

CHINA'S MELTING GLACIER DRAWS TOURISTS AMID CLIMATE WORRIES

Relevant for: World & Indian Geography | Topic: Landforms by Glaciation, changes therein and in Flora & Fauna and the Effects of such changes

Tourists gather on a platform above the Baishui Glacier No.1 on the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain in Yunnan.

The loud crack rang out from the fog above the Baishui No. 1 Glacier as a stone shard careened down the ice, flying past Chen Yanjun as he operated a GPS device.

More projectiles were tumbling down the hulk of ice that scientists say is one of the world's fastest melting glaciers. "We should go," said the 30-year-old geologist.

Chen hiked away and onto a barren landscape once buried beneath the glacier.

Millions of people each year are drawn to Baishui's frosty beauty on the southeastern edge of the Third Pole — a region in Central Asia with the world's third largest store of ice after Antarctica and Greenland that's roughly the size of Texas and New Mexico combined.

Third Pole glaciers are vital to billions of people from Vietnam to Afghanistan. Asia's 10 largest rivers — including the Yangtze, Yellow, Mekong, and Ganges — are fed by seasonal melting. "Depending on how it melts, a lot of the freshwater will be leaving the region for the ocean, which will have severe impacts on water and food security," said Ashley Johnson, energy program manager at the National Bureau of Asian Research, an American think tank.

The glacier has lost 60% of its mass and shrunk 250 m since 1982, according to a 2018 report in the *Journal of Geophysical Research*.

Scientists found in 2015 that 82% of glaciers surveyed in China had retreated. They warned that the effects of glacier melting on water resources are gradually becoming "increasingly serious" for China.

"China has always had a freshwater supply problem with 20% of the world's population but only 7% of its freshwater," said Jonna Nyman, an energy security lecturer at the University of Sheffield.

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