

China to build first polar-expedition icebreaker

July 31 2012



A view of an icebreaker ship docked in the Helsinki port in May 2012. China is set to construct its first icebreaker for polar expeditions, state media said Tuesday, in a move it described as greatly boosting its ability to explore the strategic Arctic.

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[Melting ice](#) sheets in the far north have opened up the possibility that ships could routinely cross through the [Arctic Ocean](#) as a shortcut between China and Europe as well as explore the oil-rich area.

The ship "is expected to greatly boost the country's expedition capacities in polar and oceanic regions", the Xinhua state news agency said, citing the State Oceanic Administration.

The vessel, which will be designed with the help a Finnish company and will be the first built in China, is set to begin operating in 2014. It will join the already active vessel, Xuelong, which was purchased from Ukraine in 1993.

The 8,000-tonne ship will be able to break through 1.5 meters (five feet) of ice, Xinhua said, citing officials from the State Oceanic Administration.

China has said it would like to play a larger role in the [Arctic region](#).

It has applied, alongside the European Union, Japan, South Korea and others, for permanent observer status on the Arctic Council.

The eight-member council -- which includes Canada, Denmark/Greenland, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Russia and the United States -- meets to discuss matters concerning the icy region.

China's interest in the Arctic was highlighted last year when a Chinese property tycoon sought to purchase 300 square kilometres (200 square miles) of land in northern Iceland for a tourism project.

The Icelandic government later blocked the deal after officials said [China](#) had considered using the island as a trans-[Arctic](#) shipping port.

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Citation: China to build first polar-expedition icebreaker (2012, July 31) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-07-china-polar-expedition-icebreaker.html>

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