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Hyundai's Trailer Drone, a hydrogen-powered container transportation system, is on display during the China International Import Expo in Shanghai last November. XINHUA

Free trade talks foreshadow thriving China-South Korea ties

Countries agree to pick up tempo in second stage of negotiations. **Zhong Nan** reports

Economic and trade ties between China and South Korea will be further enriched by soaring two-way investment, complementary industrial structure, and free trade deals such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement in the coming years, officials and business leaders say.

With China and South Korea making substantial progress in the second phase of free trade agreement negotiations, they said, enhanced business relations between the two major exporters will energize and stabilize supply chain operations in the Asia-Pacific region and more widely.

The two countries have agreed to speed up negotiations, and China is willing to keep up momentum so agreement is reached quickly for the two countries to work openly with trade in services and investment, China's Ministry of Commerce said.

As this year marks the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, mutually beneficial bilateral economic collaboration has enabled them to establish a deeper relationship, said Zhang Shaogang, vice-chairman of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade in Beijing.

China and South Korea signed a free trade agreement in June 2015, and it came into force in December that year. Since then, eight rounds of tariff cuts have been adopted, and China has waived more than 40 percent of tariffs on imports from South Korea.



Visitors try Samsung smartphones during a telecommunication expo in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, last November. LI ZHIHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

China exports mainly agricultural products, transport equipment, mechanical and electrical products, base metals, chemical products, textiles, garments and household appliances to South Korea.

In addition to semiconductors, mechanical appliances, precision instruments, motor, electrical and pharmaceutical products, South Korean exports to China include daily necessities, excavator parts, petroleum products, flat panel displays and sensors, wireless communication instruments, synthetic resins, optical instruments, petrochemical fiber raw materials and steel plates.

Negotiations on the current stage of trade focus on negative list-based high-level trade in services and investment liberalization, said Shu Jueting, a spokeswoman for China's Ministry of Commerce.

South Korean companies,

including Samsung Electronics Co Ltd, Hyundai Motor Co, SK Inc and LG Group, made direct investments in industries including food, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing and logistics in China last year, the ministry said.

Big-ticket projects invested in by the South Korean steelmaker Posco went well in the first half of this year, giving strong impetus to rapid growth of foreign direct investment in China, the ministry said.

By May 20 this year cumulative two-way investment between the two countries had exceeded \$100 billion.

Starting from only a small office room in China, Amorepacific Corporation, the South Korean beauty and cosmetics conglomerate, is one beneficiary of China's rapid growth over the past 30 years.

Boasting an industrial park

in Shanghai, Amorepacific now offers a wide range of products and services, from skin-care to color cosmetics in more than 5,000 stores across 250 Chinese cities.

Amorepacific China's growth was mainly driven by rising living standards in China, said Mike Hwang, president of Amorepacific China.

"Chinese consumers will demand higher-quality life as government goals such as common prosperity foster a fuller and more balanced growth of the country's market. This has provided us with a new direction for business development and generated a new impetus for growth."

Amid the pandemic and rising protectionism, the coming into effect of the RCEP carries significant implications for economic recovery of East Asian economies and in particular for China, Japan and South Korea, said Ahn Choong-yong, distinguished professor at the Graduate School of International Studies of Chung-Ang University in Seoul.

"Most importantly, the RCEP's unified rules of origin will help facilitate regional supply chains and reduce cross-border transaction costs to boost intra-regional exports and investments."

Trade between China and South Korea grew 9.4 percent on a yearly basis to \$184.25 billion in the first half of this year, China's Ministry of Commerce said.

The value of their bilateral trade exceeded \$360 billion last year, or 72 times that of 30 years ago when they established diplomatic relations.

Two near neighbors look to deepen their cultural connections

By **CHEN YINGQUN**

Kim Junbum's interest in Chinese culture started when his grandfather brought him a set of commemorative coins from the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing.

"It was very beautiful, which triggered my wish to learn more about China," Kim, 29, from Seoul, said.

