



曲 枫 主编

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北冰洋研究

第一辑

Arctic Studies



社会科学文献出版社
SOCIAL SCIENCES ACADEMIC PRESS (CHINA)



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社会科学文献出版社

Experiencing the Arctic: European and Chinese tourists in Greenland

Daniela Tommasini; Zhou Shenghan

Abstract: The Arctic, thanks to the fascinating allure of its landscapes, fauna, and rather unknown population, is considered as a mythical place in both Eastern and Western cultures. This paper, based on fieldwork done in Greenland, considers two different cultural groups of tourists: the Europeans and the Chinese. The aim is to compare the experience of Western and Eastern tourists to find out similarities and differences regarding cultural representations and interpretations of their extraordinary—physically and mentally—Arctic encounter in the context of a holiday. The data was collected in 2014 with European visitors and in 2016 with Chinese visitors. The results presented here look primarily into the tourist experiences; the persistence of icons and symbols and their new representations. Generally there is a growing interest for new destinations that can give the visitors remarkable memories of places and encounters, far away from their everyday life. There is an increasing number of tourists motivated to visit the Arctic due to public awareness about the fragile Arctic environment. The feeling of a “vanishing territory” brings the desire to travel to a vulnerable, threatened Arctic.

Keywords: Arctic tourism; Chinese tourists; Tourist experiences; Greenland

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Introduction

Experience is a life-long continuous, interactive process of actions and reflections meaningful to each individual. Perspectives on the world and/or oneself can be changed by an experience (Snel, 2011). The process of creating experience is how we can add meaning to our lives (Ahola, 2007). An individual's interests and mood play an important role in the experience creation. Primary experiences are the outcomes of what we sense and experience ourselves. Secondary experiences are the result of experiences we gain as we talk about them or when we share our thoughts and stories (Boswijk, Peelen & Olthof, 2012).

In today's tourism industry, the staging of tourism experiences has become a more important element. This relates to the notion of services becoming experiences that involve consumers being presented with memorable offerings which are achieved through the tourists' participation in the creation of such offerings (Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). In other words, a tourism experience is not formed beforehand but co-created by both experience stager and their guests. In such circumstances, experience is (re) produced within the consumption process of tourism products; consumers become an integral part of the (re)production process for their own experiences.

In an international context, tourists tend to choose a destination with different landscapes, cultures and lifestyles to experience something new (Kim & Ritchie, 2013). Touristic memory and its narration are fuelled by both actual and desired experience (Bendix, 2002). When tourists go to a new place or a new country, they want to learn about it—discover the history, visit interesting sites, eat something “local”, and bring home something “typical”. It makes them feel for a moment that they have witnessed and participated in something new and different from their everyday life, in a culture unlike their own (Laaksonen, 2010). When tourists come to new destinations, they rely on travel books, tourist

information offices, tour guides, and friendly locals to help them move around, make them aware of interesting places and events, and to know and understand a destination (Ooi, 2002). Visiting, sightseeing, and communicating with local people as well as immersing in the unique cultural atmosphere are all parts of the tourism experience.

Since the experiences “are events to which the individual reacts and thereby creates a memory, it is personal and no two people can have the same one” (Pine II, B. J., Gilmore, 1999). The deeper the tourist can access the visit experience, the more value can be produced by the interaction between the tourist and other players. Two of the main principles of experience creation are based on customer participation, which can range from passive to active, and connection between the customer and the experience, ranging from absorption to immersion. Clearly, the most memorable experiences are those that engage the customer in active participation in an activity in which they are fully immersed (Smith, 2009).

An increasing number of tourists are seeking to visit remote regions of the Arctic in order to experience the extraordinary, and enjoy the astonishing natural beauties. The attraction moulded into a dream becomes the mythical Arctic, with its fascinating landscapes of tundra, icebergs, huge fjords, and its marvellous animals such as polar bears, seals and whales. The Arctic is a new frontier for tourists who wish to travel to new and not so known destinations. In this paper, we investigate how the cultural background of the tourists influences their experience of the Arctic. We will compare the experience of Western and Eastern tourists in Greenland to seek similarities and differences in cultural representations and interpretations of their Arctic encounter in the context of a holiday.

