and an established Antarctic player, New Zealand, shows a little more nuance: both sides find themselves in a win-win situation in all three areas: logistics, science and even policy. Importantly now, how is it possible that this relationship did not result in clash but in a productive partnership? And what can be learned from this episode about the accommodation of the status aspirations of further emerging actors within the ATS?

### Keeping Antarctic order

In order to better understand how this partnership between actors with ostensibly diverging interests developed as it did, it is worthwhile engaging with International Relations theory and its insights into international power and order, actors and structures, as well as cooperation and conflict. There has been surprisingly little recent engagement between Antarctic politics scholarship and International Relations theory (beyond notably regime theory

(see Young, 2016)), even though both fields could stimulate important research questions for each other: what does it mean for International Relations when its key principle of ordering world politics, territorial sovereignty, is not extended into a whole continent double the size of Australia? On the other hand, observers of Antarctic politics may benefit from conceptual and empirical insights from the discipline of International Relations, especially those about emerging powers and regional/international order.

International Relations theory is a very pluralistic discipline with different theoretical paradigms, operating with different ontological and epistemological assumptions about how the actors, processes and structures in world politics work and interact. This article attempts to illustrate what constructivist International Relations theory can contribute to the study of Antarctic politics by focusing on the socio-structural aspects in which Antarctic actors are embedded. This is not the space to discuss all theoretical differences between the different major paradigms; however, it can be pointed out that, in contrast to “rationalists” from Realism or Liberalism, for social constructivists nation states as actors in world politics do not simply have fixed interests, their so-called national interest, over which they then struggle in an anarchical international arena. Constructivists understand the international sphere as a social structure itself where states (as well as non-state actors) are establishing sets of intersubjective meaning and standards of appropriate behaviour through their interactions with each other. They are not only able to change their own interests but also those of the very international social environment in which they are embedded. Accordingly, constructivist scholars study ideas, identities, norms and their respective social cultures in order to understand the dynamic social reality of world politics (see Hurd, 2008).

In consequence, it cannot be assumed that certain actors will inevitably clash over their somehow pre-given (and thus pre-Antarctic) interests in the Antarctic: one must also account for the social practices within and their outcomes in the respective social environment. This means that it cannot simply be assumed what Korean, Chinese or American foreign policy in the Antarctic looks like without paying attention to these actors’ interactions in the Antarctic political space. Hence, it remains an empirical question whether and how Russian Arctic policy or Chinese violations of international law in the South China Sea matter for Russian or Chinese Antarctic policies, respectively.

To observers of Antarctic politics, there is an apparent value in such approaches focusing on the socio-structural effects of the Antarctic political order, whether they are enabling, constraining or constitutive of actors’ capabilities and practices: how else do we explain how the Cold War rivals of the USA and the Soviet Union were able to work together cooperatively on the ice; how two claimant states such as the United Kingdom and Argentina fought a war over the nearby Falkland/Las Malvinas islands while still constraining themselves in the realm of the ATS (Beck, 1986, pp. 83–85) and how an internationally isolated rogue state, apartheid South Africa, was still being welcomed to regular ATCM meetings (van der Watt, 2013)? How can we otherwise conceptually grasp an “Antarctic spirit” that is tying treaty partners together like a social glue or the “protective” or “cooperative qualities of the treaty” (Beck, 1986, p. 83), shaping their Antarctic interactions and identities in an “exceptional” (Hemmings, 2010a) space?

Social constructivism is not a clearly delineated school of thought, however, and similar ideas can be seen in approaches ranging from the English School to feminist and postcolonial critical theory. If one is interested in changing relations between states



in changing political orders such as this article, constructivism offers insights into how social order is produced and maintained through practices and norms, and how identities, statuses and roles emerge, and enable as well as constrain actors. Order, “with more than fifty meanings . . . is a slippery concept” (Alagappa, 2003, p. 34) in International Relations and has been used by scholars in various ways. It is generally understood as a description of a particular status quo arrangement or setting of institutional and power relations. Alagappa (2003) further defines order as “rule governed interaction . . . where [s]ustaining order . . . means sustaining rule-governed interaction” (footnote 2, p. 39). In the case of the ATS, we may even justifiably speak (as English School scholars would) of an international society where order “would rest on common interests, values, rules, and institutions” (Alagappa, 2003, p. 36).

