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## China's Rise in Antarctica?

### ABSTRACT

China has begun a new phase in its Antarctic engagement. Beijing has dramatically increased Chinese scientific activities on the frozen continent and is looking to take on more of a leadership role there. This paper draws connections between China's expanded Antarctic program and debates on its foreign and domestic policies.

**KEYWORDS:** China's rise, Antarctica, foreign policy, resource conflict

CHINA IS ENTERING A NEW HISTORICAL PHASE in its engagement with Antarctica. Since 2005, the Chinese government has dramatically increased its expenditure on Antarctic affairs and has stepped up domestic (though less so foreign) publicity on those activities. In 2005, Chinese Antarctic scientists successfully reached Dome A, one of the last great unexplored territories of Antarctica. In the 2008–09 austral summer, a Chinese construction team began building a new base there, while other teams worked to upgrade China's other two Antarctic stations. In the same period, China also set up a new Antarctic research and logistics base in Shanghai.

Antarctica is the world's fifth largest continent, with a wealth of valuable resources,<sup>1</sup> governed by no one country, yet a place where politics is very much to the fore. For the past 50 years, Antarctica has been managed under the Antarctic Treaty System (ATS). The Antarctic Treaty was a product of the Cold War. China was initially excluded from joining the treaty for political reasons and was not able to join until 1983. Its recent increased activities in Antarctica operate toward an openly stated political goal: the Chinese government is seeking to take on more of a leadership role in Antarctic affairs and is unhappy with the current order in Antarctica.

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1. Antarctica's "resources" include minerals, meteorites, intellectual property of Antarctic bio-prospecting (the quest to find commercial uses for bioresources), locations for scientific bases, marine living resources, and preferred access to the continent for tourism.

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China is on the rise in Asia, Africa, North and South America, the Caribbean, the South Pacific, and in Western and Eastern Europe. China's activities in Antarctica (and the Arctic) are part of this rise and reflect the country's growing economic and political power. In the past, China's Antarctic programs were restricted by a lack of available funds and of scientists with Antarctic expertise. However, since 2007, China has been the world's third largest economy. The current global economic downturn only accentuates its economic importance. China now has a growing pool of experienced Antarctic scientists to draw on and a network of Antarctic research institutes nationwide.

To date, there has been no scholarly analysis outside China to examine Beijing's current Antarctic motives, agenda, strategy, and perspective on other nations' Antarctic policies. The few existing accounts discussing China's earlier Antarctic strategy are now out of date. This means there is a gap in our understanding of the implications of China's global rise for the international balance of power. Similarly, there is little material to help us apprehend the effectiveness of the Antarctic Treaty to represent the interests of all its signatories in the current world order. In order to better interpret China's current Antarctic policies, this paper examines a series of questions: Will China's rise in Antarctica impinge on the interests of other Antarctic Treaty nations or those who have not yet joined the treaty but have expressed an interest in the affairs of the continent? What does China's quest for a greater leadership role in Antarctica mean? Is China interested in challenging the status quo of the ATS and/or merely protecting its own interests?

The paper places China's Antarctic involvement within the context of its evolving domestic and foreign policy. It is based on a critical review of contemporary Chinese social science writing on Antarctica and articles in key Chinese government media outlets, interviews and correspondence with Chinese and non-Chinese Antarctic specialists, and a review of relevant secondary sources on Chinese foreign and domestic policy.

In a 1994 article on China's involvement in Antarctic affairs, Chinese international law expert Zou Keyuan divided the country's Antarctic activities into three stages.<sup>2</sup> In this paper I have utilized Zou's three stages as a starting point to outline the gradual but steady increase in China's Antarctic involvement.

2. Zou Keyuan, "China's Interests in and Policy toward Antarctica," in Bruce Davis and Richard Herr (eds.), *Asia in Antarctica* (Canberra: Australian National University Center for Resource and Environmental Studies, 1994), p. 95.

Zou's stages are the following: Stage 1, from 1978 to 1984, when China learned from the expertise of others in order to set up its Antarctic program; Stage 2, from 1985 to 1989, when China was able to set up its own bases and began to launch independent expeditions; and Stage 3, from 1990 on, when China began to shift its priorities into scientific research. I have updated this chronology to include Stage 4, from 2005 to the present, when China is seeking more of a leadership role in Antarctic affairs.

## CHINA AND THE ANTARCTIC: THE EARLY YEARS

Within the People's Republic of China (PRC), many carry a strong sense of injustice that political reasons prevented it from being one of the original signatories of the Antarctic Treaty in 1959.<sup>3</sup> However, China was excluded in part because it actually declined to participate in the scientific projects in Antarctica during the 1957–58 International Geophysical Year (IGY), which preceded the treaty. In 1958, the U.S. explicitly vetoed China's becoming a signatory, just as Washington had earlier urged that China be banned from the IGY, which launched the Antarctic programs of many nations.<sup>4</sup> The U.S., though, was only one voice—albeit an extremely influential one—in the collaborative decision-making that created the IGY and later the Antarctic Treaty. Chinese scientists were keen to be involved in the IGY and were in fact invited. But Beijing sought assurances from the IGY organizing committee that its political rival, the Republic of China (ROC, Taiwan), would not be accepted as a participant. This was not agreed to, so Beijing declined to participate.<sup>5</sup>

In 1966, China's State Oceanic Administration (Guojia Haiyangju) was established with a brief to engage in work in Antarctica "at the proper time."<sup>6</sup> However, China's domestic turmoil from 1966–76 meant that the "proper time" was much later than may have originally been anticipated. Behind this

3. See, for example, Guo Peiqing, "The Hidden Process of China's Accession to the Antarctic Treaty," *Contemporary China History Studies*, no. 4 (2004), pp. 30–49.

4. Dian Olson Belanger, *Deep Freeze: The United States, the International Geophysical Year, and the Origins of Antarctica's Age of Science* (Boulder, Colo.: University Press of Colorado, 2006), pp. 38, 373. Belanger's information on the U.S.'s attitude toward China and Antarctica in the 1950s is based on U.S. State Department files from the period.

5. Wei-chin Lee, "China and Antarctica: So Far and Yet So Near," *Asian Survey* 30:6 (June 1990), p. 580.

6. Wang Qian, "Twenty Years of Antarctic Research," November 3, 2004, china.org.cn, <<http://china.org.cn/English/2004/Nov/111106.htm>>.

agency in the chain of political command is the powerful Ministry of Land and Resources (Guotu Ziyuanbu). The late 1970s marked the beginning of a new phase in PRC foreign relations after China's new leadership adopted the policy of "reform and opening up." Hence, in 1978 Beijing discussed the possibility of joint research with a number of other countries in Antarctic fisheries, oceanography, and geological surveys. During the 1979–80 austral summer, two Chinese scientists joined the Australian Antarctic Research Expedition. In the same period, China sought advice from New Zealand on setting up an Antarctic base.

In 1981 China set up the National Antarctic Expedition Committee (Guojia Nanji Kaocha Weiyuanhui) to coordinate Antarctic research nationwide and facilitate cooperation with other countries. China joined the ATS in 1983, became a consultative party to the treaty in 1985 (which meant it could have a say in decision-making), and joined the Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research (SCAR)<sup>7</sup> in 1986. At the time it joined the treaty, China had 35 scientists working in various international expedition teams on the Antarctic continent. Having the PRC join the Antarctic Treaty was not just advantageous for Beijing; it was also a coup for treaty members because it kept China from lending its support to the anti-treaty movement led by Malaysia.<sup>8</sup>

