

Shipping and Climate Change in East Asia: The Impacts of the Opening of the Northeast Passage

Hikomitsu KITAGAWA, Ph.D.
Ocean Policy Research Foundation
Tokyo, Japan

The summer sea ice extent reached down to its minimum in 2007. Together with this high level of oil price inspired interest in the Arctic shipping, since Arctic routes are blessed with a considerable reduction of travelling distance. After the Arctic states claim the 200nm EEZ in the Arctic Ocean, there will remain a relatively small high sea area in its center. Navigations in the Arctic shall then be made under a few, one at least, jurisdiction(s) of the Arctic states and would also be done at the risks due to lack of the infrastructure along the routes, neither of hard and soft ones. Taking account of yearly and regional fluctuations of the ice conditions in the Arctic, the real opening of the Arctic is still years away, and growing environmental and ecological awareness may put off the commercial shipping even if the melting of the polar ice cap is advancing. The International Northern Sea Route Programme, carried out from 1993 to 1998, has already pointed out the key issues to be solved before the Northern Sea Route (traditionally Northeast Passage) be opened for the world shipping industry. The rich energy resources would be a prime mover of the promotion of Arctic shipping and the associated activities. Potential influences of the Arctic routings are discussed on the Asian shipping industry, referring to the current activities of the Arctic Council.

