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HEART STRINGS

Celebrating the 2024
China-Cambodia
People-to-People
Exchange Year

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Hou Sheng

China and Cambodia have shared deep-rooted people-to-people ties and cultural exchanges since ancient times. From

the bustling ships along the ancient Maritime Silk Road to frequent interactions on the modern diplomatic stage, the two countries have stood side by side, exemplifying genuine cooperation between nations. Since 2012, China and Cambodia have advanced construction of a community with a shared future grounded in mutual respect, equality, and mutual benefits.

This year marks the 66th anniversary of China-Cambodia diplomatic relations and has been designated as the China-Cambodia People-to-People Exchange Year. Bilateral cooperation, strongly supported by both peoples, has withstood tests of changing international tides and continues to demonstrate inherent momentum and expansive development prospects. Looking ahead, China and Cambodia are welcoming new opportunities to advance mutually beneficial development, and their relationship is set to become even stronger in the new era.

Friendly Exchanges Spanning Millennia

China and Cambodia share a history of over 2,000 years of friendly exchanges. Artifacts such as ancient ceramics unearthed in Cambodia's Takeo Province date the history of cultural exchanges back to the 1st Century at the latest. Zhu Ying's *Records of Foreign Culture in Funan Domain* and Kang Tai's *Tales of Foreign Countries During the Wu Period*,

Locals wave national flags of China and Cambodia to celebrate the launch of the Cambodia-China Friendship Village for Poverty Alleviation Project in Bati district of Takeo Province, Cambodia, on January 29, 2021. The project was carried out by the Cambodian Civil Society Alliance Forum, with funds from the China Foundation for Peace and Development. (CUIYANG KAI/CFP)



ENDURING FRIENDSHIP

Celebrating two millennia of China-Cambodia relations

By Hou Sheng

both written during the Three Kingdoms period (220-280), provide detailed accounts of Cambodia's customs and traditions, indicating that envoy exchange between the two countries had already commenced during that time. By the Song Dynasty (960-1279), frequent maritime trade between Cambodia and the

Chinese ports of Quanzhou and Guangzhou was well-documented. *The Customs of Cambodia* written by Zhou Daguan in the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) remains a critical document for studying medieval Cambodia. In modern times, Chinese immigrants have settled in Cambodia, deeply integrated into local



society, thereby fostering cultural connections between the two nations.

This time-honored friendship represents an invaluable asset in today's international community. In 1958, despite strong opposition from Western powers, newly independent Cambodia established formal diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. Since then, Chinese leaders have made numerous visits to Cambodia, while late King Norodom Sihanouk frequently visited China. The China-Cambodia relationship has withstood the challenges of shifting global

dynamics and remains as solid as a rock.

Entering a new stage of development, bilateral cooperation between China and Cambodia has expanded across multiple sectors including trade, defense, education, culture, and healthcare. In 2010, China and Cambodia issued a joint statement on establishing a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. In October 2016, President Xi Jinping's state visit to Cambodia strengthened the partnership even further. In 2019, then Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen reached an important consensus with President Xi during his visit to China, and the two sides jointly signed an action plan for building a China-Cambodia community with a shared future. Notably, Cambodia was the first country to forge such a partnership with China. Under the leadership of both heads of state, this action plan was swiftly implemented and has already yielded significant progress.

The China-Cambodia relationship is founded on mutual respect and equality. Both nations, having experienced foreign invasions in modern history, share a naturally aligned partnership in safeguarding national independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, while opposing hegemony and power politics. They cooperate closely within frameworks of East Asia cooperation, Lancang-Mekong cooperation, and the United Nations, acting as a leading example for promoting international, regional, and sub-regional cooperation. Cambodia has actively supported and engaged in implementing initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, Global Development Initiative,

Global Security Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative proposed by China, laying a solid foundation for future win-win growth between the two nations.