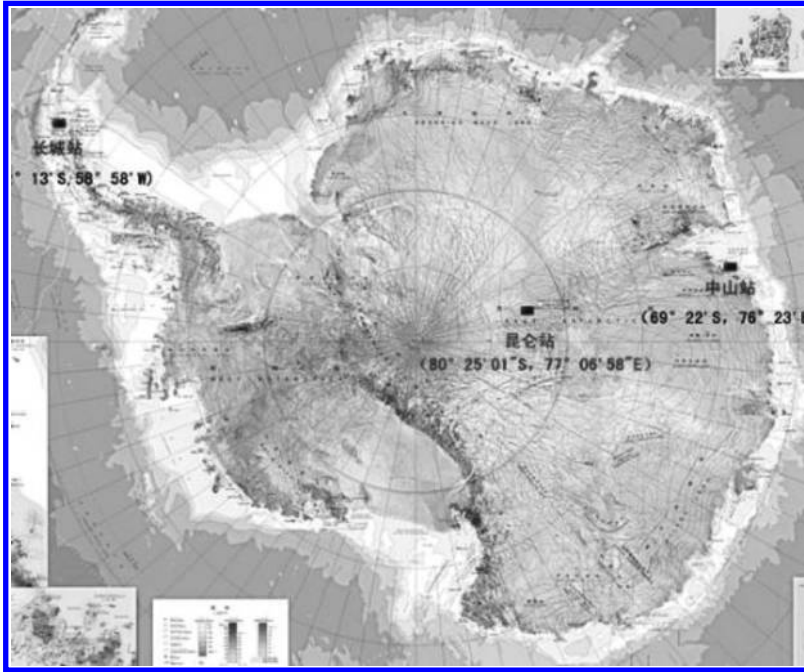
In the years from 1985 to 1989, China set up its own Antarctic scientific bases and began to launch independent expeditions. China's first base, Changcheng Zhan (Great Wall Station), was established on King George Island in Western Antarctica (see Figure 1). This station is at 62 degrees latitude, which is outside the polar circle. At the time, China did not have the capabilities to build on the Antarctic continent. In summer, the base can house up to 80 people; however, in recent years its activities have been considerably scaled down.<sup>9</sup> China's second base, Zhongshan Zhan (Zhongshan Station), was set up in 1989 on the eastern sector of the Larseman Hills close to a Russian base, Progress II. According to a senior Chinese Antarctic affairs official, after China set up this continental base, "[I]t was entitled to become a negotiating country of the Antarctic Treaty, having a say in decisions

7. SCAR is a committee of the International Committee for Science, providing advice to the ATS on scientific matters; its advice has been incorporated into Antarctic Treaty instruments on numerous occasions.

8. Lee, "China and Antarctica," p. 585.

9. "Report of 21st Chinese National Antarctic Research Expedition, 2004–05" (Beijing: Chinese Advisory Committee for Polar Research, 2005).

FIGURE 1. Map of China's Antarctica, Showing Its Three Bases



SOURCE: By author.

NOTE: Left: Changcheng Station; Center: Kunlun Station; Right: Zhongshan Station.

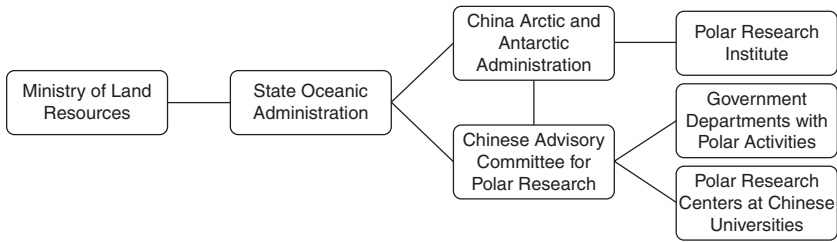
relating to Antarctica.”<sup>10</sup> Zhongshan Station is named after the father of modern China, Sun Zhongshan (Sun Yat-sen). In summer, this base can house up to 60 personnel, while in winter it is run with less than 20. Nowadays, most of China’s scientific activities are conducted at Zhongshan: it is a more useful site from a scientific point of view than Great Wall Station.<sup>11</sup>

In the 1980s, Antarctic involvement and the international collaborations that stemmed from activities there greatly increased China’s international profile and status. However, 1989 was a turning point in terms of Chinese domestic and foreign policy. After the violent crackdown on the pro-democracy movement in June 1989, the Chinese government was shunned on the international scene for a number of years. In response, Party senior leader Deng Xiaoping advocated a strategy of “hiding our strength, biding our time, and doing what we can” (*tao guang, yang hui, you suo zuo wei*) to deal

10. Wang Qian, “Twenty Years of Antarctic Research.”

11. “Report of 21st Chinese National Antarctic Research Expedition, 2004–05.”

FIGURE 2. Organizational Chart for Chinese Units



SOURCE: By author.

with Western criticism and any future conflict with Western countries. The emphasis in the 1990s was on lying low. In the same period, China's Antarctic strategy was adjusted to a consolidating, rather than expansionist, phase.

In the 1990s, China shifted its priorities into building a meaningful scientific research program in Antarctica. However, expanding Antarctic research to U.S. or U.K. levels was hampered by a lack of funds; this slowed the pace of China's Antarctic efforts for a number of years. Nonetheless, steady progress was made in this period, in tandem with China's slow but steady economic growth.

In October 1989, symbolizing the new emphasis on producing high-quality scientific research, the Polar Research Institute of China (Zhongguo Jidi Yanjiusuo) was established in Shanghai (Figure 2). In 2003, it changed its Chinese, but not its English, name to Zhongguo Jidi Yanjiu Zhongxin (literally, "center" instead of "institute"). This organization falls under the leadership of China's State Oceanic Administration. The Polar Research Institute is now the leading national organization for polar-related research in China. The choice of name was significant, demonstrating that China was not only interested in investigating Antarctic science but would now expand to include the Arctic.<sup>12</sup> The Polar Research Institute has three main tasks: (1) supervising China's polar research; (2) organizing China's polar expeditions; and (3) arranging the logistics for the expeditions, which includes managing China's polar bases and maintaining the Chinese icebreaker, *Xue Long* (Ice Dragon).

12. On China and the Arctic, see Joseph Spears, "China and the Arctic: The Awakening Snow Dragon," *China Brief*, March 2009, <<http://www.jamestown.org>>; Linda Jakobson, "China Prepares for an Ice-Free Arctic," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Insights into Peace and Security, March 2010.

In 1994, a further polar administrative body, the Chinese Advisory Committee for Polar Research (Zhongguo Jidi Kaocha Zixun Weiyuanhui), was established. This committee is led by China's State Oceanic Administration, but has cross-agency functions to advise all Chinese government departments with polar interests. The committee is charged with advising the Chinese leadership and bureaucracy on polar matters, organizing scholarly conferences on polar themes, and evaluating China's polar research program and its outcomes.

In 1996, the National Antarctic Expedition Committee was renamed the China Arctic and Antarctic Administration, which is commonly shortened as CAA (Guojia Haiyangju Jidi Kaocha Bangongshi). CAA is now in charge of administrative matters having to do with China's polar expeditions and membership in ATS organizations and committees. In 1999, CAA set up the "Chinese Polar Science Database System" project, a website with information in English and Chinese to promote the outcomes of China's polar science to the rest of the world. This is an important task if China is to take on more of a leadership role in the ATS, because it is the countries that lead in Antarctic science that lead in Antarctic governance. This website boasts (because of Internet censorship in China, it well may be the case) that it is one of the country's most inclusive and open databases.<sup>13</sup> However, China is still not as open as it could be on its Antarctic affairs: although it is a member of SCAR, it frequently does not provide annual reports of its Antarctic activities to this body. In 25 years of Antarctic research, China had provided only six reports, and most of these were from the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>14</sup> Although China has recently started providing more regular information, its reports are still relatively lacking in detail; senior representatives of the program are not comfortable discussing the program with the media. This is unfortunate, tending to lead many observers to assume that China might have something to hide.

In 1999 China launched its first ever Arctic expedition in the Bering and Chukchi Seas, followed by a second trek in 2003. In 2004, China set up a compact new polar research site, the tiny Arctic Yellow River Station (Beiji Huanghe Zhan), at Ny-Alesund, a hub for international arctic research in

13. Chinese National Arctic and Antarctic Database Center, "About Us," Shanghai, 2007, <[http://www.chinare.org.cn/pages/aboutUs\\_en.jsp](http://www.chinare.org.cn/pages/aboutUs_en.jsp)>.