A few years later, Kim attended college in Beijing and then founded Korean Peninsula Technology Co to introduce Chinese culture and China's fast-developing technology market to people in South Korea.

"I'm fond of food and tourism," he said. "China has a diversity of ethnic cultures and every place has its own special dishes, so I have a lot to experience here."

China and South Korea are geographically close and have many historical connections, said Li Shaopeng, deputy director of the Chinese Cultural Center in Seoul. The center, established in 2004, aims to promote and display Chinese culture in South Korea and build a bridge for cultural exchanges between both countries.

China and South Korea launched the Year of Cultural Exchange last year to upgrade bilateral exchanges and cooperation in various fields by carrying out a series of colorful cultural activities, continuing into this year, which marks the 30th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two.

Li said that Chinese culture has always been open, and has absorbed a lot from different cultures and excellent civilizations from other countries.

"No matter how the world changes, cultural exchanges between China and South Korea are always active, especially people-to-people exchanges. New stories are happening around us every day."

In April 2019 the center held a two-month event called Silk Road Culture Month. Through forms such as exhibitions, lectures, experiences and films it comprehensively presented many facets of Chinese culture such as ceramics, calligraphy, tea ceremony, incense ceremony and flower ceremony, promoting in-depth communication between Chinese and South Korean societies.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic,

the center changed the way it communicates on cultural matters, doing a lot more online. For instance, an activity named Cloud Tour China last year displayed tourism resources of all parts of China. It has also presented online bilingual web pages and videos to introduce to South Koreans western China, an area few visit, such as the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, Gansu province, the pandas in Sichuan province, and the featured landscape and food of Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and Tibet autonomous region.

"That activity has greatly increased South Koreans' understanding of China," he said. "A college graduate told us she learned about stories of the panda in Sichuan province from our website and had developed a close understanding of the world's largest panda habitat. ... She hoped that the pandas will become a symbol of friendly exchanges between the two countries."

Li said that because of the pandemic and geopolitical influences, cultural exchanges between the two have been affected to some extent, but no matter how the international situation changes, China-South Korea relations will inevitably develop.

"The two countries have a solid foundation and unlimited space for cooperation," he said.

The youth of both countries are the most promising and dynamic groups and should serve as envoys of cultural exchanges between China and South Korea, he said.

South Koreans who live in China have good impressions of the country, Kim said. By contrast, the perceptions of some people in South Korea who get their information about China through media outlets are skewed as a result of Western media that portray China in a negative light.

So an important part of Kim's work is to make multimedia products about China and share them with overseas audiences through social media platforms.

"I think youths play an important part in cultural exchanges because we are very familiar with social media and video platforms, so we can tell more authentic stories about China and communicate with people worldwide."



A Chinese artist performs a tea ceremony for South Koreans in the Chinese Cultural Center in Seoul during Silk Road Culture Month.
 PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Regional trade pact pays early dividends

By **PRIME SARMIENTO** and **YANG HAN**

The world's largest free-trade pact is gradually transforming economies in the Asia-Pacific region by opening up huge export markets and strengthening supply chains, analysts say.

The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which was signed by 15 countries and took effect earlier this year, is expected to sustain growth in a region rebounding from the pandemic.

The RCEP aims to establish a unified market by reducing tariff and nontariff barriers. The pact's signatories are the 10 members of

the Association of Southeast Asian Nations together with Australia, China, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand. ASEAN comprises Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

While the RCEP has been in place for only seven months, several member countries have already seen how it is freeing up trade.

Hafidzi Razali, a senior analyst for Malaysia at the advisory firm Bower Group Asia, said the agreement's "multifaceted nature" means the expected benefits will come over the medium to long term.

Malaysia ratified the agreement in March, and with the RCEP opening



The first freight train carrying imported fruit from ASEAN markets to China since the RCEP agreement took effect this year arrives in Pingxiang, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, in January. HUANG QI / FOR CHINA DAILY

up more markets for exports, Hafidzi said the Malaysian government should introduce programs that can boost export competitiveness.

