

Voice of Friendship stems from
Shi Jing (Book of Songs).

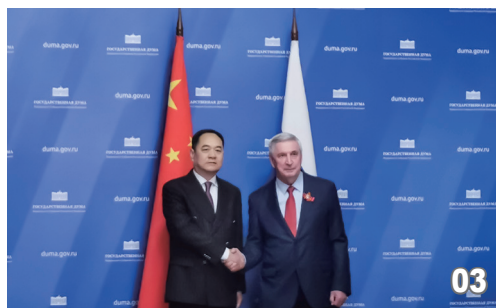
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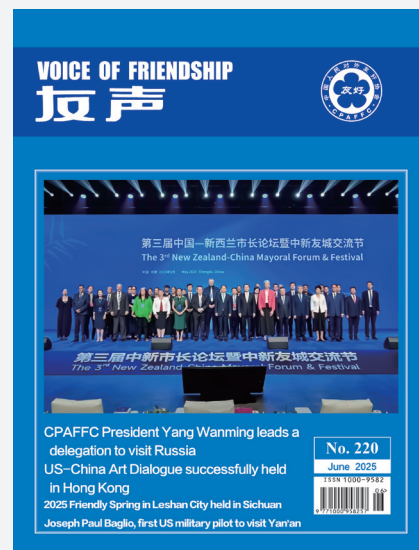
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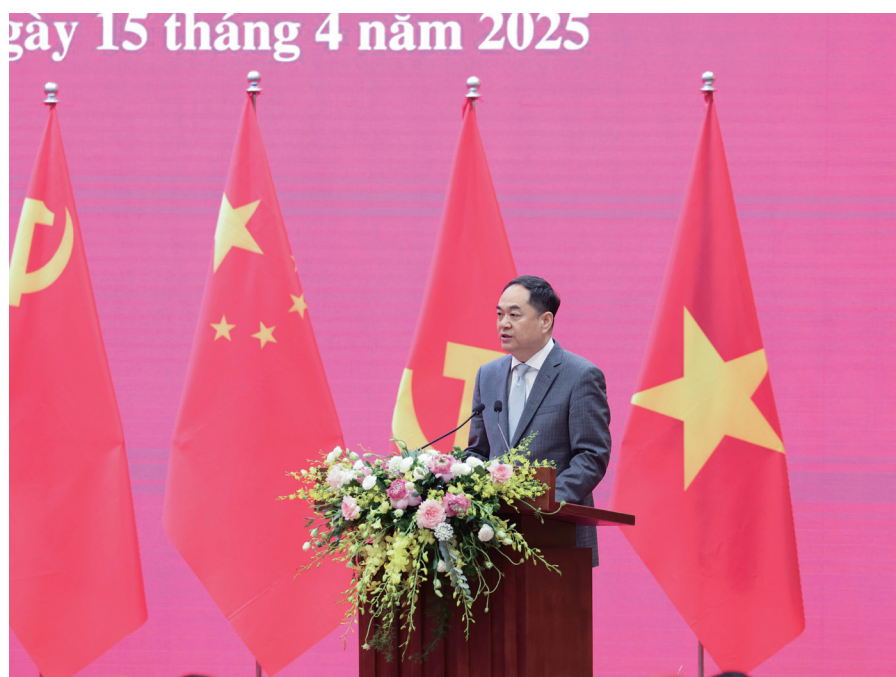
CPAFFC President Yang Wanming attends Chinese and Vietnamese People's Friendship Meeting in Vietnam

Department of East Asian Affairs

On the morning of April 15, general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and Chinese President Xi Jinping, together with general secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) To Lam and President of Vietnam Luong Cuong, met with representatives attending the Chinese and Vietnamese People's Friendship Meeting at the Hanoi International Convention Center. After the event, President Xi, General Secretary To Lam and President Luong Cuong jointly launched the "Red Study Tours" program.

Yang Wanming, secretary of the Leading Party Members Group and president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), attended the launch ceremony for the "Red Study Tours" program, and took an interview with the China Central Television (CCTV).

Yang extended his sincere thanks to the top leaders of the two parties and two countries for taking the time to attend the Chinese and Vietnamese



CPAFFC President Yang Wanming attends and addresses the event.

People's Friendship Meeting. He said that the day before, General Secretary and President Xi Jinping held a fruitful meeting with General Secretary To Lam and President Luong Cuong and reached a new important consensus. Together, they have drawn up a new blueprint for the building of a China-

Vietnam community with a shared future in the new era.