14. Rosemary Nash, SCAR, Scott Polar Research Institute, email correspondence, February 20, 2009.



Norway.<sup>15</sup> Chinese Arctic scientific teams now visit the base annually. China also has a number of specialist centers for Antarctic research such as Wuhan University's Chinese Antarctic Center of Surveying and Mapping and Nanjing University's Chinese Center for Antarctic Astronomy. In the past 25 years since joining the ATS, China has developed an extensive polar science research program looking at topics as diverse as the krill resources of the Southern Ocean, climate and environmental change at the two poles, glaciology, and astronomy.<sup>16</sup>

The international linkages stemming from China's engagement in Antarctica have proven very useful over time for improving China's relations with a wide range of countries. Beginning in the 1980s and carrying on up to the present day, China has developed an extensive program of international collaborations including with Canada, Chile, France, Germany, Norway, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Romania, Russia, the U.K., and the U.S. China's Antarctic links have not only been profitable from a scientific point of view, they have been a useful platform for track-two diplomacy. Antarctica is governed in the name of science, and it is through scientific activities there that countries can legitimately be involved in decision-making about the continent's governance and management of its resources. Thus, it is only natural that Antarctic diplomacy is also frequently conducted via scientific cooperation. As has been the case with other nations, these scientific exchanges almost always continue regardless of other disagreements between the cooperating countries; whatever their scientific merit, they serve as a useful confidence-building exercise among nations.

#### CHINA'S FOURTH STAGE IN ANTARCTICA: TAKING A LEADERSHIP ROLE

At precisely 3:16 A.M. (Beijing time) on January 18, 2005, a team of Chinese polar explorers "conquered" the peak of Dome A (also known as Dome Argus). Dome A was the last geologically significant unexplored territory of Antarctica.<sup>17</sup> It was China's fourth attempt to reach the dome (the first was

15. Polar Research Institute of China, "Zhongguo beiji zhan Huang He jieshao" (An introduction to China's Arctic Yellow River Station), Shanghai, 2006, <<http://www.pric.gov.cn/newinfo.asp?sortid=4&subid=39&id=465>>.

16. China Arctic and Antarctic Administration, "Projects of Chinese Polar Scientific Research," Beijing, 2008, <<http://www.chinare.cn/en/index.html?pid=science>>.

17. Guan Xiaofeng, "Explorers Conquer 'Inaccessible Pole,'" *China Daily*, January 18, 2005.

in 1996); it had taken close to 10 years to achieve the goal.<sup>18</sup> China's successful expedition to Dome A marked the beginning of a new phase in its Antarctic engagement. Later in the same year, a Chinese expedition spent 130 days exploring the Grove Mountains, some 400 kilometers from Zhongshan Station. Like other explorers before them, the Chinese expedition marked its presence by naming the various points of geological significance they observed, with names such as Gui Shan (Turtle Mountain), She Shan (Snake Mountain), and Xi Hu (Western Lake), reflecting Chinese tradition and history.<sup>19</sup> As a result of these two successes, Chinese scientists can now claim to be polar explorers. This new status is symbolized by the right to name Antarctic locations and is understood in Chinese sources as marking an important shift in China's political standing in Antarctic affairs.<sup>20</sup>

Also in 2005, Zhang Zhanhai, formerly director of the Polar Research Institute in Shanghai, was elected to a two-year term as vice president of SCAR, an important "eyes and ears" role and a first for China.<sup>21</sup> That was also the year when two China-based scholars, Li Shenggui and Pan Min, urged Chinese social scientists to pay greater attention to researching Antarctic issues. They stated that up until this point China had focused its attention on the "hard" sciences while neglecting the important role of social scientists in exploring and articulating China's Antarctic agenda. The authors asserted that this "neglect has been restricting China's voice, rights and interests" in international Antarctic affairs and influencing the country's international status, making it too passive.<sup>22</sup> Since the authors' rallying cry, there has indeed been a steady increase in Chinese social science publishing on Antarctica, compared with the output of previous years. This new emphasis is

18. "The Draft Comprehensive Environmental Evaluation for the Construction and Operation of Chinese Dome A Station in Antarctica," Committee for Environmental Protection (CEP) 6 (a), Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting, Kiev, 2008.

19. Yu Dawei, "Nanji 'Sanji Tiao'" [Triple jump in Antarctica], *Caijing* [Finance], no. 16, August 4, 2008.

20. "'Kongzi', 'Kangxi', 'Cao Xueqin', Deng you Wangcheng wei Nanji Zhongwen Diming" (Confucius, Kang Xi, and Cao Xueqin, et al. become Chinese Antarctic place names), Xinhua News Agency, March 29, 2006.

21. "Zhang Zhanhai churen nanji yanjiu kexue weiyuanhui" (Zhang Zhanhai takes up a post at SCAR), *Zhongguo haiyang bao* [China Ocean News], no. 1429, March 20, 2007, <<http://www.soa.gov.cn/hyjww/jdsy/2007/03/20/1174381011512817.htm>>.

22. Li Shenggui and Pan Min, "Zhongguo Nanji Ruankexue Yanjiu de Yiyi, Xianzhuang yu Zhanwang" [The significance, status quo, and prospect of Antarctic soft science research], *Jidi yanjiu* [Chinese Journal of Polar Research] 17:3 (September 2005), pp. 214–31.

directly encouraged by senior government leaders, and the outcomes are now being utilized in China's policy making on Antarctic issues.<sup>23</sup>

Following on from Zou Keyuan's concept of the different stages of China's Antarctic activities, I would argue that all these events demonstrate that China has moved into a new stage in its Antarctic engagement. During Stage 4, beginning from 2005, China has moved toward taking more of a leadership role in Antarctic affairs. Antarctic leadership takes many forms, including holding leadership positions in Antarctic bodies, engaging in leading Antarctic research, taking a leadership role on important issues such as environmental management, and making a major investment in Antarctic capacity. China's aspiration to become a leader in Antarctic affairs has been expressed in multiple forums, from media statements by its leading polar scientists and social scientists, to debates in scholarly publications, and as seen by the dramatic increase in China's investment in its Antarctic program. In the period from 1983–2003, China spent 900 million yuan (around US\$110 million) on its Antarctic research. In 2005–08, China spent 500 million yuan (around \$60 million) just to upgrade its existing Antarctic bases.<sup>24</sup> China's overall expenditure so far on Antarctic activities in 2010 was 300 million yuan (around \$44 million).<sup>25</sup> This is more than double what was spent on an annual basis in the previous Five-Year Plan.<sup>26</sup>

China's future economic development is measured in five-year plans, and its Antarctic agenda is no different. Pursuant to the 11th Five-Year Plan, from 2006–10, China refurbished Zhongshan and Changcheng Stations; set up Kunlun Zhan (Kunlun Station) at Dome A over two austral summers, 2008–10; refitted the ice breaker *Xue Long*; established a dedicated berth for the ship and warehouse space in Shanghai; dramatically increased the budget for Antarctic research; and promoted domestic and international awareness

23. Discussions at the Polar Research Institute in December 2009. See also Zhang Jiansong, "Zhuanjia Chengying Zhengzhi Nanji Ziyuan Fenzheng, Qi Guo you Guafen Lingtu Yaoqiu" [Experts call for facing up to the struggle over Antarctic resources, seven countries put in a request to carve up the territory], *Liaowang* [Outlook], June 18, 2007, at <<http://news.sohu.com/20070618/n250625161.shtml>>.

24. "China to Build 3rd Station in Antarctica," *China Daily*, October 14, 2004.

25. Phone interview with Yang Huigen, director of Polar Research Institute in China, July 6, 2010. This figure includes the cost of annual expeditions, refurbishment of the two old bases, the ice breaker, the new wharf and storage facilities in Shanghai, the setting up of the new base, the scientific research budget, and IPY special projects.

26. The previous amount was "roughly 20 million." See "China Takes Bold Steps into Antarctic's Forbidding Interior," *Science* 306 (October 29, 2004), p. 803.

about its Antarctic program. China also investigated how it might take on a greater leadership role in the ATS, catch up with, and even overtake developed countries in Antarctica in terms of research and level of involvement.

The new Kunlun Station is to be used for deep ice core drilling, glaciology, astronomy, atmospheric science, weather observation, and studying the geology of the Gamburtsev mountain range that lies beneath the ice cap. Initially, the base will be a summer only station, although in the long run it will be developed as an all-year base. The choice of name for the station is significant. Although Kunlun is an actual place in China, it also has mythical associations deeply rooted in Chinese culture. According to tradition, Kunlun Mountain is a Daoist paradise, a place where communication between humans and gods is possible. The actual location of the Kunlun Range, on the northern boundary of Tibet, marks the outer limits of the old Chinese empire. Kunlun Base in Antarctica offers China unprecedented visibility for astronomical research<sup>27</sup>—dialogue with the “gods.”

