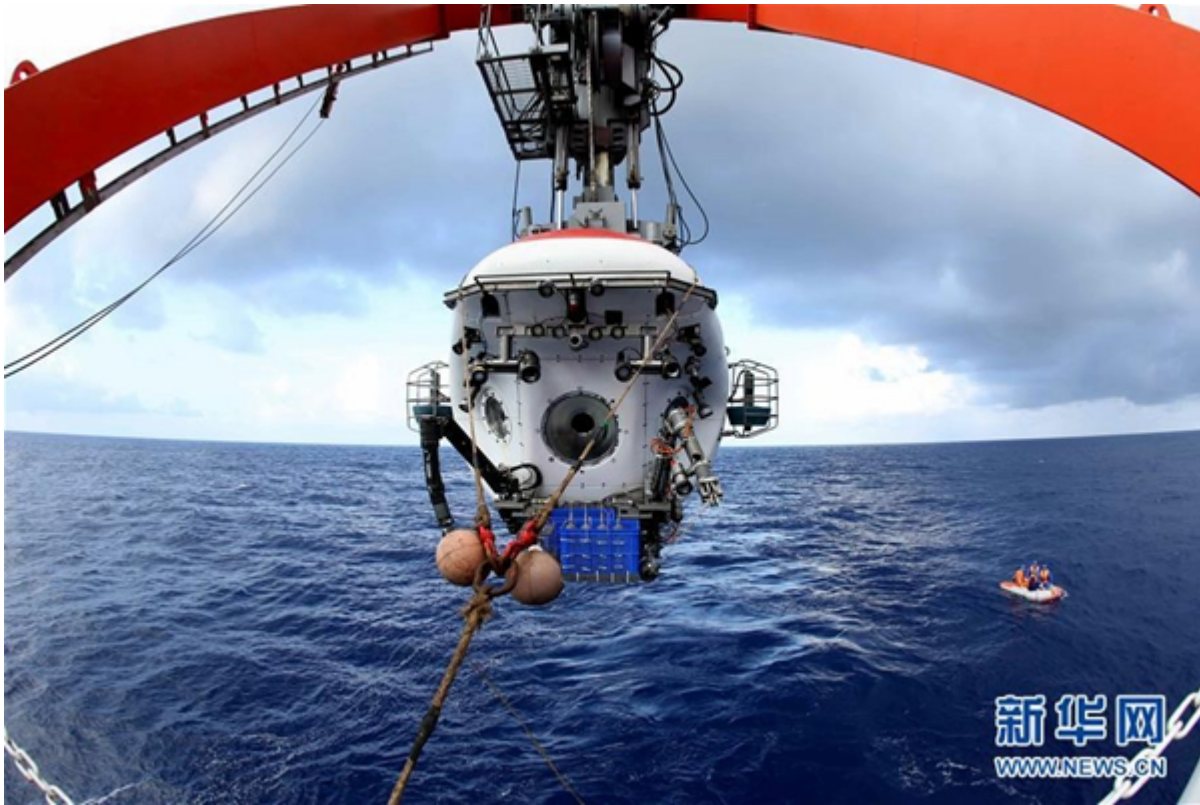


China to begin building two new ships for 2019



Jiaolong, China's manned submersible, conducted its fourth dive on April 30 around the Zhenbei Seamount in the South China Sea. [Photo/Xinhua]

China will soon begin building its first marine resources survey ship and its first mother ship for manned submersibles, according to the State Oceanic Administration.

Hu Xuedong, deputy director of the administration's Deep Sea Department who oversees China's ocean exploration programs, said at a news conference in Beijing on Wednesday that the construction work on the two vessels will start before July.

The survey ship will be built at China State Shipbuilding Corp's Huangpu Wenchong Shipbuilding Co in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. The mother ship for manned submersibles will be made at China Shipbuilding Industry Corp's Wuchang Shipbuilding Industry Group in Wuhan, Hubei Province.

"The two ships will have world-class technological and operational capacity. They will be able to travel at least 6,000 nautical miles on each journey," Hu said. "Their service will extensively improve our capabilities in ocean surveying, deep-sea science and marine environmental protection."

The ships, which have yet to be named, will be commissioned in the first half of 2019, he said.

Currently, China Marine Research Vessels operates 17 long-range oceanographic

research ships and 15 coastal water survey ships.

According to the State Oceanic Administration, the marine resources survey ship will be 98 meters long and 17 meters wide, and will have a displacement of 4,000 metric tons. It will have an advanced electric propulsion system.

The vessel will carry more than 70 kinds of scientific research equipment and will be capable of conducting highly accurate long-term surveys in a wide range of fields such as marine geology, marine ecology and ocean-atmosphere systems.

The mother ship, which will serve China's manned submersible Jiaolong, will also have a displacement of around 4,000 tons. It will support Jiaolong's operations and handle and analyze samples taken by the submersible, according to the administration.

Named after a mythical dragon, Jiaolong is China's first manned deep-sea research submersible. It reached its deepest depth—7,062 meters—in the Mariana Trench in June 2012. Currently, the Jiaolong is based on the Xiangyanghong 09, a survey vessel that has been in service since 1978. The new vessel will be the first dedicated mother ship for the submersible.

Hu said the mother ship will also assist the nation's effort to build a manned deep-sea station that the government plans to put into operation around 2030.

Cui Yiliang, editor-in-chief of industry magazine Modern Ships, said the two ships will be sophisticated in terms of technology and structure, so their construction will be a challenge to shipbuilders.