Yang said the meeting also provides fundamental guidance and direction for deepening people-to-people friendship between the two countries. He pledged the CPAFFC's willingness to work with all walks of

life in China and Vietnam to implement the new important consensus reached by the two top leaders on people-to-people diplomacy; adhere to the guideline of long-term stability, future orientation, good-neighborly friendship and comprehensive cooperation, and the spirit of good neighbors, good friends, good comrades and good partners; stay true to the original aspiration of China-Vietnam friendship; and keep in mind the common mission.

“Centering on the six overarching goals of greater political mutual trust, more solid security cooperation, deeper mutually beneficial cooperation, stronger popular support, closer multilateral coordination, and better handling of differences, we will give full play to our role as the main channel of people-to-people diplomacy, forge broader social consensus, and help accelerate the building of a China-Vietnam community with a shared future that carries strategic significance,” he said.

Yang expressed the need to give full play to the fundamental role of people-to-people diplomacy, to promote the profound traditional friendship between Vietnam and China as comrades and brothers, and to be the guardians of common ideals. He emphasized the importance of expanding channels for friendship-city exchanges to further deepen and solidify subnational cooperation, and to be the practitioners of pragmatic cooperation.



CPAFFC President Yang Wanming meets with Phan Anh Son, president of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations.

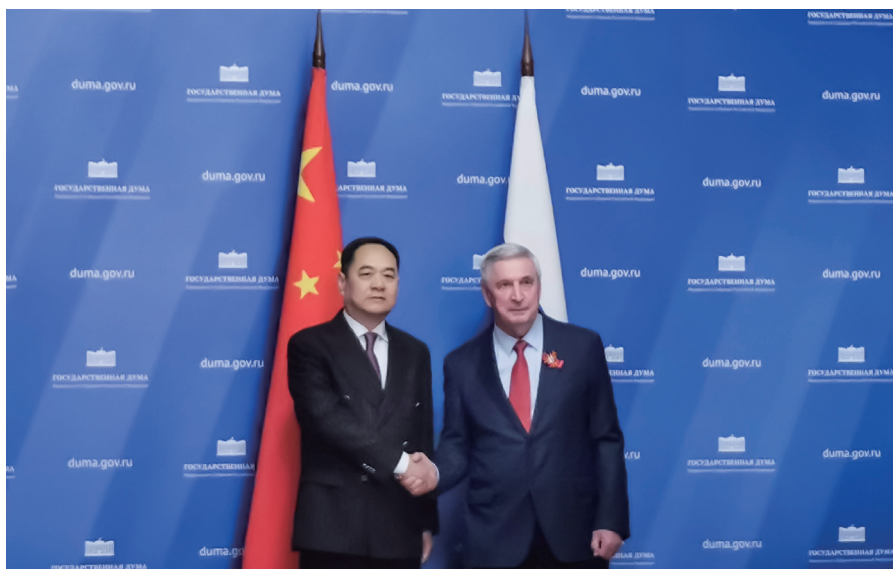
Yang also talked about the necessity of holding diverse people-to-people friendship activities that are heartwarming and welcomed by communities and resonate with the public, to make the people-to-people bonds more broad-based and to encourage more people to take an active part in cultural exchanges. He underlined the significance of implementing the program for Vietnamese youth to visit China on “Red Study Tours”, which aim to guide the younger generations of both countries to inherit and promote the fine traditions of the older generation, to sustain the revolutionary legacy, and to continue and enhance the friendly ties between the youth of both countries.

During his visit, Yang held a working meeting with Phan Anh Son, president of the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations. They had in-depth exchanges and pledged to implement the new important consensus and the guiding principles of important instructions of the top leaders of the two parties and two countries, pooling strength to ensure the success of the “Red Study Tours” program for Vietnamese youth, breaking new ground in hosting friendly activities such as the China-Vietnam People’s Forum and the China and Vietnam Border Inhabitants Gala, and continuously deepening the people-to-people friendship between the two countries. ■