In Alagappa’s (2003) typology of order, this “Antarctic society” would most closely resemble a normative-contractual order, in contrast to instrumental or solidarist ones. In a normative-contractual order, for example, we can observe a sense of obligation to others, little use of force in intragroup interactions and a persistent dominance of national interests, but with a collective identity and interests emerging, as well as an emphasis on norms and rules to collectively manage power, facilitate coexistence and avoid undesirable outcomes (Alagappa, 2003). Rising or emerging powers are generally understood to be “states whose increasing material capacities and status-seeking strategies may potentially have an impact on the international system and also affect the dominant position of the hegemonic powers therein” (Wegner, 2017). The corresponding debate in International Relations has been whether and how emerging powers can be peacefully accommodated in a given political order or whether their increasing material capabilities and status seeking are threatening the status quo. In other words, the question here is how a new Antarctic player is socialised as a rule-following stakeholder of the status quo Antarctic order. In the following, the ostensibly unlikely cooperation between South Korea and New Zealand in a changing Antarctic order will be explored through these three selected concepts from constructivist scholarship: status, hierarchy and socialisation.

### *Status and hierarchy*

The first two concepts that are of interest to understanding how states relate to other states in international or regional affairs are those of status and hierarchy. According to a recent review of the status literature by Ward (2019), “international status refers to collective beliefs about a state’s position in a social hierarchy, commonly understood as membership in some elite club” (p. 161). It is a simplification to speak of states as somehow unitary actors, but it is generally accepted in this scholarship that states as international actors care about what they perceive to be their appropriate position vis-à-vis significant others. They (or those acting on behalf of the state) try to acquire the markers of their sought-after status and demand respective recognition from significant others, with non-recognition or disrespect possibly leading to conflictual outcomes. From this perspective, it made sense for South Korea as a developing, postcolonial and thus status-sensitive country to try and gain membership of the Antarctic community in the 1980s, an international high-status group (see Naylor, 2018). It seems unlikely though that status seeking does stop with CP status and regular attendance at ATCMs. Status seeking surely continues within, with growing logistical and science capabilities, as well as

sought-after policy initiatives. Ward (2019) further argues that ambitious status claims can be accommodated by established actors in order to avoid conflict over non-recognition, while the nature and form of an international order shape the outcome of this status accommodation: “When institutions facilitate the accommodation of a rising power without diminishing the influence of established powers, the latter will be more willing to accommodate” (p. 163). This raises questions about the social stratification of Antarctic politics and the challenging effects of status seeking within.

The ATS is usually seen as one of the most successful multilateral governance arrangements, because it successfully turned the Antarctic continent into “a natural reserve, devoted to peace and science” (Environmental Protocol, Article 2), where all decisions are made by consensus at annual meetings. Generally, any nation state can qualify as a CP and thus participate in Antarctic decision-making if they sign up to the Treaty and commit to substantial research activity (Jabour, 2018). What counts as substantial research and consequently as political capital, however, lies in the eye of the established CPs. Among these parties are the 12 original signatories and 7 nations that are allowed to maintain territorial claims. Even though these claims have been neither recognised nor refuted by all parties, they are explicitly protected by the Treaty. Despite its consensual decision-making, the ATS is nonetheless a stratified institution with regard to rights and privileges. The existing territorial claimant states, for example, are the only ones allowed to maintain a claim and, in contrast to other consultative parties, original signatories cannot lose their decision-making status if they do not continually uphold their science programmes. Further, only sovereign nation states can acquire decision-making CP status at ATCMs and not, for example, indigenous people, NGOs or other international organisations. These examples are all manifestations of asymmetric power structures that are institutional, political and normative. In all cases, rules and norms delineate boundaries between an inside and outside group with unequal rights and privileges: claimant states and non-claimant states, original signatories and later signatories, nation states and non-nation states. The European Union is a member of CCAMLR, however, and some environmental NGOs such as the Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition have been admitted as observers to ATCMs since the early 1990s.

In an assessment of policy paper submissions and science output of Antarctic nations, Dudeney and Walton (2012) also demonstrated how the group of seven territorial claimants, as well as USA and Russia, showed the greatest leadership and political influence within Antarctic affairs. According to the authors, “those CPs producing the most science generally [have] the greatest political influence” (p. 1), which is clearly showing the instrumental value of science as political capital. Also, when looking at the budget contributions for the Antarctic Treaty Secretariat where treaty partners can contribute at levels A to E, New Zealand, for example, is in the group of highest contributors (A: USD 60,000 per annum) whereas South Korea sits in the second to last category (D: USD 40,000 per annum) (Antarctic Secretariat Programme, 2019).

The ATS looks like a socially stratified order from this perspective and can be likened to other long-standing institutions representing “frozen configurations of privilege and bias” (Barnett & Duvall, 2005, p. 52) where institutional power is at play in favour of established nation-state actors. Barnett and Duvall’s (2005) taxonomy of power is further useful to distinguish between the more formal, legalistic and regulative “institutional power”, on which most international legal scholars tend to focus, and the more

informal, habitual and constitutive “structural power”. Structural power concerns the mutual constitution of actors’ identities, social capacities and interests in dependent relationships and lies in the focus of most constructivist International Relations scholars. Is this hierarchical Antarctic political order capable of accommodating new players with growing capabilities so that they do not feel unrecognised and disrespected? One answer to this question can be found through investigating socialisation processes.