Arctic imaginary

The western imaginations of the Arctic can be traced back to ancient Greece. At that time, the Arctic was considered as a place of peace and happiness, a symbol of integrity, the probable seat of Paradise. In classical antiquity, the North was a geographical place beyond the last stretch of land, which although unknown,

was at least denominated. Situated in the sea free of ice, the extreme North was a virginal land, uniformly white. The Arctic is described, celebrated in fables, as the lost Eden and the aspiration is to rediscover the state of grace with God (Navet, 1992). The interest in the Polar Regions intensified in Europe in the late 16th and early 17th century, stimulated by the wish to tap the passage to the Orient and the riches of Cathay, to exploit a direct route to the Far East via the Arctic. At the end of the 16th century, the Western imagination fixed the stereotype of the Arctic as a mysterious place (Loomis, 1977; Sugden, 1982; Osherenko & Young, 1989). The Arctic thus lured explorers seeking a challenge to the human spirit.

In contrast, the Eastern tradition had limited records of the Arctic. Ancient China had very colourful records of aurora as they had a special meaning in Chinese traditional beliefs. According to a research project organized by the Chinese Academy of Sciences, the Ministry of Education and the State Administration of Cultural Heritage in 1974, there are more than 300 records on the phenomenon of the Northern Lights in several Chinese ancient books (Wang, Liu, 2003). The “Han Shu – Tian Wen Zhi” (The History of Han Dynasty: Astronomical Treatise) recorded that the Northern Lights were observed on October 24, 32 BC, this is one of the oldest aurora observation records in the world (Zhang & Yu, 2013). Among the different forms of the Northern Lights, a snake-like band of lights is very common. They are often composed of numerous ever-changing rays, looking like ribbons (Liu, Chen, Zhou & Bao, 1984). This is similar with the image of the *loong* (Chinese dragon) in ancient China which for thousands of years, has been the totem of the Chinese nation. In the silk book *Er San Zi Wen* of the Mawangdui Mausoleum of Han dynasty, Confucius emphasized three characteristics of the loong: changes a lot, beautiful beyond any words, and with unexpected exquisite pattern (Lian, 2012). In the description of ancient Qin and Han dynasty, the loong also has the ability of acting in the dark. Additionally, the loong-related cultural relics are limited in the northern and central provinces (Shitoubu, 2015). The natures of the loong—luminous capacity, no fixed shape, and spectacular beauty—suggest that the loong is not a kind of animal, but more likely an astronomical incarnation of the Northern lights

(Zhang, 1986).

Indeed, places are chosen to be gazed upon because there is anticipation, especially through day-dreaming and fantasy (Urry, 1995). The mysterious character of the Arctic and of the North makes the Arctic region a highly attractive place to visit. Arctic places can offer both a sacred site and a sacred sight, for instance a view of something very special, the midnight sun, a phenomenon that seems to underline a cosmic impression of the site. Lynch (1960) suggests that a desirable image is one that celebrates and enlarges the present while making connections with past and future, and the feeling one gets from seeing the midnight sun seems to be stronger than that of a sunset (Jacobsen, 1997). The mystic symbolism of the polar environment allows contemplation about the wider universe (Sugden, 1989), this feeling of purity (Viken, 1995), is an important component of the tourist's Arctic image. Another motivation of visiting the Arctic has been associated with spirits of adventure on the edge of the world (Weber, 2001; Gyimóthy, S. & Mykletun, 2004; Lee, Weaver & Prebensen, 2017). Some travellers need farther distances, extreme sensations and to surpass their own previous achievements. To climb glaciers and hike where they hope other humans will not have left a mark. The unique nature-based experiences have now given way to a representation more suitable to the demands of its present user who is no longer an armchair traveller. It is a representation that belongs to an active user who participates in person, not just enjoying his journeys sitting in a room, his imagination inspired by books and summaries. His experience is enriched by going one phase farther. After having dreamed over books, films and the tales of friends, with a very precise image, he travels to the place and gives life to his myth, give substance to his dream, to his mental representation (Tommasini, 2011).

Nevertheless, Osherenko and Young (1989) argue that the myth of pristine wildernesses in the Arctic is rapidly vanishing as environmental interest groups focus attention on increasing pollution, habitat disturbance and destruction of the wildlife in the Far North. Rapid change associated with a warming planet threatens tourism resources, yet pushing a "see it while you can" mentality among nature, cultural and adventure tourism markets (Lemelin, Dawson, Stewart, et al., 2010; Snyder & Stonehouse, 2007) while producing uncertain regional benefits

(Grenier & Müller, 2011; Grimwood, 2015). This “disappearing Arctic,” attributable to global warming but also to increased development pressures, paradoxically contributes to an increasing number of tourists to that vulnerable region. For the eco-clientele, touristic activities in the Arctic must be environmentally-conscious while opening up the vulnerable region to the increasing number of tourists (Lee, et al., 2017).