Fruitful Cooperation

Since 2013, strategic alignment of China's Belt and Road Initiative with Cambodia's Rectangular Strategy has significantly contributed to Cambodia's socio-economic development. The two countries have implemented the Cambodia-China "Diamond Hexagon" cooperation framework encompassing six key domains—political affairs, production capacity, agriculture, energy, security, and people-to-people exchanges. This has brought tangible benefits to the people of both countries and contributed to peace and prosperity in the region and beyond.

In 2022, the Chinese-invested Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway, Cambodia's first expressway, was opened to the public, ushering in the expressway era for the country. Beyond this, bilateral cooperation between China and Cambodia includes:

- The Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone
- Construction of the Cambodia-China Friendship Preah Kossamak Hospital and the Cambodian National Stadium
- Restoration of historical sites such as Chau Say Tevoda and Ta Keo Temple
- Joint infrastructure projects such as the Siem Reap Angkor International Airport, Phase I of the New Phnom Penh International Airport, and the Kratie-Mekong River Bridge
- Growing trade in Cambodian products to

Chinese consumers including rice, mangoes, longan, pepper, and seafood

● Modernization of Cambodia's agricultural systems

These achievements exemplify a model of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, showcasing the win-win nature of China-Cambodia partnership.

Since its signing in 2020, the China-Cambodia Free Trade Agreement has resulted in zero tariffs on over 90 percent of tariff lines in trade in goods for both sides. China has maintained its position as Cambodia's largest trading partner and top source of foreign investment for 12 consecutive years. According to the General Department of Customs and Excise of Cambodia, bilateral trade between China and Cambodia reached US\$7.31 billion in the first half of 2024, an 18.8 percent year-on-year increase. Chinese investment accounted for 42 percent of the total foreign direct investment in Cambodia in the first half of the year.

Bright Prospects

China-Cambodia relations are gaining momentum, with strengthening political trust,

flourishing economic cooperation, and closer bilateral coordination. China's Belt and Road Initiative is highly aligned with Cambodia's Pentagonal Strategy, while the paths toward high-quality development in China and sustainable development in Cambodia are showing significant convergence. China's goal of building a fully modernized socialist country by 2050 and Cambodia's goal of becoming a high-income country by 2050 are moving in parallel. China and Cambodia are fellow travelers on the path of development, and the prospects for building a China-Cambodia community with a shared future are promising. Their cooperation serves as a model for building a community with a shared future for mankind.

Looking ahead, three key areas require continued focus:

First, strengthening strategic mutual trust. The concept of a China-Cambodia community with a shared future is a strategic decision to advance bilateral relations in a healthy and stable manner. This partnership, based on mutual integration, equality, and win-win cooperation, already serves as a model for regional cooperation. It is

playing a pioneering role in building a China-ASEAN community with a shared future and a broader Asian community with a shared future.

Second, deepening economic cooperation. Efforts should be made to better align the development strategies of both countries to facilitate the flow of people and goods. Enhanced industrial cooperation will drive growth in digital and green economies as well as small and medium-sized enterprises. Investment cooperation should be elevated and greater support given to industrial parks. China will help Cambodia improve the modernization and industrialization of agriculture, expand imports of Cambodian agricultural products, and promote large-scale infrastructure projects. China will continue implementing "small yet beautiful" aid projects to improve local livelihoods in Cambodia.

Third, expanding people-to-people exchanges. People-to-people connectivity remains a cornerstone of the traditional friendship between China and Cambodia. Both countries should promote greater cultural exchange, tourism cooperation, and partnerships in education, health, science and technology, and expand mutual student exchange programs and personnel training.

Across the vast expanse of Asia, the relationship between China and Cambodia is like a river of friendship that has traversed time and space, growing increasingly resilient through trials and tribulations. As President Xi remarked, "No matter how the international and regional situation changes, China will always be Cambodia's most trustworthy friend and most steadfast supporter." Under the strategic guidance of both countries' leaders, the China-Cambodia community with a shared future will continue to develop and serve as a model for building a shared future for all humanity. ■

✉ An aerial photo taken on October 28, 2022 shows the Phnom Penh-Sihanoukville Expressway project in Kampong Speu Province, Cambodia. (XINHUA)



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