Report of the Asian Forum for Polar Sciences (AFoPS) 2019–2021

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***Introduction***

AFoPS was established in May 2004 when the three Directors-General of the polar research institutes of China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea gathered in Shanghai to encourage and facilitate cooperation for the advance of polar sciences among countries in the Asian region. Later, India, Malaysia, and Thailand joined AFoPS. Much cooperation among Asian countries, such as inviting observers for each training course for polar expeditions, collaborative field research in the Arctic and Antarctic, and joint publication of the AFoPS special issue have been carried out with the support of this research network. Further information on AFoPS members, structures, etc. can be found at www.afops.org. This report has been prepared by Japan to update the new developments as chair country for AFoPS from 2018 to 2020.

***2019 AFoPS Annual General Meeting***

The Annual General Meeting was held from October 30 to November 1, 2019, at the National Institute of Polar Research (NIPR) in Tokyo, Japan. Dr. Takuji Nakamura, the Director-General of NIPR, as the Chair of AFoPS, welcomed 18 overseas participants from AFoPS member countries and New Zealand as an observer along with 30 Japanese participants to the AGM. Plenary lectures and national reports, including updates on each national program, were presented by the members on the first day. A special session titled “AFoPS Collaborations from Antarctic to the Arctic” was held in the morning on the second day, followed by the Business Meeting, closed to nonmembers.

The Business Meeting was attended by 12 overseas participants and 5 NIPR participants. With the handing-over of the secretariat from the Polar Research Institute of China (PRIC) to NIPR, it was reported that the AFoPS Web server was transferred from PRIC to NIPR. NIPR proposed that it can offer technical maintenance for years after the chairmanship to avoid efforts to relocate the web server every two years at the moment of handover of the chairmanship. It was reported that an introduction of AFoPS was presented at the Forum of Arctic Research Operators (FARO) by NIPR according to a request from FARO’s EXCOM during ASSW in May 2019. Members agreed to continue to increase the number of coauthored papers between the member countries through collaborative research projects. The Chair announced that the next AFoPS AGM was to be held in Kyoto, Japan, in autumn 2020.

***AFoPS informal online meeting at ASSW 2020***

The AFoPS informal online meeting was held on March 30, 2020, organized by NIPR, with 18 participants from five member countries. Members from Malaysia could not join the meeting because of network problems.

The Chair introduced the preparation status of the AGM scheduled for September in Kyoto and announced that the AGM should be held before March 2021 in case the schedule was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was proposed by the Korea Polar Research Institute (KOPRI) that AFoPS be added to the International Coordination Group list of IASC, as it was not included in the group. The AFoPS Secretariat informed the meeting that Malaysia and Thailand were being asked to join the Third Arctic Science Ministerial (ASM3), to be cohosted by Iceland and Japan in Tokyo in 2021.

***AFoPS informal online meeting in July 2020***

The AFoPS informal online meeting was held on July 29, 2020, hosted by NIPR, to share the situation of COVID-19 impacts on the activity of each institute and country and the national polar programs and share the proposals and views on when and how to hold the next AGM, scheduled for September. Representatives and coordinators from all the member countries attended the meeting.

Each member reported that under the COVID-19 pandemic, national Antarctic programs were to be canceled or mostly canceled for the summer research projects, with year-round observations to continue. The editorial schedule was announced for the fourth AFoPS Special Issue of the journal *Environmental Research* by KOPRI. The Chair proposed holding an online AFoPS Business Meeting in September, and an AFoPS Science Symposium, possibly online, with national report updates on polar programs after and during COVID-19, scheduled in February–March 2021.

***2020 online Business Meeting***

The online Business Meeting was held on September 22, 2020, organized by NIPR. Twenty-five participants from six member countries attended the meeting. Activity reports of AFoPS in other forums were presented, and scholarship programs of member countries for collaborative research and those of SCAR, COMNAP, IAATO, and CCAMLR were introduced.

KOPRI introduced the schedule of the fourth AFoPS Special Issue of Environmental Research with the theme of “Climate Change and Adaptation of Life in the Polar Regions.” The call for submissions was to be open from January 1 to May 20, aiming for publication in October or November 2021. The Chair announced the transfer of the chairmanship to Malaysia and Dr. Azizan Abu Samah of the National Antarctic Research Center, University of Malaya, as an AFoPS representative of Malaysia accepted the proposal. The Chair proposed managing the website of AFoPS after transferring the chairmanship to Malaysia, and all members agreed.

***Online Science Symposium 2021***

The online Science Symposium was held from March 3 to 4, 2021, organized by NIPR, with a focus on the stimulation of joint observations in the polar regions among Asian countries. Due to the influence of COVID-19, it was held online for the first time and attended by 61 participants from 11 countries. Six member countries (China, Japan, Korea, India, Malaysia, and Thailand) presented their latest results in the “Scientific Projects for Future Collaborations” session. Collaborative research projects among the members were reported. Also, sessions were planned to introduce research from Australia, Egypt, Iran, Sri Lanka, and Turkey, who participated as observers. Through the lively question-and-answer session, the symposium successfully provided an opportunity to exchange information and ideas for new collaborative research. It was a great pleasure as the host institute that this first online symposium was very effective and that there were many positive comments from the participants, including the expectation to hold such meetings repeatedly.

A Member Countries’ Meeting was held following the symposium on March 4, inviting the AFoPS chair, Dr. Azizan Abu Samah, as a chair of the meeting. Representatives of the AFoPS members exchanged information and views on the current status of polar observations under the COVID-19 pandemic and discussed the future activities of the Forum. As the only polar research network among Asian countries, AFoPS plans to promote advanced polar research continuously and contribute to further cooperation under the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, we would like to note that the two-year period in this report was a transition between the COVID-19 free year and the year under COVID-19. AFoPS is successfully being adjusted to such a pre- and under-COVID time. However, the members do understand the importance of in-person meeting opportunities, and are looking forward to the time to organize such meetings as well.