The consultancy Dezan Shira & Associates said the RCEP has "great significance for China and for foreign investors". The trade pact brings

huge import-export opportunities for China, encouraging its companies to boost exports in which China has advantages, and increase imports of key technologies, components and raw materials, it said.

The RCEP will allow China to have a "more stable and solid connection"

with Asia-Pacific countries, the firm said.

China's trade with other RCEP countries expanded 6.9 percent to 2.86 trillion yuan (\$422.7 billion) in the first quarter of this year and accounted for 30.4 percent of China's total foreign trade value, the General Administration of Customs said.

In Thailand between January and April exporters applied for RCEP certificates of origin relating to trade worth \$204 million, said Jurin Laksanawisit, a Thai deputy prime minister and commerce minister.

In the period, the value of goods imported by Thailand using RCEP preferential policies came to \$72.3 million.

Thailand exported more than 500,000 metric tons of durian to China between Feb 1 and June 17, in trade worth 54.4 billion baht (\$1.47 billion). This surpassed the 425,000 tons exported in the corresponding period a year earlier.

Thailand is among the world's

biggest fruit exporters, and China is its top export market.

Piti Srisangnam, associate professor of economics at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, said the RCEP's aim of easing trade is especially helpful for Thai agricultural exporters. Allowing fruit exporters' perishable products to pass immigration procedures quickly means they can easily ship to markets like China, Srisangnam said.

Kim Sam-soo, director-general of the (South) Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency's Dalian office in Liaoning province, Northeast China, said the trade deal has brought new opportunities for trade with China.

"After the RCEP came into effect exports of some South Korean companies with production bases in Dalian have increased," said Kim, adding that an international business district under the RCEP framework was established this year in the Dalian Free Trade Zone.

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From a barren wilderness prone to severe sandstorms to a verdant forest that provides Beijing and its adjacent regions a bulwark against natural calamities, Saihanba in Weichang Manchu and Mongolian autonomous county, Hebei province, is nothing short of a green miracle.

Epic endeavors of three generations of foresters have transformed the arid land into a woodland made by human hands, and Zhang Jianglai's family is proud to have contributed to the extraordinary project.

Zhang, 29, who was born and raised in the county, recalls how his father, a truck driver, transported timber for the forest farm.

"I vividly remember the day my dad first took me to Saihanba. It was like an ocean of green. The rows of trees stretched as far as the eyes could see."

It was a day he never forgot. After he graduated from university, he applied for jobs at the forest farm and has now become a director of one forest section.

"Our predecessors laid a solid foundation," said Zhang. "We are standing on that foundation and pushing forward."

Historically, Saihanba was once an abundant resource of flora and fauna, but deforestation began toward the end of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). Wars and conflicts in the first half of the 20th century reduced it to a desert.

In 1962, the central government established the Saihanba Mechanical Forest Farm and engaged a dedicated team of 369 youths to revive the green lung. The area's forest cover, which was only 18 percent those days, now stands at 82 percent.

In 2017, the Saihanba afforestation community won the United Nations Champions of the Earth award for its outstanding contribution to the restoration of degraded landscape.

During an inspection in August 2021, President Xi Jinping said generations of workers there have forged, through concrete action, the Saihanba Spirit — staying true to the original aspiration, being hardworking and enterprising, and pursuing green development.

In a statement at the UN Summit on Biodiversity, via videoconference in 2020, Xi said that China always prioritized ecological progress, and embedded it in every dimension



Sheep graze at Saihanba National Forest Park in Weichang Manchu and Mongolian autonomous county, Hebei province. PAN ZHENGQUANG / XINHUA

A green revolution

Enormous efforts invested in resurrecting Saihanba as one of the world's largest man-made forests are rooted in the ancient Chinese philosophy of peaceful coexistence. **Cheng Yuezhu** reports

and phase of economic and social development. The goal is to seek a kind of modernization that promotes a harmonious coexistence between people and nature, he stressed.