CPAFFC President Yang Wanming leads a delegation to visit Russia

Department of European & Asian Affairs

From May 8 to 10, Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) led a delegation on a visit to Moscow and Volgograd in Russia at the invitation of the Russia-China Friendship Association (RCFA) to attend the 80th anniversary of the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War. During the visit, he met with Ivan Melnikov, first vice-chairman of Russia's State Duma and president of the RCFA; Galina Kulikova, first vice-president of the RCFA and recipient of the Friendship Medal of the People's Republic of China; Vyacheslav Gavrilov, vice-president of the RCFA, member of Russia's State Duma, and president of the Russia-China Parliamentary Friendship Group; Kirill Babayev, vice-president of the RCFA and head of the Institute of Chinese and Modern Asian Studies; Ekaterina Peshkamskaya, vice-governor of the state of Volgograd; Mikhail Korotkov, president of the Volgograd Branch of the RCFA and president of Volgograd State Social



CPAFFC President Yang Wanming meets with Ivan Melnikov, first vice-chairman of Russia's State Duma and president of the RCFA.

and Pedagogical University; and Yuriy Fedorovich Starovatyh, president of the Volgograd Branch of the Russian Peace Foundation. Yang also took part in the planting of a pine of friendship together with representatives of the RCFA and university students of the two countries.

During the meetings, Yang said that in recent years, the top leaders

of China and Russia have frequently exchanged visits. China-Russia relations have been constantly elevated to higher levels, further broadened, and become more resilient under the strategic leadership of President Xi Jinping and President Vladimir Putin. The two countries have jointly paved a new path of neighboring-major-

countries relations featuring long-term good neighborliness, friendship, and mutually beneficial cooperation.

Yang pointed out that this was Xi Jinping's 11th visit to Russia since he took office as the president of China. During this visit, the two countries concluded the Joint Statement by the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation on Further Deepening the China-Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for a New Era on the Occasion of the Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the Victory of the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War, which outlined the future direction of bilateral relations.

Yang recalled that 80 years ago, China and the Soviet Union served as the main theater of war in Asia and Europe respectively. The two peoples united to fight shoulder-by-shoulder against the enemy and developed deep friendship with blood and lives, which has been passed on from generation to generation.

He criticized the rising unilateralism and bullying acts that are severely disrupting the world order and applauded the independent, mature and resilient China-Russia relations, highlighting their benefits not only for the two peoples but also for global strategic stability and international fairness and justice. He also emphasized their contributions to the global effort to safeguard the post-war international order, promote multi-polarization, and support the reconstruction of the international

political structure.

Yang said that non-governmental friendship has laid a deep-rooted foundation for Sino-Russia relations, always serving as an important pillar in advancing bilateral relations. He noted that subnational cooperation is an important part of bilateral relations. The local governments of the two countries have been making active exchanges through various multilateral platforms and frameworks, including BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, while fostering pragmatic and grounded cooperation.

On behalf of the CPAFFC, he expressed willingness to work together with friends from all walks of life in Russia to develop closer ties at the grassroots level, promote mutual understanding and deeper friendship between the two peoples, and fully tap into the potential of subnational cooperation, so that they can add new glory to the China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era.

At the event for the co-planting of the pine of friendship, hosted by the Volgograd State Social and Pedagogical University and attended by representatives of the RCFA and university students of the two countries, Yang delivered a speech urging the young people of the two countries to make relentless efforts to carry forward the spirit of Sino-Russia friendship. He encouraged them to nurture the tree of friendship with the power of youth, so that the traditional friendship between China and Russia can be passed on from generation to generation.

The Russian side said that on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the Victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the Victory of the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War, President Xi Jinping's visit to Russia at the invitation of President Putin and his attendance at the celebration commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War are of great and profound historic significance.

They said that the visit has proved again the unprecedented high level of mutual trust, mutual understanding, and mutual support in Russia-China relations. It will inject new impetus into the development of the Russia-China comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination for a new era, and will strongly propel the international order to develop in a more just and reasonable way.

They emphasized that people-to-people friendship is the driving force for Russia-China relations. The RCFA and its local branches expressed readiness to keep close contact with the CPAFFC, so that they can make concerted efforts to advance people-to-people friendship between the two countries, and pool resources to deepen bilateral relations.

During their stay in Russia, the delegation paid a visit to the Eternal Fire in the Hall of Military Glory in Mamayev Kurgan and laid a wreath at the tomb of General Vasily Ivanovich Chuikov, to commemorate the martyrs and heroes who fought in the Battle of Stalingrad. ■

CPAFFC President Yang Wanming leads a delegation to visit Armenia and Georgia

Department of European & Asian Affairs

At the invitation of the Armenia-China Friendship Association (ACFA) and the Georgia-China Friendship Association (GCFA), Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), led a delegation to visit Armenia and Georgia from May 11 to 16.

