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Report from Asian Forum of Polar Sciences to the ATCM XXXVIII

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AFoPS History and Progress

Asian Forum of Polar Sciences (AFoPS), a ten year old Asian organization dedicated to polar research and cooperation, is preparing for another decade. The AFoPS was established in 2004 to encourage and facilitate cooperation for the advancement of polar sciences among countries in the Asian region. Toward the end of the first decade, the AFoPS has become an important medium of collective endeavors in human and information exchange, research collaboration, and logistics cooperation among the Asian polar science institutions. Today the AFoPS consists of five Members - China, India, Japan, Malaysia, and the Republic of Korea - with four more Asian countries (Thailand, Indonesia, Philippines, and Vietnam) as observers. So far, AFoPS has served as a forum for information sharing among the Members and a starting point of cooperation as opportunities arise. As a token of collective efforts, a plan to issue AFoPS special volumes from scientific journals was endorsed and the first volume appeared in late 2013 with the next one to follow.

2014 marked the tenth anniversary of AFoPS. At a meeting held in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia last October, a symposium was organized to collectively evaluate how each member has been making progress and what future the members are envisioning. Key achievements were presented by a senior scientist and an early career scientist from each member.

Renewed Start of AFoPS

The AFoPS is now gearing for a big leap in the next decade. Since the transition of the chairmanship to Korea, new developments are taking place. The AFoPS Secretariat, now with more dedicated manpower support from Korea Polar Research Institute (KOPRI), has been tasked to strengthen information-sharing among the Members, to re-activate its website, to compile historical data of AFoPS and to facilitate its future planning. A series of steps and measures to enhance internal and external communication has been taken thus far:

- (1) Circular: Began issuing monthly AFoPS circulars to disseminate information for the Members;
- (2) Official website: Reactivated AFoPS official website, compiling available data information and records of AFoPS of the last 10 years; Please refer to our website (www.afops.org) for more information.
- (3) Documentation format: Provided documentation formats to support AFoPS decision-making and information management efficiency;
- (4) Newsletter: Published the first issue of quarterly AFoPS e-newsletter, which was distributed to international polar science societies (about 90 recipients including international polar organizations, national polar research institutes, and individual polar scientists); and,
- (5) Collaboration with other international organization: Chair's letter sent to the leadership of other international polar organizations such as the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP), Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), Forum of Arctic Research Operators (FARO), and International Arctic Science Committee (IASC) respectively for future opportunities for the inter-organizational cooperation.

AFoPS is now poised to widen and consolidate its collaborative ties with other international organizations. Enhancing its stature is not the major purpose of AFoPS but to strengthen its real world collaborations. Discussion is underway with SCAR and IASC, as well as COMNAP and FARO on how best to activate this process.

Above all, the most critical initiative pursued by AFoPS at this time is AFoPS cooperative projects. Existing projects or new applications from the members are encouraged to join forces by common planning and joint field exercises to form AFoPS endorsed programs. Ocean observations in the polar waters of rapid sea ice loss, particularly in the Arctic, climate changes and differential responses of Antarctic penguins and climate

linkage between poles and the tropics, and sharing opportunities for land based geology expeditions are just a few examples.

Asian polar programs are still relatively young but are no longer beginners. Populations and influences coming together from the Asian members of the global community are already substantial enough to anticipate responsibilities and commitments from these Asia countries. Particularly when Asian research facilities are spread around the Antarctic and also the Arctic, they actually close a loop in a circumpolar fashion, and hence offer a great deal of potential for international cooperation among the Asians as well as partners from other continents. Now it is time to use these assets for a greater cause and to generate outcomes.

AFoPS Future Plan

AFoPS is now 10 years old and this is the time when we see a large expansion in research infrastructure and investments among the Asian polar programs. AFoPS certainly made some achievements in this period of time. Having an information-sharing scheme in place and establishing a framework for joint work are an achievement in its own right. Hitherto the AFoPS collaboration has been a little opportunistic and not necessarily well pre-planned. AFoPS has yet to develop more specific and substantial collaborative projects. Now AFoPS is facing a new decade and it is high time to do that using this network and framework that has been developed in the meantime. AFoPS is aspiring for more pronounced presence and perhaps a bigger voice in the international polar community. An exclusive regional block, however, is certainly not the intent. AFoPS is determined to create a channel and make use of it so that the contribution is maximized to the global community in a synergistic way, to see a greater output than when AFoPS members work single-handedly in separation.