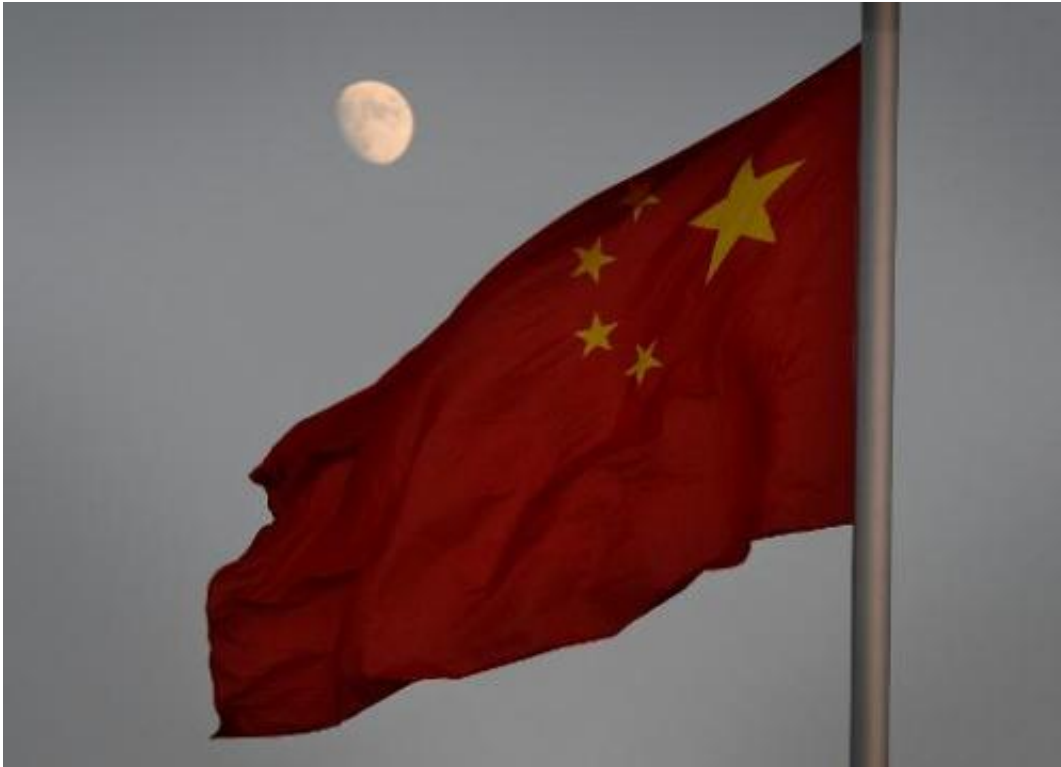


China opens fourth Antarctic research station

February 10 2014



China's Taishan Antarctic research station officially opens, in another step for the country's exploration ambitions in both earth and space

China's fourth Antarctic research station—the flying saucer-shaped Taishan—has officially opened, in another step for the country's exploration ambitions in both earth and space.

The station, named for one of China's five sacred mountains, sits at an altitude of 2,600 metres (8,530 feet) between China's Zhongshan and Kunlun stations, according to the State Oceanic Administration (SOA).

The site's average annual temperature is minus 36.6 degrees Celsius (minus 33 degrees Fahrenheit) and construction began on December 28.