Yang met with Mnatsakan Safaryan, deputy minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia, and Karen Avagyan, president of the ACFA, and attended the celebration of the 37th anniversary of the ACFA. He held meetings with Levan Davitashvili, first deputy prime minister and minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia; Irakli Mezurnishvili, first deputy chairperson of the Committee of Sector Economy and Economic Policy and honorary president of the Association of Georgia-China Regional Cooperation (ACCRC); Sul Khan Tamazashvili, president of the Ajaria Autonomous Republic; Elisso Bolkvadze, minister of Culture; Levan Zalkaliani, state representative of Imereti region; and Ivane Chkhartishvili, president of the GCFA, and signed a memorandum of cooperation with the ACCRC.

During his visit to Armenia, Yang said that both China and Armenia are ancient civilizations with a long history, and the traditional friendship between the two peoples runs deep. In recent years, under the strategic guidance of the leaders of the two countries, the political mutual trust has been continuously deepened, cooperation in various fields has been steadily advanced, and people-to-people and cultural exchanges have become increasingly close.

Yang pledged that the CPAFFC stands ready to work with all sectors in Armenia to enhance people-to-people friendship between the two countries, further strengthen cooperation in the fields of education, culture, and tourism, as well as local-level and youth exchange, and contribute to the better and faster development of bilateral relations.

The Armenian side stated that Armenia values the traditional friendship with China and considers the development of bilateral relations as its key diplomatic priority. As one of the earliest countries to respond to and participate in the Belt and Road Initiative, Armenia is committed to

deepening practical cooperation and promoting Armenia-China relations to a higher level. All sectors in Armenia look forward to building more platforms for exchanges and cooperation with the CPAFFC, promoting mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples, and infusing new vitality into their traditional friendship.

During his visit to Georgia, Yang noted that China and Georgia are longstanding friends and cooperative partners. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations 33 years ago, bilateral relations have developed healthily and steadily.

“Under the strategic guidance of the leaders of both sides, the political mutual trust between our two countries has reached a new height, and our cooperation in jointly building the Belt and Road Initiative has achieved fruitful results,” he said. “Strengthening exchanges between friendly groups of both countries at the local and people-to-people level is an important part of the China-Georgia strategic partnership. The decisions on visa-free travel, direct flights, free trade agreements and the joint building of the Trans-

Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) have laid a solid foundation for people-to-people exchanges and local cooperation between China and Georgia.”

Yang pledged that the CPAFFC is willing to work with all sectors of Georgian society, including the GCFA and the ACCRC, to implement the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, foster practical cooperation at local levels, tap the potential for cooperation

in education, culture, science and technology, sports, youth exchange and other fields, promote the further development of bilateral relations, and bring more benefits to the two peoples.

The Georgian friends said that Georgia attaches great importance to the traditional friendship with China and is committed to strengthening cooperation between the two countries. They noted that the elevation of bilateral relations to a strategic partnership has brought

benefits to the people of both countries. They commended the important role played by the CPAFFC in deepening practical cooperation between the two sides and expressed their hope to jointly contribute to the in-depth and substantive development of local cooperation between Georgia and China.

Li Xinwei, Chinese ambassador to Armenia, and Zhou Qian, Chinese ambassador to Georgia, attended relevant activities. ■



CPAFFC President Yang Wanming meets with Levan Davitashvili, first deputy prime minister and minister of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia.

Delegation from Soka University of Japan visits China

Department of East Asian Affairs

At the invitation of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), a delegation of 99 people from Soka University of Japan visited Beijing, Hubei province, and Shanghai from March 1 to 7.

Members of the delegation took part in a variety of exchange activities. They visited China Foreign Affairs University (CFAU), Central China Normal University, Hubei University, and Fudan University, where they strolled through the campuses alongside Chinese students, engaging in conversations about youth, ideals, and friendship. They also visited the Research Center for a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind at the CFAU and attended a lecture on a community with a shared future for mankind and China's major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics.

The delegation visited the Museum of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the China Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum, the China

Science and Technology Museum, the Memorial Hall of the Xinhai Revolution, the Hubei Provincial Museum, and the Shanghai History Museum, among others, to learn about the long and splendid history of Chinese civilization, modern and contemporary Chinese history, and the development of China-Japan relations.