This concept of coexistence is derived from the term *tianrenheyi* in ancient Chinese philosophy. Here, *tian* literally means the sky or heaven, but its definition extends to encompass nature and the order of things as determined by nature and followed by people.

Taoist philosopher Zhuangzi made a representative statement when he said: "Heaven and earth were born at the same time I was, and the ten thousand things are one with me."



Saihanba today is one of the world's largest man-made forests, and an invaluable source of plant data. WANG XIAO / XINHUA



In ancient Chinese philosophy, nature and everything in it are equal. Together we are one. This is why ancient philosophy requires us to be kind to nature and to treat it with the reverence it deserves."

Guo Wenbin
An expert in traditional Chinese culture

An example of this is the Chinese lunisolar calendar that stresses the impact of the sun and the moon on people's daily lives. It played an important role in China for millennia, as it guided agricultural production.

"In ancient Chinese philosophy, nature and everything in it are equal," said Guo. "Together we are one. This is why ancient philosophy requires us to be kind to nature and to treat it with the reverence it deserves."

"Under this philosophical frame, the relationship between nature and people is an interactive one. We should be grateful to nature. If we continue to be so, nature will repay us with more kindness," Guo adds.

According to last year's figures, made available by the National Forestry and Grassland Administration, China's forest cover has improved from 8.6 percent over six decades ago to 23.04 percent by the end of 2020.

The country has established 11,800 protected natural sites, offering protection to around 90 percent of terrestrial types of ecosystem, 85 percent of wildlife species and 65 percent of higher plant communities.

During the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20), desertification control was conducted on more than 10 million hectares, and approximately 4 million hectares of farmland was converted back to forests or grasslands.

China's outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) states in its main objectives that new progress will be made in building an ecological civilization.

Zhang Yu contributed to this story.

Intrepid migrants of the air

By XIN WEN

In late spring, Yuan Xuejun, who works in an office near the Zhengyang Gate in Beijing, loves hearing the sharp, clear notes of birds in the sky.

Each year the birds appear in the spring, before migrating in the autumn.

Yuan, 56, a researcher at the Beijing Central Axis Heritage Protection Center, said: "I wondered where they headed for the winter. I am so grateful for the chance to fully appreciate the birds and enjoy their boundless energy."

A study published in the international journal *Movement Ecology* in June showed the migration routes and preferred habitats of migratory birds for the first time.

Yuan is enchanted by the Beijing Swift (*Apus apus pekinensis*), the only wild migratory avian species in the world named after the Chinese capital, and a subspecies of the common swift (*Apus apus*).

These birds travel about 15,000 kilometers annually to spend the northern winter in southern Africa, covering the same distance when they return to Beijing to build nests and start breeding.

The swifts, which are 16 to 18 centimeters long, fly fast and cover long distances. They rarely land during migration, and perform the round trip of 30,000 km every



Beijing Swifts.
CHU JIANMEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

year, passing over 37 countries and regions.

According to the study, Beijing Swifts begin their autumn migration in the middle of July, leaving the city after breeding. They fly northwest to Mongolia, then west over the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, the Junggar Basin — a large sedimentary area in northwestern China — and then enter Central Asia.

Around Aug 16 every year the birds cross the Red Sea and head toward Central Africa. They reach the eastern Congo Basin in early September, where they remain for about one month, before flying south to reach the Southern African Plateau in early November. They stay there for about 100 days.

Liu Yang, corresponding author of the study and professor of life sciences at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, said: "To reach Africa, the birds fly in the shape of a parabola."

"The research also suggests that they adapt well to semiarid areas and have a preference for hot air currents."

One of the major reasons for this is that countless insects, the birds' primary source of food, abound in relatively dry regions.

Rather than heading straight to the hot and humid south, the swifts take a "labor-saving route" by first flying north and then northwest due to their dietary habits, Liu said.

The return route for the spring migration is almost identical. The birds arrive in the eastern Congo Basin in mid-February from the Southern African Plateau, staying for about a month before crossing the Red Sea. They leave Africa in early April.