### *Socialisation as mutual accommodation*

State socialisation has been at the centre of constructivist norm research, where the regulative and constitutive effects of norms, understood as “a standard or appropriate behaviour for actors with a given identity” (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998, p. 891), have been investigated. The prime example for this early line of research is Finnemore and Sikkink’s norm life cycle, which offers a three-stage model for how a norm from one context diffuses into and is internalised in a different context. Socialisation is here the dominant mechanism of the norm diffusion through emulation or shaming, as well as coercive sanctions or material incentives. Once a norm has been internalised, it is then finally taken for granted, which renders compliance and conformity automatic. Generally, socialisation is the process of inducting new actors to the rules of a community. Checkel (2005) argues that there are two types of socialisation: type I is mere imitation or simulation of behaviour or role-playing where actors are simply “knowing what is socially accepted in a given setting or community” without having norms internalised completely (type II) and without seeing them truly as “the right thing to do” (p. 804).

This obvious mono-directional or top-down perspective has been problematised by later norm researchers who criticise the consequential infantilisation (Flockhart, 2006) of the norm-taker side, as well as the lack of agency granted to the norm receivers (Acharya, 2004). These scholars started focusing on norm localisation or norm contestation (Wiener, 2014) as a way of accounting for how communities of norm acceptors can alter the meaning of constitutive norms through interpretation and resulting practices. Scholars like Pu (2012), Terhalle (2011) and Thies (2015), for example, argue that socialisation is better understood as a two-way, mutual accommodation of actors in interaction. It is Thies’s (2001; 2015) role-based state socialisation approach that will be used in the following to shed light on the Antarctic partnership between South Korea and New Zealand, as this role-location centred perspective allows us to account for socialisation instances where no obvious conflict or contestation occurred.

Thies (2015) argues that, in the international system, there are two main mechanisms that account for competition between states: organisational competency, where states can “appropriate benefits from legitimate activities” (p. 288), and rational imitation, where states imitate behaviour of successful others in pursuit of benefits and positions. Importantly now, Thies (2015) adds a socialisation dimension to this understanding of international politics: great or established powers socialise new players into the rules of the game through direct instruction of normative expectations or through “indirect assimilation of norms through identification with socialising agents” (p. 288) by new players. Finally, the level of commitment by the new actors towards the social group and the extent of differences between the socialiser and the socialised affects the speed of socialisation. What exactly counts as “differences” here though needs to be operationalised further. For the purposes of the analysis at hand, it is sufficient to treat

difference as political alignment or closeness of a political, diplomatic relationship. It seems obvious that a socialisation process between New Zealand and a close economic partner and liberal democracy such as South Korea will be smoother than one involving New Zealand and totalitarian North Korea.

In Thies’s (2015) model of a stratified international system, there are at least four master statuses: novice (low/uncertain capabilities, high socialisation pressure), minor member (moderate capabilities, medium socialisation pressure), major member (higher capabilities, medium socialisation pressure) and great powers (greatest capabilities, low socialisation pressure). This model can be adapted for the ATS regional order in the following way: a novice state (for example, Malaysia) is a signatory to the Treaty, but is a Non-CP. It has low/uncertain logistical and scientific capability but is exposed to high socialisation pressure with regard to the science criterion for acquiring consultative status. A minor member (for example, Poland) has overcome this institutional hurdle by achieving moderate capabilities and consequently CP status, with now lesser but still medium socialisation pressure. A major member has even higher capabilities regarding science and logistics and arguably a certain amount of influence with regard to policy (for example Germany), but does not experience higher socialisation pressure. Finally, great powers (here the seven claimant states plus the USA and Russia) have the national programmes with the greatest capabilities, and institutional power as well as influence (Dudeney & Walton, 2012), which is most likely manifested in agenda-setting (as well as agenda-limiting) policy initiatives (“institutional power”); these actors are exposed to the lowest socialisation pressure, but are still constrained by the very norms that constitute their leadership roles and related privileges (“structural power”).