The ice underneath Dome A is over 3,000 meters thick; researchers predict that through drilling for ice cores they will push back current knowledge about the earth’s climate record to 1.5 million years ago. This information is important to China’s climate-change policy makers as they negotiate over their country’s efforts to reduce global warming. China was extremely critical of the outcome of the Copenhagen Summit and decried the criticisms piled upon Chinese delegates for allegedly stalling progress. Some senior officials hope that the ice core research at Dome A may help prove the view of a number of scientists and policy makers in China that the human impact on climate change is exaggerated.<sup>28</sup>

China will be in charge of research efforts at Dome A, working in collaboration with teams of international researchers. The research outcomes are likely to be groundbreaking, giving China an unprecedented opportunity to leapfrog ahead in its efforts to garner international recognition for Chinese Antarctic scientific research. Producing high caliber research is one of the key routes to establishing authority in the ATS.

Apart from its government-sponsored bases and research program, China has other interests in Antarctica that are rapidly expanding. For example, a

27. Jane Qiu, “China Builds Inland Antarctic Base,” *Nature* (January 6, 2009), <<http://www.nature.com/news/2009/090106/full/457134a.html>>.

28. Discussions with senior officials of the Department of Land and Resources, Christchurch, January 2010.

growing number of Chinese tourists and tourism operators are keen to venture into the continent. Relatively small numbers of Chinese tourists currently visit, using non-Chinese tour companies. At present, no Chinese tourism operators are licensed to work there, but there is strong interest in gaining a licence to process the increasing numbers of Chinese consumers who can afford international travel and wish to make the trip.<sup>29</sup> China is one of the fastest-expanding markets for outbound tourism in the world. As one news article noted, it is just “a matter of time” before China opens up its own Antarctic tourism program.<sup>30</sup> The ever-increasing expansion of Antarctic tourism is already a matter of concern to many observers, so there may well be some conflict in the offing. At present, Beijing is restricting Chinese tourism operators from applying to set up their own Antarctic ventures because of concern about “political sensitivities.”<sup>31</sup>

#### THE TAIWAN FACTOR IN CHINA’S ANTARCTIC ACTIVITIES

As it is in many other aspects of Chinese diplomacy, Taiwan has been a factor in China’s involvement in Antarctica. In the 1950s, the U.S. was allied with Taiwan (as the ROC) and supported it in its efforts to lock the PRC out of international organizations. It was U.S. opposition to Chinese communists and “unrecognised Communist regimes” that helped bar China from being an early treaty signatory.<sup>32</sup> China eventually joined the Antarctic Treaty in 1983 in a period when the PRC was taking over the China seat from the ROC in a wide range of international organizations (and when China was joined with the U.S. in an unofficial alliance against the Soviet Union).

For Chinese political leaders, joining the Antarctic Treaty was more about the PRC’s need for international recognition and status than about pursuing serious science. The political side to China’s Antarctic science was adumbrated early on, when from 1988 the PRC made use of its Antarctic

29. Wang Zipan, “Zhongguo Nanji Luyou Kaifa Tantaoyao” (An approach for developing Chinese Antarctic tourism), *Luyou xuekan* [Tourism Journal] 18:6 (2003).

30. Zhang Jiansong, “Wo Guo Kaizhan Nanji Luyou zhi Shi Shijian Wenti” [It is just a matter of time as to when China opens up Antarctic tourism], *Xinhua*, November 23, 2007.

31. “Qu Nanji Luyou? Xianzai bu Xing” [Tourism in Antarctica? Not right now], January 19, 2007, Sichuan luyou zhengwu wang [Tourism Governance website of the Sichuan government], <<http://news.sohu.com/20070119/n247705552.shtml>>. This article was circulated widely throughout the Chinese language Internet, especially on tourism-related sites.

32. Dian Olson Belanger, *Deep Freeze*, pp. 38, 373.

activities to invite Taiwanese and Hong Kong scientists to participate in joint projects.<sup>33</sup> Such exchanges continue up to the present day. In early 2009 at the end of the 2008–09 austral summer, the *Xue Long* made a “courtesy” call to Taiwan, before returning to the Chinese Mainland. During the 2009–10 austral summer, three Taiwanese scientists participated in China’s annual Antarctic exploration. These activities are all part of cross-Taiwan Strait bridge-building efforts.

In 2005 Taiwanese legal scholar Li Ming-juinn wrote that as a sovereign state, the ROC is entitled to apply to join the Antarctic Treaty and may try to do so in future.<sup>34</sup> Taiwanese scientists have been engaged in Antarctic research for many years, so the ROC could conceivably apply to be a consultative party in the treaty. Thus far, the ROC has made no formal attempts to join the Antarctic Treaty. But in 2006, Taiwan applied to become an observer at the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).<sup>35</sup> There are no Taiwan boats fishing legally in the Southern Ocean (though some may have been involved in illegal fishing in the past). However, CCAMLR signatory countries were lukewarm on the issue of Taiwan becoming an observer. They did not want to offend China because of the “One China” principle the PRC insists on.

China acceded to CCAMLR in 2006 and became a full consultative member in October 2007.<sup>36</sup> In recent years, PRC boats have been involved in illegal fishing activities in the Southern Ocean.<sup>37</sup> As a result, countries such as New Zealand and Australia, whose territories border on the Southern Ocean, were keen for the PRC to join CCAMLR and come under its jurisdiction.<sup>38</sup> It is significant that China’s membership in CCAMLR does not include Hong Kong. This is no doubt because the former colony is the main base of multinational fishing company Pacific Andes, which through its own activities and those of its subsidiaries is heavily implicated in the illegal fishing of the highly

33. China Arctic and Antarctic Administration, “Guoji jiaoliu yu hezuo” (International exchange and cooperation), Beijing, 2008, <[http://www.chinare.gov.cn/caa/gb\\_article.php?modid=06001](http://www.chinare.gov.cn/caa/gb_article.php?modid=06001)>.

34. Li Ming-juinn, “The Possibility of Taiwan’s Participation in the Antarctic Treaty,” *Taiwan haiyang fa xuebao* (Taiwan Ocean Law Review) 4:1 (June 2005), pp. 73–99.

35. CCAMLR manages marine living resources in the seas around Antarctica. It is part of the body of international law governing Antarctica. A total of 32 nations have signed the convention.

36. CCAMLR, meeting notes, 2007, <[http://www.ccamlr.org/pu/E/e\\_pubs/cr/07/102.pdf](http://www.ccamlr.org/pu/E/e_pubs/cr/07/102.pdf)>.

37. Megha Bahree, “Blue Waters, Gray Areas,” *Forbes*, November 12, 2007; email, Antarctic Policy Unit (APU), New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (NZ MFAT), September 14, 2007, APU/CHN, Part 3.

38. Email, APU, NZ MFAT, July 18, 2006, APU/CHN, Part 1.

endangered Patagonian Toothfish.<sup>39</sup> When it joined CCAMLR, China declared that its membership would not include Hong Kong.<sup>40</sup> This is perfectly legal according to the Hong Kong Special Autonomous Region's unique status in the Chinese polity, which permits Hong Kong to establish and maintain a separate international legal personality from the PRC's.<sup>41</sup> However, the fact that Beijing has not made more efforts to urge Hong Kong to sign up with CCAMLR shows that China is not as serious about dealing with illegal fishing issues in the Southern Ocean as its membership might imply.

It appears Taiwan's interest in obtaining observer status in CCAMLR was the main impetus to China's decision to join. This is a familiar pattern that has occurred in countless international organizations. The lack of cooperation from the Chinese government in August 2007, when four Chinese vessels were caught fishing illegally in the Southern Ocean, was a symptom of this situation. During this incident, in contravention of the norms of CCAMLR, the Chinese government refused permission for Australian fisheries officers to board the four vessels and inspect them.<sup>42</sup> However, since that low point, Beijing has in fact been fairly cooperative in bringing Mainland Chinese illegal fishing in the Southern Ocean under control, although the problem of Hong Kong remains unresolved. Chinese scholars have even been studying the Australian approach to illegal fishing control and the lessons China can learn from it.<sup>43</sup> When it comes to Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, it

39. Coalition of Legal Toothfish Operators, "The Alphabet Boats: A Case Study of Toothfish Poaching in the Southern Ocean," Hobart, Tasmania, Australia, 2007, <[http://www.colto.org/background\\_why\\_case\\_study.htm](http://www.colto.org/background_why_case_study.htm)>.