The delegates took a stroll along the Beijing North Central Axis Landscape Avenue and Wuhan's Lihuangpi Road and East Lake Greenway, made a study tour of the new rural construction in Wuhan's Xingguang Village and Lantu Automobile Technology Co., Ltd., to experience China's development achievements in the fields of economy, culture, science and technology, and environmental protection in the new era.

On March 2, a welcome banquet was held in Beijing. Yuan Mindao, vice-president of the CPAFFC, attended and delivered a speech.

Yuan said that China and Japan are close neighbors, and people-to-

people friendship is a fine tradition of bilateral relations. Over the years, Soka University has carried out exchanges and cooperation with the Chinese side in the fields of education, academia and youth exchange, making valuable contributions to enhancing mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples and training successors for the cause of China-Japan friendship.

Yuan expressed the hope that the students of Soka University will inherit and carry forward the spirit of China-Japan friendship, and strive to become ambassadors of bilateral friendship, to build the golden bridge of friendship even stronger and broader.

Okutomi Masayuki, head of the Soka University delegation, said that this year marks the 50th anniversary of Daisaku Ikeda's third visit to China, and the delegation will follow the footsteps of its predecessors, bear in mind the faith of Japan-China friendship, retrace the road of friendship, in order to inherit and carry forward the legacy of Daisaku Ikeda.

“The current global situation is complicated,” Okutomi Masayuki said. “It is increasingly important for Japan and China to strengthen exchanges and cooperation in various fields and jointly tackle common issues. Soka University will adhere to and carry forward the tradition of bilateral friendship and the ideal of peace, continue to deepen friendly exchanges and cooperation, and work together to foster enduring friendship between our two peoples from generation to generation.”

During the exchange activities

at the welcome banquet, young people from China and Japan gave wonderful performances to showcase the traditional culture and modern art of both countries. They joined hands to sing *Friends*, a popular Chinese song, bringing the atmosphere of the event to a climax.

Members of the delegation said that through the visit, they have gained a better understanding of China’s long history and culture as well as its economic and social development in the new era. They were particularly

impressed by China’s efforts to build a community with a shared future for mankind and promote the common development of all countries in the world through its own development. They noted that they have learned about a real China that is different from media portrayals and established sincere friendship with their Chinese peers. Looking ahead, they expressed their willingness to actively participate in Japan-China friendship activities and contribute their youth to promoting the friendship between the two peoples. ■



CPAFFC President Yang Wanming leads a delegation to visit Japan

Department of East Asian Affairs

From March 25 to 30, Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), led a delegation comprising of leading officials from the five provinces of Liaoning, Jiangsu, Fujian, Jiangxi, and Shandong, and the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, as well as representatives from the 11 cities of Dalian, Fuzhou, Qingdao, Shenyang, Urumqi, Aksu, Yancheng, Zhangzhou, Nanping, Yichun, and Zaozhuang, to visit the prefectures of Osaka, Fukuoka, and Okayama in Japan.

The delegation had extensive exchanges with more than 300 representatives from various sectors, including the government and parliament, people-to-people friendship organizations, business circles, media, think tanks, and universities from 31 cities in 14 prefectures in the Kyushu, Kansai, and Okayama regions. Yuan Mindao, vice-president of the CPAFFC; Xue Jian, Chinese consul-general in Osaka; and Yang Qingdong, Chinese consul-general in Fukuoka; attended



CPAFFC President Yang Wanming meets with Katsunori Kamibo, deputy governor of Okayama prefecture.

relevant activities.

In Osaka, Yang Wanming met with Yasunori Nakaya, speaker of the Osaka Prefectural Assembly; Shigeki Watanabe, deputy governor of Osaka prefecture; and Katsuhisa Mita, chairman of the Japan-China Friendship Parliamentarians' Union of the Prefectural Assembly.

Yang also held talks with leaderships of major economic

organizations in the Kansai region, including Masayoshi Matsumoto, chairman of the Kansai Economic Federation; Shingo Torii, president of the Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Shoji Nagai, representative director of the Kansai Committee of the Japan Association of Corporate Executives; Yoshio Ito, president of the Japan-China Economic Relations and Trade Centre; and Kenji Imamura,

director of the Kansai Head Office of the Japan-China Economic Association. In addition, he met with the key personnel from friendly organizations and youth representatives from the prefectures of Osaka, Kyoto, Nara, Wakayama, and Shiga in the Kansai region.