Methodology

In August 2016, questionnaires were sent to the tour members of “The Arctic Low-Carbon Journey”, by the Shanghai CTS Private Overseas Affairs Co., Ltd. All the 44 Chinese participants to the cruise ship to Greenland (Figure 1) answered it. The questionnaire comprised 9 questions and was written in Mandarin to ensure that all respondents could clearly understand all questions. Information on motivation and first-hand tourist experiences were collected through the survey. The questions were based on previous field research carried out in July 2014 in Tasiilaq (Ammassalik) on the East Coast of Greenland (Tommasini, 2014, 2015). (Figure 2). In the 2014 fieldwork research, questionnaires were sent to tourists and some additional questions were asked during interviews. The sample included 80 interviews with visitors spending more than three days in a Greenlandic location. The questions aimed at looking into the authenticity of the tourist experiences, the knowledge of local culture, the reaction to promotional material, and the spatial perception of the place.

Findings

Demographic information of the respondents

Among the 44 Chinese respondents in the 2016 survey, 52% of them were men and 48% were women with a wide age range from 6 to 68 years old. In the 2014 study, 80 people participated, 45% of them were men and 55% were women. The majority of the visitors were from European countries, mainly Germany. As for

non-European countries, visitors at the time of the survey came from Australia and United States followed by tourists from Israel. About the age of the visitors, the main cluster was from 60 onwards, retired people that very often were fulfilling a life dream. The 50 – 59 years old cluster was visitors that could afford a high-priced holiday to an Arctic place. Thirty-fivepercent were 30 – 39 years old, attracted by the sport activities that can be performed undertaken in the area.

Motivations

For both groups of tourists, their first motivation in choosing a Arctic nowadays is the wildness of the landscapes. Also, The Arctic is also attractive because of its relatively unknown native inhabitants (Tommasini, 2011). Another motivation is adventure. Figure 3 shows that unspoiled nature/environment (58%) and unique landscape (40%) motivates many Chinese to visit an Arctic place. Around half (48%) of the respondents are also pushed by the curiosity of the unknown place and 39% stated that this journey could enrich their knowledge and their personal experience. As for representation and conception of Arctic memories, the tourist photograph has already become an expert (Crouch & Lubben, 2003) since 67% of the Chinese tourists came with the specific purpose of taking photographs.

In the 2014 study, the majority of the tourists travelled with friends or with relatives. For them, Greenland is a place where nature is one of the main attractions and is also perceived as a place where to perform sport-oriented activities (e. g. , hiking, climbing, and kayaking) that may include camping outside inhabited areas with friends. To summarize, the main motivations for the western tourists are landscape and nature (60%), outdoor activities (20.5%) and local culture (19.5%).

Impressions before visit

Because of the increasing availability of information through various channels and the rapid development of social media, in the 2016 survey, Chinese tourists showed a better understanding of the Arctic region. 60% of the participants said they know the Arctic pretty good; there are even 25% of them stating they know

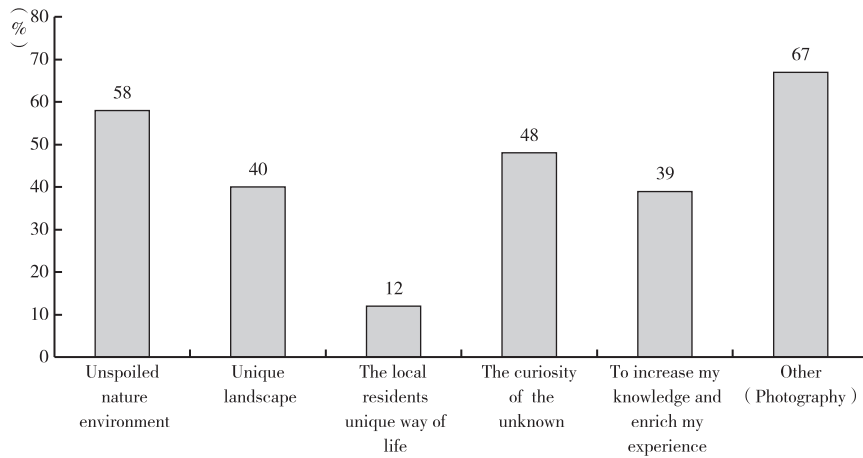


Fig. 1 Travel motivations of Chinese tourists

this region very well. Besides the iconic symbols such as Northern Lights and natural beauties, environmental considerations like the climate change, which accelerated melting of the ice sheet, or the polar bears and other species in danger, are mentioned by the Chinese visitors when they were asked about the impressions of the destination. Chinese respondents were also aware about plans to open an Arctic route through the ocean.