40. Antarctic and Southern Ocean Coalition, "Port Visits of Vessels on CCAMLR's IUU's [Illegal, Unreported, Unregulated] Vessels Lists: Lessons on Port State Performance," Washington, D.C., 2009, p. 6, <<http://www.krillcount.jp/CCAMLR2009/CCAMLR%20Ports%20performance%20paper092709%20FINAL.pdf>>.

41. See Roda Mushkat, *One Country, Two International Legal Personalities: The Case of Hong Kong* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1997).

42. Email, APU, NZ MFAT, September 14, 2007, APU/CHN, Part 3. However, the following article demonstrates that some in the Chinese fishing sector were sympathetic to requests to control IUU fishing: Lin Zhifeng and Zhang Mei, "Nanji Haiyang Shengwu Ziyuan Yanghu Gongyue dui Woguo Nan Dayang Yuye de Yingxiang" [The effect of CCAMLR on Chinese distant water fisheries in the Southern Ocean], *Haiyang yuye* [Ocean Fishing] 28:1 (2006). The 2007 contretemps is more likely to be related to different branches of the Chinese government having conflicting interests over the issue of IUU.

43. Yuan Hua, Tang Jianhua, and Huang Shuolin, "Aodaliya Kongzhi IUU Bulao de Guojia Cuoshi ji qi dui Woguo Yuye Guanli de Qishi" [Analyses on Australian national action to deter IUU fishing and its illumination for China's fisheries management], *Shanghai shuichan daxue xuebao* [Shanghai Fisheries University Journal] 17:3 (2008).

appears that as with other international organizations, it is still better to have China inside the tent than out.

### CHINA'S CRITIQUE OF THE ANTARCTIC TREATY SYSTEM

In the past, China was quiescent on the political status quo in Antarctica and the management of resources there. However, the underlying theme of the fourth phase of China's engagement in Antarctica is an increasing dissatisfaction with the current order. This dissatisfaction is mostly still being expressed through Chinese-language publications, both scholarly and journalistic. In Chinese-language sources, leading Chinese Antarctic specialists (whose analysis is the basis for China's Antarctic policy making) are extremely critical of the ATS. Some describe it as a "rich man's club" (*furen de julebu*)<sup>44</sup> or a zone for "collective hegemony" (*jiti baquan*),<sup>45</sup> and assert that in the past China has been a "second class citizen" (*er deng gongmin*) within the treaty.<sup>46</sup> My conversations with Chinese Antarctic policy makers in December 2009 and January 2010 revealed that they shared Chinese scholars' views on the ATS, although we have not yet seen China taking action on this rhetoric. Despite being an Antarctic Treaty partner since 1983, China feels itself to be on the outer rim of the ATS power structure, and it deeply resents the power imbalance. In theory, Antarctica is owned by no one and open to all nations. But economic limitations effectively exclude most of the developing world and many middle-income countries, and the best Antarctic locations for research bases and resource exploitation were long ago taken by earlier Antarctic powers.

In a 2005 article discussing the political future of Antarctica, Yan Qide and Hu Lingtai asserted that the Antarctic Treaty; the Antarctic Treaty consultative nations (that is, the consultative members of the treaty); and Antarctic Treaty consultative meetings (ATCMs) were still the best means to manage Antarctica. But they noted that the question of who actually owns Antarctica remained unresolved and is an issue that will not go away.<sup>47</sup>

44. Guo Peiqing, "Jidi Zhengduo Weihe Xiaoyan zai Qi" [Polar conflict: Why the smell of gunsmoke has returned], *Liaowang* 45 (November 2007); <<http://gbl.chinabroadcast.cn/18904/2007/11/05/2165@1829761.htm>>.

45. Guo Peiqing, "Nanji Bainian de Zhengduo" [A hundred years of fighting over Antarctica], August 1, 2007, *Huanqiu* [Global]. This newspaper is part of the *People's Daily* publishing group.

46. Yu, "Nanji 'Sanji Tiao'."

47. Yan Qide and Hu Lingtai, "Nanji Zhou Zhengzhi Qianjing Qianxi" [Analyzing the political future of Antarctica], *Jidi yanjiu* 17:3 (September 2005), pp. 157–64.



Some social scientists have advocated that the U.N. should have an increased role in Antarctica, but Guo Peiqing, a senior researcher at Ocean University of China in Qingdao, Shandong Province, asserts that the U.N. is “powerless” in Antarctica and is not the right body to resolve any disputes.<sup>48</sup> Guo is one of many voices urging China to take a much more active role in Antarctica, both to defend its existing interests and to keep up with the activities of other Antarctic nations. According to Guo, the impact of ever-increasing numbers of tourists visiting Antarctica and the perceived weakness of control measures to deal with breaches of environment protocols are among several reasons why Antarctica needs to be governed by a set of international laws covering all nations, not just signatories to the ATS.<sup>49</sup>

In the course of this research, I spoke with numerous Chinese polar scientists and policy makers. Many regard the tougher environmental protections required for Antarctic activities and the setting up of Antarctic Specially Managed Areas as a ruse to maintain the assets of more-established powers there.<sup>50</sup> An article in the semi-official periodical *Liaowang* noted that these changes in the environmental regulations “had made the struggle over resources in Antarctica all the more complicated, more covert, and more extreme.”<sup>51</sup> The article noted that the skirmish over Antarctic resources was being waged through scientific, diplomatic, and legal measures, rather than through force, and said mineral exploration is continuing disguised as scientific activity. The article asserts that the current ATS is unfair to developing countries that lack the resources to engage in scientific research. Engaging in Antarctic scientific research is the means by which a nation attains a governance role in Antarctica.

However, China’s central critique of the ATS revolves around the issue of the distribution of resources. Deciding who can control polar resources is a matter of global political and economic importance. As an energy hungry nation, China is extremely interested in the resources of Antarctica (and the

48. Guo Peiqing, “Lianheguo ‘Wu Quan’ Guanxia de Nanjizhou” [The United Nations is powerless in the Antarctic Peninsula], *Haiyang Shijie* [Oceanic World], no. 12 (December 2006), pp. 34–37.

49. Guo Peiqing, “Nanji Luyou Guanli Zhidu Xingcheng Milu” [An outline of Antarctic tourism management], *Zhonggong Qingdao Shiwei Dangxiao Qingdao Xingzheng Xueyuan Xuebao* [Qingdao Party School Journal] 6 (2006), pp. 45–48.

50. Discussions with Chinese polar officials and scholars in Wuhan, Shanghai, and Qingdao, December 2009, and Christchurch, January 2010.

51. Zhang Jiansong, “Zhuanjia Chengying Zhengzhi Nanji Ziyuan Fenzheng.”

Arctic) and any possibilities for their exploitation. The notion of “resources” has a broad meaning in the Antarctic context. As noted above, it includes minerals, meteorites, the intellectual property of Antarctic bio-prospecting, locations for scientific bases, marine living resources, and access to the continent for Antarctic tourism. Chinese-language polar social science discussions are dominated by debates about resources and how China might gain its share.<sup>52</sup> Such discussions are virtually taboo in the scholarly research of more-established Antarctic powers. Nowadays (it wasn’t always the case), scholars in those countries tend to focus on preserving the environmental heritage of Antarctica and the Southern Oceans. Yet, as Guo Peiqing rightly points out, “No nation or Antarctic researcher has ever negated the possibility that Antarctic resources could be utilized.”<sup>53</sup> Zhu Jiangang, Yan Qide, and Ling Xiaoliang assert that the main reason various nations are engaged in Antarctic research is to find a way to get access to the riches there.<sup>54</sup> Numerous newspaper reports in Chinese have alleged that some countries are already prospecting in Antarctica, under the cover of scientific research.<sup>55</sup>

Some Western commentators claim that Chinese foreign policy is now dominated by this quest to acquire more resources.<sup>56</sup> In Chinese-language debates, social and hard science scholars, government officials, and journalistic commentators all appear to agree that the exploitation of Antarctica is only a matter of time and that China should prepare itself. China’s preparations include ramping up its scientific programs as well as investing in social

52. See, for example, Yan Qide, “Nanji Ziyuan yu Guoji Fenzheng” [The international struggle for Antarctic resources], *Kexue* [Science] 43:4 (1991), pp. 261–72; Zhu Jiangang, Yan Qide, and Ling Xiaoliang, “Nanji Ziyuan Fenzheng ji Woguo de Xiangying Duice” [The dispute of Antarctic resources and our countermeasures], *Jidi Yanjiu* 18:3 (2006), pp. 17–22; Zou Keyuan, “Guifan Weilai Nanji Kuanwu Ziyuan Kaifa Liyong de Falu Yuanze” [The legal principles behind standardizing the future use of Antarctic mineral resources], *Haiyang kaifa yu guanli* [Oceanic opening up and management], no. 3 (1994); Zou Keyuan, *Nanji Kuanwu Ziyuan yu Guoji Fa* [Antarctic mineral resources and international law] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1996).