Yang also visited Panasonic Corporation and met with President Kazuhiro Tsuga. Furthermore, he made a special trip to Nara to visit Yukiji Tsukamoto, a recipient of the “People’s Friendship Envoy” Award and a renowned friend of China.

In Fukuoka, Yang met with Akie Omagari, deputy governor of Fukuoka prefecture; Yoshitaka Eguchi, deputy speaker of the Fukuoka Prefectural Assembly; Yutaka Naga, president of the Japan-China Friendship Parliamentarians’ Union of the Prefectural Assembly; Soichiro Takashima, mayor of Fukuoka city; and Motoyasu Uchikoshi, speaker of the Fukuoka City Assembly. He attended the 2025 Kyushu China-Japan Friendship Exchange Conference and China-Japan Sister Cities Exchange Event jointly hosted by the CPAFFC, the Consulate-General of China in Fukuoka, the Japan-China Friendship Association (JCFA), and the Kyushu Regional Japan-China Friendship Association.

Yang also participated in a welcome dinner with Tokuichiro Utsunomiya, president of the JCFA; Senichi Moriyama, chairman of Fukuoka Prefecture Japan-China

Friendship Association; and leaders from local governments, parliaments, and friendly organizations in Kumamoto, Okinawa, Kagoshima, and other prefectures. Additionally, he took an interview with Nishinippon Shimbun.

In Okayama, Yang met with Ryuta Ibaragi, governor of Okayama prefecture; Katsunori Kamibo, deputy governor of Okayama prefecture; and Masao Omori, mayor of Okayama city. He watched the dance drama *Crested Ibis* on tour in Japan during the time, with Governor Ryuta Ibaragi. He also participated in an exchange event hosted by the Okayama Prefectural Japan-China Friendship Association, which was attended by nearly 100 representatives from various sectors across cities in the prefecture, including Okayama, Kurashiki, Bizen, Ako, Setouchi, Tamano, and Asakuchi.

During the exchange activities, Yang stated that China-Japan relations are experiencing positive momentum of improvement and development. All sectors in both countries are earnestly implementing the important consensus reached during the meeting between President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba in Lima. The Second Meeting of High-Level Consultation Mechanism on People-to-People and Cultural Exchanges between China and Japan, the Ninth Meeting of the China-Japan Ruling Party Exchange Mechanism, and the Sixth China-Japan High-Level Economic Dialogue have been successively held. Both sides

have conducted a series of positive interactions in various fields, further enriching the connotations of China-Japan strategic relations of mutual benefit in the political, economic, and cultural fields.

“This visit to western Japan by a delegation of officials from relevant Chinese cities, the hosting of the 2025 Kyushu China-Japan Friendship Exchange Conference and China-Japan Sister Cities Exchange Event, as well as dialogues and exchanges with people from various sectors in Japan are important steps in maintaining the recent positive momentum in bilateral relations and promoting people-to-people exchanges and sister-city cooperation,” he said.

Yang emphasized that people-to-people exchanges are the “source of living water” for bilateral relations. The Two Sessions that recently concluded in China further demonstrated to the world the robust momentum behind China’s high-quality development. China remains committed to high-level opening up and actively fosters new quality productive forces, providing important opportunities for local and people-to-people exchanges and mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries.

Yang expressed his hope that both sides will seize the opportunities, safeguard the political foundation of bilateral relations as outlined in the four political documents between China and Japan, and expand practical cooperation. He emphasized the need

to focus on emerging industries such as artificial intelligence, the digital economy, green and low-carbon technologies, and health and elderly care. These efforts will further enrich the China-Japan strategic relationship of mutual benefit. He also highlighted the importance of fostering exchanges and dialogues across all sectors, with particular emphasis on youth exchange programs to cultivate the next generation of leaders dedicated to the friendship cause, thus further improving the public opinion foundation for China-Japan friendship.

Yang introduced the key exchange activities planned by the CPAFFC for this year and encouraged representatives from local sectors in both countries to actively participate in them, to create a new wave of local and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries.