Applied to the two Antarctic players of interest here, it seems as if the small state and territorial claimant New Zealand, with its strong strategic interest in the status quo order, sits somewhere between the major and great power statuses: as described in the previous section, New Zealand’s resources and capabilities are limited, but it is punching above its weight because of its strong science programme and policy influence. Considering Thies’s (2015) socialisation mechanisms, as well as the historical episode of New Zealand’s engagement with Malaysia, and because of the mostly logistics- and science-driven bilateral cooperation, it also seems plausible that New Zealand socialisation efforts are less direct and more successful if there is high commitment from the socialised side. As shown in the previous section, South Korea exhibited such a high commitment to live up to the rules of the game, especially with regard to managing IUU fishing in the Southern Ocean. The Korean government was eager to improve its image among Ross Sea area partners and to establish itself as a (junior) partner in the Antarctic. Korean scientists, on the other hand, were keen to work with their New Zealand counterparts as mentors. South Korea’s emerging status within the Antarctic order, in turn, can be assessed as a rise from a minor to a major member, where an increase of capabilities was not met with an increase in socialisation pressure. Finally, the speedy and comparatively smooth socialisation was possible because of the high commitment displayed from the South Korean side as well as the – in the end – not too divergent interests between the two countries. The zoning of the Ross Sea MPA is a good example here: where outsiders might have expected a clash of interests, the fishery interests between New Zealand and South Korea happened to be rather aligned. Finally, adding Ward’s (2019) insight that status accommodation is easier for established powers if the new players



are not threatening their privileged position, it makes sense that Korea's status seeking from minor to major member status did not really challenge a great power's position and privilege in the stratified Antarctic order.

## Conclusion

In the sparse academic literature on Korea's engagement with Antarctica and in the wider media discourse around emerging Asian countries in the Antarctic, the view exists that Korea, like other new players from Asia, may pursue interests that are potentially challenging for the existing Antarctic order. This article attempted the first assessment of South Korea's upgraded national programme and its relationship with one of its closest Antarctic partners, New Zealand, a country with strong vested interests in the status quo order. How did the cooperation develop between these two actors with ostensibly diverging interests? The picture emerging from this assessment shows a bit more nuance: Koreans and New Zealanders found themselves in a win-win situation in all three areas: logistics, science and even policy, so far at least.

In addition to the first descriptive part, this article offers an International Relations theory-informed analysis of how this unlikely partnership was able to develop in the way it did. In the end, the win-win or "symbiotic" partnership between New Zealand and South Korea was not as unlikely as the literature presently suggests: South Korea increased its capabilities significantly but its sought-after status as a major member did not expose it to any heightened socialisation pressure, compared to its already achieved minor member status. Further, the emerging player Korea showed high commitment to the rules of the game and its interests, especially in the potentially most contentious issue around fisheries and the Ross Sea MPA, were not too dissimilar from the socialising agent of interest, New Zealand. Additionally, gaining the logistical capabilities of another major member in the Ross Sea area was seen as an opportunity by New Zealand to continue supporting its established Antarctic programme to make up for its limited resources as a small state.

This does not mean that it is impossible that the evolved partnership between New Zealand and South Korea cannot turn sour in the future. If South Korea (or any other major member, for that matter) further increases its capabilities and seeks a great power status, the question arises again whether other great powers are willing to accommodate these status aspirations, because they would have to share their position and privileges in the stratified Antarctic order. This may indeed be the situation developing with the emergence of the People's Republic of China as a great polar power within the Antarctic Order (see Brady, 2017). If successful socialisation and the resulting stability of a maintained order are not simply a one-way or top-down street of norm internalisation and expected compliance but a mutual accommodation between significant others, it becomes important how adaptive the Antarctic order and the great powers supporting it can and want to be.

This last point poses an important research question for further scholarly engagement with the issue: norm researchers like Wiener (2014), for example, explore whether regular access to contestation for involved stakeholders will enhance the legitimacy of governance systems. What regulatory areas and institutional privileges are established that major/great powers and regional stakeholders would be willing to open up for contestation in order to accommodate emerging players' great power status claims and to maintain

the stability of the current Antarctic order? Are they willing to relax the science criterion for acquiring the CP status or grant consultative parties that happen to be non-original signatories their decision-making rights indefinitely? Are the established players and territorial claimants willing to give up their claims, or allow other actors to make new ones? These questions are, of course, purely speculative, but should be part of future scholarly and strategic thought and research.

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## Interviews

- Interview with CCAMLR and Antarctica Desk Officer, New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in Wellington, June 2018.**
- Interview with KOPRI biologist I in Incheon, September 2018.**
- Interview with KOPRI biologist II in Incheon, September 2018.**
- Interview with KOPRI oceanographer in Incheon, September 2018.**
- Interview with KOPRI paleo-climatologist in Incheon, September 2018.**
- Interview with KOPRI Policy Unit in Incheon, September 2018.**
- Interview with K-route Unit in Incheon, September 2018.**
- Interview with NZ geologist in Wellington, June 2018.**
- Interview with NZ oceanographer in Wellington, February 2019.**