53. Guo Peiqing, “Nanji Ziyuan yu qi Ziyuan Zhengzhi” (Antarctic resources and the politics of their management), *Haiyang Shijie*, no. 3 (2007), p. 71.

54. Zhu et al., “Nanji Ziyuan Fenzheng ji Woguo de Xiangying Duice,” p. 215.

55. See, for example, “Beiji Bingrong dui Zhongguo Yiweizhe Shenme” [What the melting of the North Pole means for China], *cippe.net*, July 28, 2008, <<http://news.cippe.net/news/10054.htm>> (this website collates news for the Chinese petroleum industry), accessed February 19, 2009; “Yingguo Shuaixian Daoxiang Nanji zhi Zheng” [U.K. fires the first shot in Antarctic conflict], *Xinhua*, October 22, 2007.

56. See David Zweig and Bi Jianhai, “China’s Global Hunt for Energy,” *Foreign Affairs* 84:5 (September/October 2005), pp. 25–38.

science research. Beijing needs to develop the specialist knowledge that will enable China's representatives at Antarctic forums to defend its interests. In the 1990s, China did not have the economic and technical ability to exploit such resources, so the ban on exploitation suited its interests. However, China's recent significant investment in its polar programs demonstrates the country's increased economic capacities and its interest in garnering more influence in Antarctic affairs. Science is the main means to gain influence in Antarctic governance. China aims to be poised to take advantage of any opportunities to exploit the resources of Antarctica—with trained personnel and infrastructure in place.<sup>57</sup>

The risk with China ensuring that it gets its fair share of polar spoils is that it will need to invest heavily not only in civilian research but also in military capabilities. China, like many nations involved in Antarctica, uses military support for some of its logistics needs and has had military personnel participate in its Antarctic research program,<sup>58</sup> although its 2008 and 2009 reports to the ATS stated that it had no military personnel in its program.<sup>59</sup> If conflict erupts over polar resources, China might also need military back-up to protect its interests. In 2008, the People's Liberation Army-Navy (PLA-N) began providing protection to Chinese merchant ships in the Gulf of Aden. A similar scenario could be envisaged regarding transferring resources from either of the poles back to China.

China's interest in garnering its fair share of Antarctic resources is inevitably going to cause tension with other nations, particularly the claimant states of Antarctica, but also with later entrants and rising powers such as India and South Korea. Any shift in the balance of power almost inevitably leads to friction. In 2007, Chinese official news sources gave strident and antagonistic coverage of the controversy surrounding the U.K. and six other Antarctic claimants that put in a claim for sea bed rights to the U.N. Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.<sup>60</sup> China has accused the U.K. of using

57. Zhu et al., "Nanji Ziyuan Fenzheng ji Woguo de Xiangying Duice," p. 220.

58. See, for example, "Wo zai Nanji shang kong fei hang" [I flew in Antarctica], *Ba-Yi Fengcai* (August 1 Color), <[http://www.am765.com/ztt/zftl/ypzt/pla80/history/200707/t20070725\\_272470.htm](http://www.am765.com/ztt/zftl/ypzt/pla80/history/200707/t20070725_272470.htm)>; *Junshi kongjian* [Military Airspace], <<http://www.armsky.com/army/JGKYGL/mavin/200804/9411.html>>; *Tiexue shequ* [Iron Blood District], <[http://bbs.tiexue.net/post2\\_2309351\\_1.html](http://bbs.tiexue.net/post2_2309351_1.html)>.

59. Antarctic Treaty Electronic Exchange Information: China 2008/2009, <<http://eies.ats.aq/Ats.IE/ieGenRpt.aspx?idParty=9&period=1&idYear=2008>>.

60. "Yingguo Shuaxian Daoxiang Nanji zhi Zheng."

the International Law of the Sea to gain non-sovereignty related rights in Antarctica. This controversy won't go away, and China is not the only nation to raise concerns about what is going on.

### CHINA'S RISE IN ANTARCTICA AND CONTEMPORARY CHINESE FOREIGN POLICY

The call for China to take more of a leadership role in Antarctica is in tune with recent debates among some Chinese foreign policy scholars who want Beijing to take a more active overall foreign policy role. Beginning in 1999, after the U.S. bombing of Kosovo, Chinese foreign policy moved from a post-1989 passive stance to an "active defensive position."<sup>61</sup> This meant that China would become proactive in both political and economic affairs in order to combat perceived strong attacks from the West on both fronts. In the early 2000s, as China's economic and political power was consolidated, Chinese scholars debated the relevance of Deng Xiaoping's 1989 maxim that China should "hide its strengths." In 2008 the Chinese foreign policy line was adjusted to focus on the more proactive "do what we can" (*you suo zuo wei*) theme of Deng's foreign policy strategy.<sup>62</sup> China is currently "on the rise" in Asia,<sup>63</sup> Africa,<sup>64</sup> Latin and South America, the Caribbean,<sup>65</sup> and the South Pacific.<sup>66</sup> China's activities in the Arctic and Antarctic are part of this rise. Beijing is on the brink of moving from a defensive to a more proactive—but not

61. Chen Junhong (ed.), *Jiaqiang he Gaijin Sixiang Zhengzhi Gongzuo Xuexi Duben* [A reader of strengthening and reforming political thought work] (Beijing: Zhonggong Zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1999), p. 169.

62. "Xianggang Wenhui bao: Zhongguo junshi 'geng you zuo wei'" (Hong Kong's *Wen Wei Po* newspaper: The Chinese military is "doing more of what it can"), January 4, 2009, <<http://www.chinanews.com.cn/hb/news/2009/01-04/1512366.shtml>>. Bonnie Glaser also notes that Chinese foreign policy has recently become more "proactive" on selective issues, especially resource-related ones, and that Deng's dictum has been adjusted to emphasize the latter section rather than the former. See Glaser, "China's 11th Ambassadorial Conference Signals Continuity and Change in Chinese Foreign Policy," *China Brief* 9:22 (November 4, 2009), <[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=35691](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=35691)>.

63. See, for example, Elizabeth Economy, "China's Rise in Southeast Asia: Implications for the United States," *Journal of Contemporary China* 14:44 (August 2005), pp. 409–25.

64. See Ian Taylor, *China's New Role in Africa* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2009).

65. See Robert Devlin, Antoni Estevadeordal, and Andres Rodriguez-Clare (eds.), *The Emergence of China: Opportunities and Challenges for Latin America and the Caribbean* (Washington, D.C.: Interdevelopment Bank, 2006).

66. See Anne-Marie Brady (ed.), *Looking North, Looking South: China, Taiwan, and the South Pacific* (Singapore: World Scientific, 2010).

aggressive—approach in its overall foreign policy. Its expanded activities in Antarctica reflect this.

China's resurgence is often viewed negatively by Western analysts as the "China Threat." Some commentators fear China as a rising power because of the nature of its political system, which is at odds with the dominant liberal democratic model of the current leading global powers. Journalistic comment is frequently similarly negative. A 2007 article on the BBC website made the (spurious) connection between China's announcement that it was going to construct a new base in Antarctica and the controversial announcement that the U.K. and Chile planned to claim the parts of the Antarctic sea bed that relate to their territorial claims on the continent.<sup>67</sup> However, in general there has been very little journalistic (and no scholarly) analysis outside China of what China's expansion of its Antarctic programs means. What little coverage there is consists of either speculation or word for word reproduction of China's own media releases. This can be seen as a victory for China's ongoing efforts to have its own news reports utilized by foreign news services, but it also reflects the dearth of foreign journalists with knowledge of both Chinese politics *and* the Antarctic. International news on China's Antarctic program tend to be based on anodyne Xinhua reports, but even this tame coverage garners a negative response from foreign online audiences. Online commentary about China's rise in Antarctica reveals comment after comment tinged by hostility and suspicion.<sup>68</sup> Since the events of 1989, the Chinese government has suffered from an international image problem. From the point of view of China's foreign critics, the recent drive to expand activities in the Antarctic only increases that negative perception.