Japanese friends warmly welcomed Yang and his delegation, noting that over 260 representatives from local sectors in both Japan and China gathered in Fukuoka for the 2025 Kyushu China-Japan Friendship Exchange Conference and China-Japan Sister Cities Exchange Event. This

gathering has injected new momentum into bilateral relations at the people-to-people and local levels, with positive and far-reaching significance. Kansai has a long-standing tradition of exchanges with China and views China's development as an important opportunity. The region stands ready to take the 2025 Osaka-Kansai Expo as a platform to further strengthen economic, trade, and cultural exchanges with China and continue advancing Japan-China relations. Okayama will carry forward the tradition of friendship and continue to contribute to the bright future of bilateral ties. ■



CPAFFC President Yang Wanming (front row in the middle) has a group photo with leaderships of major economic organizations in the Kansai region.

CPAFFC President Yang Wanming attends performance of *Crested Ibis* in Okayama, Japan

Cultural Exchange Department

On March 27, the dance drama *Crested Ibis*, performed by the Shanghai Song and Dance Troupe and organized by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), was staged in Okayama prefecture, Japan.

Yang Wanming, president of the CPAFFC, who was visiting Japan, attended the performance alongside Ryuta Ibaragi, governor of Okayama prefecture, and other key officials from Okayama prefecture and various municipal governments. Since its premiere in Chiba prefecture on February 19, *Crested Ibis* has toured 19 cities across 18 prefectures in Japan, attracting nearly 50,000 viewers. The performance in Okayama was the 34th stop on the tour.

The theater was packed on the night of the performance. Audiences, arrived early with long-awaited excitement, including long-time supporters who specifically came to revisit the play, as well as new faces who had heard of its fame. On stage, the artists demonstrated the spirit of performing each show as perfectly as if it were the first time, using their superb dancing skills to bring the elegance and grace of the crested ibis to life. Off

stage, the audiences were immersed in this picturesque artistic world, all deeply touched by the beauty of life and nature. Especially during the depiction of the crested ibis's journey from near-extinction to rebirth, many audiences were moved to tears. As the curtain fell, the applause and cheers lasted for a long time. At that moment, emotions transcended national boundaries, and the seeds of love and peace quietly took root and began to sprout.

During his interactions with Japanese friends, Yang noted that cultural exchanges between China and Japan have always served as a stabilizer of bilateral relations. Since 1975, the CPAFFC has organized over 40 outstanding domestic performing troupes—including Peking opera, acrobatic, song and dance, and drama—to tour Japan. These efforts have built a bridge of art and friendship between the peoples of both countries. This *Crested Ibis* tour in Japan is also part of the association's ongoing efforts to promote mutual understanding between the two peoples. Yang expressed his hope for more bilateral cultural exchanges in the future.

After watching the performance, Ryuta Ibaragi remarked that the

crested ibis, as a symbol of luck, carries the deep friendship between the two peoples across mountains and waters. He described the *Crested Ibis* performance as a profoundly moving visual feast. He hoped that the CPAFFC will bring more outstanding cultural and artistic works to Japan in the future to further promote understanding and friendship between the two peoples.

Following the performance, Yang extended his regards to the cast and crew, congratulated them on the success of the performance, and encouraged them to redouble their efforts to make new contributions to cultural exchanges, mutual understanding, and friendship between the two peoples.

Yuan Mindao, vice-president of the CPAFFC; Fang Wei, deputy consul-general of the Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Osaka; local leaders of the Soka Gakkai; and Koji Yamaguchi, president of the Min-On Concert Association, attended the performance, which was watched by an audience of nearly 2,000 people.

The tour of *Crested Ibis* in Japan lasted for over two months, with 55 performances across 30 cities in 28 prefectures. ■

CPAFFC President Yang Wanming leads a delegation to visit Laos

Department of East Asian Affairs

At the invitation of the Laos-China Friendship Association (LCFA), Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), led a delegation to visit Laos from April 9 to 12.

Yang met with Sinlavong Khouthaythoune, member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) and president of the Central Committee of the Lao Front for National Construction (LFNC), and Anouphab Tounalom, secretary of the LPRP Central Committee, secretary of the LPRP Vientiane Municipal Committee and president of the Vientiane People's Council.

Yang talked with old friends of the Chinese people—Sommad Pholsena, member of the LPRP Central Committee and vice-chairman of the Lao National Assembly; Khemmani Pholsena, minister of the Lao Presidential Office; Sommano Pholsena; and other representatives of the Pholsena family.