The European tourists had some pre-formed ideas about the Arctic before visiting. For the 38%, this should be a place with beautiful landscapes; 30% thought it has a cold and unpredictable weather; 24% that the place is remote and has very few inhabitants. 9% of the interviewees came to the destination without any idea about it since they wanted to be surprised. Nevertheless, 94% of the European participants had certain knowledge of the local culture. The typical information sources, such as books and travel guides were preferred by 45% of European participants (Figure 4). Nonetheless the use of the web was very relevant for 23% when gathering information and planning the holiday. The main internet sources are the official website of the National Tourist Board (<http://www.greenland.com>), followed by the local tourist organisation called Destination East Greenland (<http://www.eastgreenland.com>). 15% stated that they got the idea of visiting the Arctic from school lectures and museum visits.

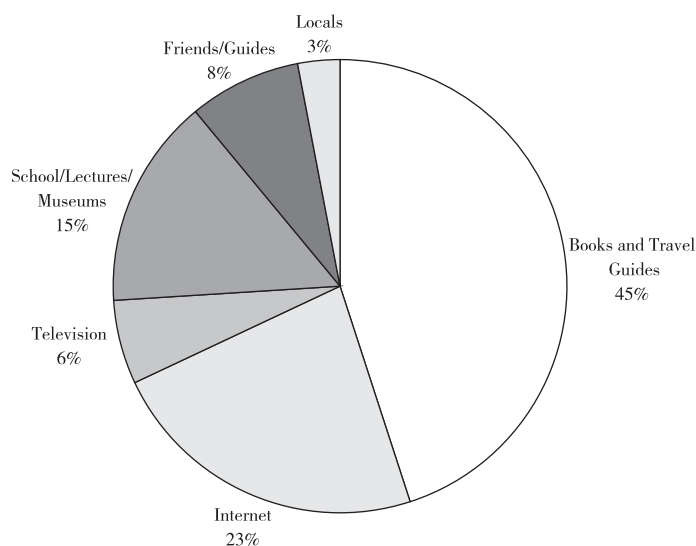


Fig. 2 Sources of information for European tourists

Tourists' experiences

For the Chinese tourists, the authentic experiences which can only be gathered in a real Arctic place are considered to be remarkable and memorable. When experiencing the rough sea during the navigation, some tourists felt how humans are so tiny and helpless in the nature (Respondents 14, 20, 23). The Greenland wind with force 10 also impressed the tourists. One of the participants said "every time when I got down to the boat, we were sailing to the known scenery against the wind, this experience is the most peculiar and exciting; it doesn't matter what I'm going to see, because everything in my sight is a unique scenery in my life, the most memorable is the whole experience" (Respondent 36). To get close to the glacier by boat and walk on the ice sheet; to climb the rock on a small island and play in the hot spring among the glacier; as well as to meet and communicate with the local people are those precious once-in-a-lifetime experiences for Chinese tourists (Respondents 6, 14, 18, 30).

As the 2016 survey was carried out with a group of tourists from a very specific eco-tour programme, some of their experiences are more related to the

environment protection. According to the description of the tourists, they witnessed how global warming accelerates the melting of the ice sheet; as the capital Nuuk is hot and foggy; as the polar bears survive in a worse living environment due to less floating ice (Respondents 3, 15) . For the European tourists, the most important experiences during the holiday were the beauties of the landscape and its impressive views (35%) – 17% were deeply touched by the beautiful nature – as well as the culture and the people (35%); exciting activities that could be done during the holiday (10%); or the adventurous travel (4%).