Will China's rise in Antarctica be a peaceful one? Chinese foreign policy specialists repeat like a mantra that China's rise is certain to be "peaceful."<sup>69</sup> The Antarctic Treaty sets out to manage Antarctica in the interests of peace and science; all disputes are meant to be resolved by consensus.<sup>70</sup> Although China may be unhappy with the status quo in Antarctica, the requirements

67. "China Bolsters Antarctic Posts," November 6, 2007, BBC; see also "China to Finish Interior Antarctic Station in 2009," Reuters, April 20, 2008.

68. See, for example, *Nature News*, <<http://www.nature.com/news/2009/090106/full/457134a.html>>; *The Register*, <[http://www.theregister.co.uk/2006/03/30/china\\_antarctica/](http://www.theregister.co.uk/2006/03/30/china_antarctica/)>; *Socialist Courier*, <<http://socialist-courier.blogspot.com/2007/11/chinese-in-antarctica.html>>.

69. Zheng Bijian, "China's 'Peaceful Rise' to Great-Power Status," *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2005), pp. 18–24.

70. Antarctic Treaty, 1959, <[http://www.ats.aq/devAS/info\\_measures\\_list.aspx?lang=e](http://www.ats.aq/devAS/info_measures_list.aspx?lang=e)>.

of governance there necessitate that Beijing work within the existing governance structures and follow current policies of the ATS. The only alternative to this is leaving the treaty, a step China is unlikely to take. So inevitably, China's rise in Antarctica, if it continues, will be a peaceful one that requires cooperating with the other Antarctic states. The Chinese government's current behavior in the various forums of the ATS is similar to its behavior in many other multilateral organizations and international regimes: it may not like the current order but it prefers to work within that order to bring about the change it ultimately seeks.

This is why, in the fourth stage of China's Antarctic involvement, while recent Chinese-language scholarly and media analysis of the ATS have been openly critical, in international meetings Beijing has continued its official acquiescence to the status quo in Antarctic management. Where China has expressed an alternative point of view, it has only been with regard to defending its own interests. At the 2007 ATCM in New Delhi, China was very assertive. It rejected attempts by Australia and other concerned nations to issue a resolution criticizing illegal fishing in Antarctic waters. China's delegate stated that IUU fishing could not be discussed at the ATCM.<sup>71</sup> The final report of the meeting diplomatically recorded these conflicts: "consensus could not be reached."<sup>72</sup>

However, at the next ATCM in 2008 in Kiev, China's delegates were in a more cooperative frame of mind, keen for approval of their plans to build a base at Dome A. The only objection they raised was to wording in the feedback on China's plan that it "met requirements in most respects." It appears that on this question, China wanted unqualified support for its new base.<sup>73</sup> This debate was not recorded in the final report, reflecting the Antarctic tradition that stresses consensus at all costs. According to the formal records of the Kiev meeting, China took a very low profile, providing only factual information on its activities in Antarctica and not contributing to debates on sensitive issues such as bioprospecting or regulating tourism.<sup>74</sup>

71. Interview with Trevor Hughes, New Zealand delegate to the 30th ATCM, Wellington, February 2, 2009.

72. "Antarctic Treaty: Final Report of the Thirtieth Consultative Meeting," New Delhi (April 30–May 11, 2007), p. 21.

73. Interview with Trevor Hughes.

74. An electronic version of this report is available on the ATS site, at <[http://www.ats.aq/documents/atcm\\_fr\\_images/ATCM31\\_froot1\\_e.pdf](http://www.ats.aq/documents/atcm_fr_images/ATCM31_froot1_e.pdf)>.

## CHINA'S ANTARCTIC AMBITIONS VERSUS CURRENT ABILITIES

China has set itself the goal of catching up to developed countries in its Antarctic program.<sup>75</sup> Beijing is making a major investment in Antarctic research, in both the “hard” and “soft” sciences. Yet, despite 20 years of solid effort, compared to other Antarctic Treaty consultative parties, China’s Antarctic research output is relatively small, even smaller than Italy’s or South Africa’s scientific contribution.<sup>76</sup> This is not simply from lack of resources. According to Zou Keyuan, China’s early Antarctic research was “symbolic,” meaning that it mostly served political ends, rather than scientific ones.<sup>77</sup> Chinese Antarctic officials repeatedly emphasize that their country’s Antarctic program is not just about answering scientific questions; it is as much, if not more, about China’s national interests.<sup>78</sup> According to a leading Antarctic scientist, Dong Zhiquan, who led China’s first Antarctic expedition in 1983, most of his nation’s Antarctic research to date has been derivative.<sup>79</sup> And Guo Peiqing notes that regardless of the scientific significance of research in Antarctica, engaging in this research and launching expeditions are ways for China (and other nations) to maintain a political presence on the continent.<sup>80</sup>

The reasons for the emphasis on the “political” nature of China’s Antarctic research become less obscure when we look at the problems China faces in matching the infrastructure of more-established Antarctic powers. China’s Antarctic program has always suffered from limited logistical capabilities and funding for projects in the field, limitations in computer facilities available to Antarctic researchers, lack of timely access to relevant scientific literature, and a lack of funding for high quality scientific equipment.<sup>81</sup> Although China has made a big push to strengthen its Antarctic program in the period 2005–10, even with the new investment in upgraded facilities China is still a long way behind the dominant powers: the U.S., U.K., France, Australia,

75. Wang Qian, “Twenty Years of Antarctic Research.”

76. Prabir G. Dastidar and Olle Persson, “Mapping the Global Structure of Antarctic Research Vis-à-vis Antarctic Treaty System,” *Current Science* 89:9 (2004), pp. 1552–54.

77. Zou Keyuan, “China’s Interests in and Policy toward Antarctica,” p. 97.

78. Yu, “Nanji ‘Sanji Tiao.’”

79. “China Takes Bold Steps into Antarctic’s Forbidding Interior,” *Polar Science* 306 (October 29, 2004), p. 803.

80. Guo Peiqing, “Nanji Ziyuan yu qi Ziyuan Zhengzhi,” p. 70.

81. J. Cole-Dai, Y. Li, S. Liu, and Z. Zhang, “Antarctic Research in the Polar Research Center in China,” American Geophysical Union, Fall meeting, 2003.

and Japan. It seems that when it comes to Antarctica, China is still a medium power with big-power aspirations.

There are 30 nations with bases in Antarctica, and I do not have the space to compare all their programs or the activities of other Antarctic Treaty signatories who are active on the ice but don't have their own bases. Instead, in Table 1 I have compared China's Antarctic activities with three representative programs: two from established Antarctic states, the U.S. and New Zealand, and one from another rising power in Antarctica, India. China's program looks extremely modest in comparison to the U.S. program—"the elephant on the ice"—but is comparable to the efforts of India, which is also expanding its operations.

Two telling examples of the gap between China's ambitions and its current abilities occurred in the 2008–09 austral summer. From November to December 2008, China's ice breaker *Xue Long* was stuck in ice 28 miles from the Zhongshan Base.<sup>82</sup> Despite having been recently updated, it just wasn't powerful enough to break through the ice flows. In the end, helicopters were used to unload the ship and its crew, putting the traverse to Dome A behind by 10 days (in November 2009, the boat was also stuck in ice in the same area). In January, when a group of Chinese senior officials visited Zhongshan Base, they had to fly via commercial airlines to Australia, get a lift with the Australian air link to Casey Station, be picked up by *Xue Long* to be taken to Zhongshan, then return home via Russian planes across the Antarctic continent to South Africa, and by commercial airplane to China.<sup>83</sup>

China's Antarctic program desperately needs a new ice breaker and air-planes suitable for flying in Antarctica.<sup>84</sup> Chinese scientists will also need further increases in spending on research activities to match the government's ambition to take a leadership role in Antarctic affairs, because cutting-edge science is a key means to establish authority in the ATS. China's 11th Five-Year Plan (2005–10) led to a dramatic increase in spending, but the next plan is even more crucial if China is to invest the sums required to match its political ambitions. It can be expected that in the next plan, China's Antarctic

82. Jean de Pomereu, "So Near, Yet So Far," December 11, 2008, International Polar Foundation, <[http://www.sciencepoles.org/www\\_sciencepoles/index.php?s=2&trs=home&tuid=1391](http://www.sciencepoles.org/www_sciencepoles/index.php?s=2&trs=home&tuid=1391)>.