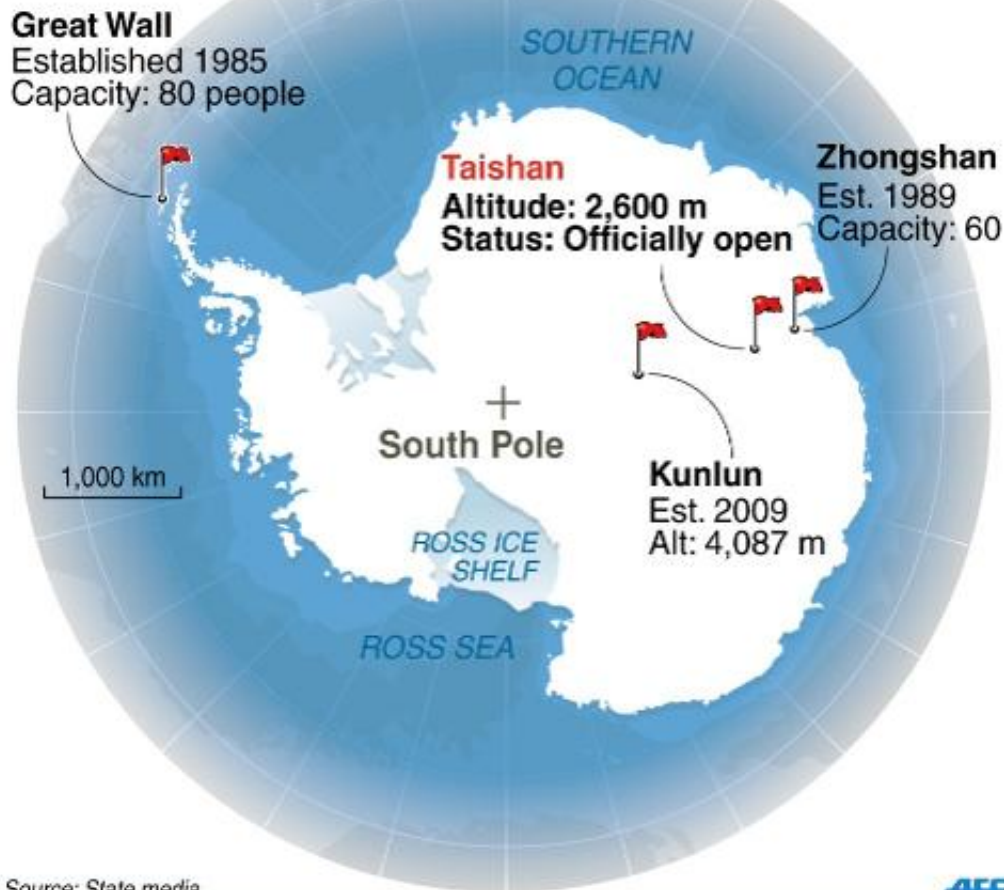
The state-run Xinhua news agency reported at the weekend that President Xi Jinping offered written congratulations, calling scientific research in the frozen continent important for exploring nature and developing mankind.

State media announced in December that workers were on their way to construct the facility to be used during summer for research into "geology, glaciers, geomagnetism and atmospheric science", saying its main building would be shaped "like a Chinese lantern". A fifth station is also being planned, reports said.

Pictures of the Taishan facility released by Xinhua show a 12-sided structure raised on stilts above the ice.

China in the Antarctic

Research stations



Graphic showing China's Antarctic research bases

China is a relative latecomer to Antarctic exploration, sending its first exploration team to the remote continent in 1984 and establishing its first research base a year later.

Approximately 30 nations operate permanent research stations in Antarctica including the US, China, Russia, Australia, Britain, France and Argentina.

Argentina, one of the closest countries to Antarctica, has 13 facilities on the continent, more than any other country, according to 2012 data from the Council of Managers of National Antarctic Programs (COMNAP).

The US maintains six facilities, while Russia has 12 and Japan five, according to COMNAP.

China also is pursuing an ambitious space programme. It most recently garnered global headlines with its first moon rover—Jade Rabbit—deployed on the lunar surface in December from the Chang'e-3 probe.

Late last month, however, state media reported it had experienced a "mechanical control abnormality", leading to speculation the device was in serious trouble.

The landing—the third such soft-landing in history, and the first of its kind since a Soviet Union mission nearly four decades ago—has been a huge source of pride in China, where millions across the country have been charting the rover's accomplishments.

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