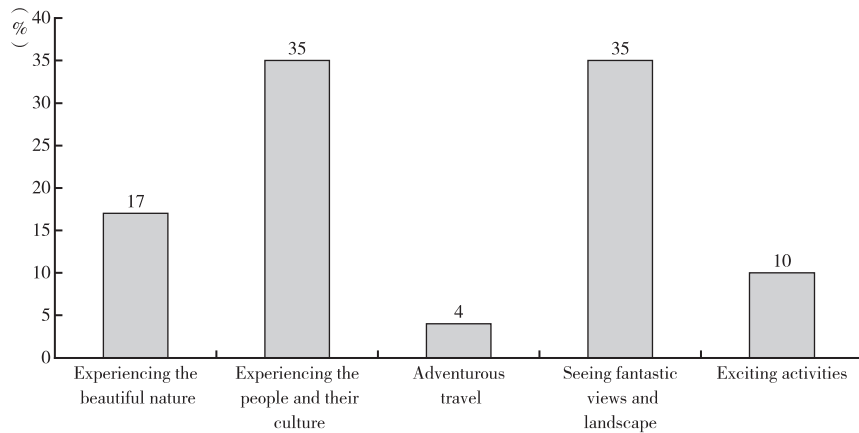


Fig. 3 The most important experiences for the European tourists

Regarding activities undertaken in the Ammassalik area, hiking was the favourite followed by boat tours, often arranged directly with the local hunters, and by guided tours. More than 53% of the activities were organised by the hotel, 40% by the tourists themselves and 7% by the cruise staff.

Tourists were interested to meet the local population as this was the case for 72%; the other 28% would have liked to but did not have the occasion. For 44%, the opportunity to meet local people was during an excursion; for the 37% the encounter was in the villages or in the streets. For the 15% of the interviewees, meeting the local people was during the stay at the hotel, and for the 4% the meeting was on the occasion of a cultural exhibition. About trying local food, 41% did and other 28% would have liked to but did not have the occasion;

10% who had the possibility to try did not like it and 20% did not have any interest about testing local specialities.

About cultural activities, 34% of the interviewees has not seen any; 30% did and it was a drum dance for 23% followed by song performance for 12% while 3% saw a games or sport demonstration. A visit to the local art and crafts and souvenir shop “Skaæven” was a must for the 75% of the visitors, the majority buying maps (27%), postcards (20%) and DVD (20%), followed by calendars (13%) and accessories (13%); and traditional art crafts made on sealskin, bones or narwhal tooth (7%). Almost all the visitors went once to the bookshop Neriusaaq during their stay in Tasiilaq. It is also a popular meeting point for locals.

Memories to bring back

Chinese respondents declared that these Arctic experiences were quite significant. They could learn how to live a low-carbon lifestyle and be environmental sensitive (Respondents 17, 40); were interested by scientists helping to better understand climate change issues (Respondent No. 37); could learn the culture of the indigenous population (Respondent 2). According to their cultural Chinese background, the quality of life depends on the lifestyle, so climate change will not only affect the future of our own generation, but also the future of further generations (Respondent 19). The noteworthy experience was emphasised by some respondents (Respondents 21, 34, 38) as “with my eyes, my body and my footsteps, I experienced the gifts of nature; I truly realized what the consequence of human’s unfamiliarity with issues and the menace of global warming was the irreversible answer of nature. I learned how to contribute to environment protection; it starts with small actions” (Respondent 21). Many respondents observed the landscape of the Arctic and learned how tiny climate change will have a huge effect on many places.

As for memories to bring home, more than half (53%) of the European tourists will remember the beautiful landscape and the “views” or the scenic spots; for 27% it will be the interesting people; peace and calmness (7%); and mosquitoes (7%). Cold (2%), unpredictable weather (2%), and social problems (2%) are also part of the memories of their journey (Figure 4).