83. Phone interview with Jean de Pomereu, January 15, 2009. Polar journalist Jean de Pomereu spent six weeks with the Chinese Antarctic Expedition in the austral summer of 2008–09.

84. There are already plans in place to establish an air bridge between Zhongshan Station and the Kunlun Base, but it is estimated to take many years to achieve. See Yu, "Nanji 'Sanji Tiao'."



TABLE 1. Four-way Comparison of National Antarctic Programs

	<i>U.S.</i>		<i>China</i>		<i>India</i>		<i>New Zealand</i>	
Name of Antarctic Program	U.S. Antarctic Program (USAP)		Chinese Arctic and Antarctic Administration (CAA)		Indian Antarctic Program (IAP)		New Zealand Antarctic Program (NZAP)	
Annual overall expenditure 2010	US\$387 million		US\$44 million*		US\$33 million		US\$24 million**	
Bases (wintering)	3		2		1		1	
Year first base established	1956		1985		1983		1957	
Transit country (last stop before Antarctica)	Christchurch, New Zealand; Punta Arenas, Chile		Fremantle, Australia; Christchurch, New Zealand		Cape Town, South Africa		Christchurch, New Zealand	
Average total population in stations (winter)	288		65		25		10 (average)	
Average total population in stations (summer)	1,548		164–85		25, plus 45 in additional huts		85, plus summer field camps	
Air transport provider	U.S. Air Force, U.S. Air National Guard, U.S. Air Force Reserve, Kenn Borek Air		None at present		DROMLAN		Shared air lift with U.S. and Italy	
Military personnel (total)	261 (2008–09)		None		None (2007–08)		92 (2008–09)	

SOURCE: By author.

\* Yang Huigen interview.

\*\* This figure includes Antarctica New Zealand's annual budget of \$15 million, research funding, the extra funds for the IPY scientific programs, and the Antarctic activities of other agencies.

spending will continue to rise.<sup>85</sup> However, China still has a very long way to go before it can catch up with the other established Antarctic powers, let alone overtake them. Increases in budgets alone will not be enough for China to match the Antarctic activities of many other nations. It will take decades to build up the requisite talent pool of senior scientists and social scientists who can engage in internationally competitive polar research and garner the language skills that will enable them to freely participate in international efforts.

Although China as yet lacks the resources to fully take on more of a leading role in Antarctica, its various projects toward that goal are very useful in the domestic context. China's Antarctic program is heavily promoted to Chinese-language audiences as part of ongoing political education efforts. The stress on China's Antarctic triumphs boosts the Communist Party government's legitimacy and distracts the population from more pressing issues such as unemployment and social inequity.<sup>86</sup> Hence, in addition to their scientific duties, leading Chinese Antarctic scientists are given the task of promoting their research in thousands of talks to Chinese youth. The stated aim of these talks is to teach Chinese youth to "love science" and "love their country."<sup>87</sup> Chinese youth are now the primary target of the Communist Party's ongoing propaganda and thought-work activities.<sup>88</sup>

The Chinese media is also heavily involved in this endeavor. The media is tasked by the party with "guiding public opinion" (*zhidao yulun*) on certain issues.<sup>89</sup> China's Antarctic expeditions have always been incorporated into the government's ongoing propaganda and thought work activities. The first expedition was commemorated with a television documentary announcing, "Antarctica Here We Come!" (*Nanji wo lai le!*). More recently, especially from 2005, there has been a big push to promote Chinese public awareness

85. Discussions with senior officials of the Ministry of Land Resources and CAA, Christchurch, January 2010.

86. See Anne-Marie Brady, "The Beijing Olympics as a Campaign of Mass Distraction," *China Quarterly* 197 (March 2009), pp. 1–24.

87. State Bureau of Survey and Mapping, "Zhongguo Nanji cehui kexue kaocha 22 nian chengjiu yu gongxian" [22 years of achievements of China's Antarctic mapping], 2007, <<http://www.sbsm.gov.cn/article/ztlz/jdch/jdch/200711/20071100027867.shtml>>.

88. See Xuanchuan wenhua zhengce fagui bianweihui, ed., *Xuanchuan Wenhua Zhengce Fagui* [Policies and regulations on propaganda and culture] (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1999), p. 10.

89. See Anne-Marie Brady, *Marketing Dictatorship: Propaganda and Thought Work in Contemporary China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), p. 79.

of China's Antarctic activities as well as on the political issues surrounding Antarctica (and the Arctic) and the government's strategy for dealing with them. A CCTV (China Central Television) camera crew was part of China's 17-man team to conquer Dome A in 2005. In 2008, a *People's Daily* journalist and two from CCTV were on the 25th Chinese Antarctic expedition. The CCTV crew was part of the 28-man team making the traverse to build the new base in Kunlun in the 2008–09 austral summer.<sup>90</sup> The *Xue Long's* 2009–10 Antarctic expedition had five journalists on board. Journalists tend to create a glorified image of China's Antarctic efforts that differs somewhat from the reality on the ground or in comparison with reports on other countries' efforts. Few observers in or outside China have the opportunity to contrast the official representation with an alternative view, so these propaganda efforts are remarkably effective in building up a popular notion of China's strengths in Antarctic affairs.

## CONCLUSION

China's Antarctic exploration was initially limited by the country's economic development, but as the Chinese economy expanded, so did its Antarctic involvement. For the PRC, the reasons behind the delay in its involvement have influenced perceptions of other nations' Antarctic policies and activities and of China's own goals there. The current conversation on Antarctica in official and academic circles in China is also strongly informed by the nationalist national narrative forged by foreign imperialism.

In the long run, if the current Chinese-language debates in scholarly and journalistic circles come to fruition, China's rise in Antarctica is sure to impinge on the interests of Antarctic Treaty nations and those who have not yet signed it but would like to. China's obsession with gaining its share of the spoils of Antarctic wealth will pit it against many within the international community, not only those who crave access to these resources but also those who demand their exemption from exploitation in the name of protecting the world's last great wilderness. Yet, it should be understood that from a Chinese perspective, China's ambitions are defensive, not aggressive, and it is simply acting to protect its own legitimate interests.

90. Jean de Pomereu, "Dome A Traverse and Kunlun Station," International Polar Foundation, December 18, 2008, <[http://www.sciencepoles.org/articles/article\\_detail/dome\\_a\\_traverse\\_and\\_kunlun\\_station/](http://www.sciencepoles.org/articles/article_detail/dome_a_traverse_and_kunlun_station/)>.

At present, China's interest in an increased leadership role in Antarctic affairs is more an aspiration than a reality. As discussed, the unique way in which Antarctica is governed means that "Antarctic leadership" can be expressed in multiple and over-lapping ways. It can include holding leadership positions in Antarctic bodies, engaging in leading Antarctic research, taking a leadership role on important issues such as environmental management, and making a major investment in Antarctic capacity. China is currently relatively weak in all these areas.

China's Antarctic ambitions are part of "China's rise" in the global community. When any shift of power occurs, there is sure to be some tension; there may even be open conflict. Overall, China is emerging from being a medium power to become a major power in the global system. It is even, in some parts of the world, becoming a dominant force. However, when it comes to Antarctica, despite its massive investment in spending, China is still only a medium power. Antarctica is a clear-cut case of the world system currently being unipolar: the balance of power would have to shift enormously for China to challenge U.S. dominance there (if this is in fact a goal). As Beijing's recent cautious behavior over its adjusted foreign policy line demonstrates, China's rise on the world stage—as in Antarctica—is not (yet) about challenging existing powers. Rather, its behavior reflects the Chinese government's ongoing efforts to act in ways commensurate with the country's new global status and to use its increased financial resources to extend its international influence and protect its national interests. The actions also reflect China's quest for more resources to fuel its development. China is certainly on the rise in Antarctica, but it is still a long way off from being able to challenge the current order there.