Flying almost nonstop, the swifts return to their breeding area after arriving in Beijing from about mid-April to mid-May.

Natural approach

By XU XIAOMIN

Many people have been cranking up their air conditioning to deal with a heat wave in Shanghai, but Xiong Feng and his family have managed to stay cool without having to resort to such measures. His solution: nature and architectural design.

Like most farmers on Chongming Island, at the mouth of the Yangtze River and more than an hour's drive from downtown Shanghai, Xiong grew up learning how to till the fields and plant crops. It is natural to sweat in summer, he said.

But Xiong, 46, also has a background in architecture and interior design, and this is prominently showcased on his 12,000-square-meter farm. A towering, pyramid-like structure made of bamboo and reed makes his farm stand out from the rest.

Dubbed the rice field theater, this structure was designed to draw cool air from the surrounding fields while allowing hot air to rise and dissipate through the hole at the top, Xiong said. In addition to using this space to host family gatherings and visitors, Xiong takes his afternoon naps there.

"The secret to stay cool without an air conditioner is managing the air flow," he said.

The same principle applies to his living quarters in the farm, which he calls a camp. Unlike other farmers

who often use air conditioning to beat the heat, Xiong relies on a row of ball-shaped stainless steel roof fans that have been strategically positioned so they spin due to the influx of air from outside his property. This approach, he said, is not down to cutting costs.

"Nature is my teacher and my provider. I want to give my family a living environment that is based on harmony between people and nature."

Born into a family of farmers in Jingzhou, Hubei province, Xiong moved to Shanghai more than 20 years ago to pursue his ambition of becoming an architect. After years of toiling, he eventually experienced success and opened his own firm. He even managed to buy an apartment in downtown Shanghai.

In the eyes of his friends and family, Xiong had made it in life. But he said he never felt at home in the bustling metropolis. In fact, the yearning to return to the tranquil countryside only got more pronounced over the years.

"I don't think I will ever get used to living in a modern city," he said.

Driven by this desire to return to his roots, Xiong sold his home in Shanghai and moved back to his hometown in Hubei. Five years ago the family moved to where his wife was from, Chongming Island, because it was more convenient for their two daughters to go to school.

The move from being the boss



A 12,000-square-meter area of land on Shanghai's Chongming Island has been transformed dramatically by Xiong Feng into a farm where visitors can spend their leisure time close to nature. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

of his own company to a farmer in Chongming was something many people did not understand. Some might say he had "given up" too much to satisfy his desire of living in the countryside.

"This isn't giving up on what I had," Xiong said. "It's a choice. The truth is that living in the countryside gives us more."

At the beginning, the land that he rented in Chongming was nothing more than an unruly patch of weeds

and some scattered rice fields. Today the space has been dramatically transformed into a farm with a rice field, a lotus pond, pavilions, bathhouses, docks and corners where his daughters spend their leisure time chasing butterflies or enjoying the waterway.

Xiong's reverence for nature is reflected in the name of his farm, which is a combination of the characters *chunting*, which means Chinese toner tree, and *pumen*, which refers to permaculture, a concept for sustainable farming and living created by two Australian environmentalists, Bill Mollison and David Holmgren, in the 1970s.

On Xiong's farm, ducks are deployed to get rid of insects and weeds in the field, and their excrement is used as fertilizer for crops. The two toilets built on stilts above the field are also used as fertilizer sources. Modern farming solutions are hardly used.

"The philosophy of permaculture is inspired by various cultures and I think it is very similar to the Chinese notion of fostering harmony between humans and nature," Xiong said.

Xiong is focusing on promoting permaculture beyond the boundaries of his farm. His ambitious project revolves around handcrafting canoes and having visitors explore the island's many waterways.

Apart from selling agricultural produce, Xiong earns from hosting visitors who come to camp, canoe, practice yoga or hold weddings on the island. Despite the lack of promotion, business has been brisk.

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