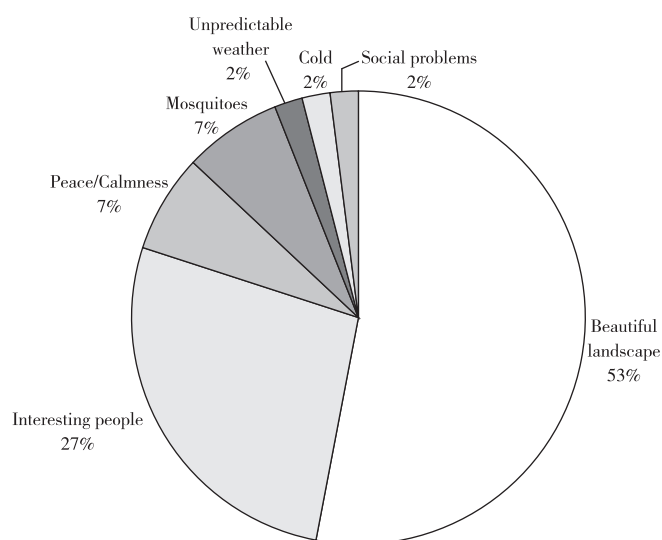


Fig. 4 Memories bring home for European tourists

Conclusions

This research was looking into the aspects of experience, image of the place, expectations, and memories of two groups of tourists who visited Greenland in 2014 (European) and 2016 (Chinese). As reported by our results and popularized by the media, the recent years have witnessed an increasing number of visitors to the Arctic regions. As a “hit” destination, the Arctic will receive growing flows of western and eastern tourists as individuals, groups, and on cruise ships. The Arctic, especially for people from central and southern regions of Europe, is a relatively new destination, very much popularised by the media and by tour operators as a new, relatively close last frontier. For Chinese tourists, currently in the process of becoming one of the world’s largest source markets, the Arctic destinations are attractive and thus affected by a growing trend.

In the case of Greenland, the reasons for this noteworthy and valuable interest are the unique nature, the different culture, the animal life, and the pristine environment. Pure, clean air and the huge vastness of empty spaces are desired,

and sought by both Chinese and European visitors. This paper highlighted the similarities and differences in the approach and the lived experience of Greenland. Both eastern and western tourists are visiting the Arctic with the wish to witness the extraordinary natural beauties; to explore new and not so known places; and have a once – in – a – life – time experience. Perhaps due to cultural differences, Chinese tourists are more likely to have a pre – determined purpose when they travel and emphasize their personal achievement gained through the journey. For Europeans, the essential part of the experience is to “live” their dream, to meet another culture, to perform sport activities, and to have a personal experience of the Arctic.

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体验北极：中、欧游客的格陵兰岛之旅

〔意〕丹妮拉·托马西尼

周圣涵

摘要：北极，由于其神妙迷人的自然风貌，独具魅力的动植物，以及相对未知的人文风情，在东西方文化中一直被认为是一个神话般的存在。本文以在格陵兰岛进行的实地考察为数据基础，对比了两种不同文化的游客群体：欧洲人和中国人。目的是通过对东西方游客的旅行体验进行比较，找出他们在文化体现和对北极之行不同寻常之处的解读上的异同。文中所用数据分别来自2014年针对欧洲游客的调研以及2016年针对中国游客的调研。这里展示的研究成果主要着眼于游客体验、北极文化符号的持久性及其新的表示形式。一般来说，人们对能带来深刻记忆的新兴旅游目的地越来越感兴趣；这些新目的地让游客远离日常生活的地方和日复一日平淡无奇的生活方式。同时，也基于公众对保护北极脆弱环境的意识的觉醒，越来越多的游客前往北极旅游。这种去实地感受“消失的领土”的感觉更加重了去脆弱的、受到威胁的北极旅行的迫切心情。也许由于文化差异，中国游客在旅游时更倾向于有一个预先确定的目的并更侧重于他们在旅途中的个人收获。对于欧洲人而言，旅行体验的核心则是实现个人梦想，见证另一种文化，以及亲身体验北极的经历。

关键词：北极旅游 中国游客 欧洲游客 旅行体验 格陵兰

社会科学文献出版社

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

北冰洋研究. 第1辑 / 曲枫主编. -- 北京: 社会科学文献出版社, 2019. 12

ISBN 978-7-5201-5638-7

I. ①北… II. ①曲… III. ①北冰洋-区域-丛刊
IV. ①D5-55

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2019)第218984号

北冰洋研究 (第一辑)

主 编 / 曲 枫

副 主 编 / [德] 迈克尔·克努佩尔 (Michael Knüppel)

出 版 人 / 谢寿光

责任编辑 / 邓 翊

出 版 / 社会科学文献出版社·国别区域分社 (010) 59367078

地址: 北京市北三环中路甲29号院华龙大厦 邮编: 100029

网址: www.ssap.com.cn

发 行 / 市场营销中心 (010) 59367081 59367083

印 装 / 三河市龙林印务有限公司

规 格 / 开 本: 787mm × 1092mm 1/16

印 张: 13.5 字 数: 228 千字

版 次 / 2019年12月第1版 2019年12月第1次印刷

书 号 / ISBN 978-7-5201-5638-7

定 价 / 89.00 元

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