He held working meetings with Phet Phomphiphak, Lao minister of Planning and Investment and president

of the LCFA; Sinava Souphanouvong, minister to the Lao Prime Minister's Office; Saysana Sitthiphone, Lao deputy minister of Planning and Investment; Bounthueng Douangsavanh, Lao deputy minister of Industry and Commerce; Kikeo Chanthaboury, vice-president of the Lao Academy of Economic and Social Sciences; Songpeo Maupaseut, former Lao deputy minister of Information, Culture and Tourism; and other leaders of the LCFA.

Together with Siriphone Souphanthong, vice-governor of Luang Prabang, Yang attended and addressed the China-Laos Seminar on Poverty Alleviation and Common Development, jointly organized by the CPAFFC, the Chinese Consulate-General in Luang Prabang, the LCFA, and the Luang Prabang Provincial Government. He made extensive contacts with friends from various sectors, introduced the spirit of China's Central Conference on Work Related to Neighboring Countries and the theory on fighting poverty as well as the country's experience in poverty alleviation, and had in-depth exchanges with all parties on China-Laos relations, people-to-people friendship, practical cooperation and youth exchanges, and reached positive consensuses.

During the meetings, Yang said that as socialist comrades and brothers, China and Laos enjoy a friendship that has become increasingly strong with the passage of time. In recent years, under the strategic guidance of the top leaders of the two parties and two countries, the all-round cooperation between the two sides has achieved fruitful results, and the building of a China-Laos community with a shared future has been deepened and consolidated. All these efforts have brought tangible benefits to the two peoples and set a good example for building a community with a shared future for mankind.

In October last year, Yang said, General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee and Chinese President Xi Jinping met with General Secretary of the LPRP Central Committee and President of Laos Thongloun Sisoulith, charting the course and providing fundamental guidance for deepening the building of a China-Laos community with a shared future.

"A few days ago, the Central Conference on Work Related to Neighboring Countries was successfully held in China. It once again

showed that China will continue to uphold the principle of amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness in neighborhood diplomacy, carry out friendly cooperation with neighboring countries, enhance understanding and mutual trust, and achieve common development and rejuvenation,” he added.

“This year marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of the LPRP and the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, and next year will usher in the 65th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between our two countries,” Yang noted. “At present, both sides are actively implementing the important consensus reached by the top leaders of our two countries and the new version of the action plan for building a China-Laos community with a shared future, and working towards more outcomes in cooperation, connectivity, economy, trade and investment, and cultural exchanges.”

Yang pledged that the CPAFFC is willing to work closely with the LCFA and other friendly organizations and all sectors in both countries and give full play to its unique role of people-to-people diplomacy to enrich the bilateral people-to-people friendship, build more bridges of non-governmental exchanges, boost practical cooperation, cultural exchanges and youth friendship, and further deepen and substantiate the building of a China-Laos community with a shared future.

Sinlavong Khoutphaythoune spoke highly of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), thanked the CPC, the Chinese government and its

people for their support and assistance to Laos, and appreciated CPAFFC’s positive role in deepening Laos-China friendship and advancing bilateral relations, saying that fruitful results have been achieved in economy, trade and investment, connectivity, cultural exchanges and subnational cooperation, benefiting both Laos and its people. He believed that the Laos-China relations are at their best in history. Laos will never waver in upholding socialism and will deepen exchanges with China across the board under the strategic guidance of the top leaders of the two parties and two countries, so as to make new progress in the building of a Laos-China community with a shared future.

Anouphab Tounalom said that Laos-China relations are currently operating at a high level, and subnational cooperation holds great potential. Vientiane will actively participate in mechanisms such as the RCEP Local Governments and Friendship Cities Cooperation (Huangshan) Forum and the Forum on Lancang-Mekong Local Government Cooperation hosted by the CPAFFC, and exchange activities among cities along the China-Laos Railway, so as to further deepen practical cooperation between local governments of both countries in connectivity, urban governance and cultural exchanges at both the bilateral and multilateral levels.

Phet Phomphiphak expressed his continued commitment to advancing the implementation of projects under bilateral and multilateral mechanisms between the two associations. Taking the 65th anniversary of the establishment of Laos-China diplomatic

relations next year as an opportunity, he pledged to explore new ways of organizing celebrations and to join hands to deepen the friendship between the two peoples.

Friends of the Pholsena family recalled the friendship with the older generation of Chinese leaders, especially Premier Zhou Enlai. Sommano Pholsena excitedly recounted his school days with President Xi Jinping. Sommad Pholsena and Khemmani Pholsena praised the CPAFFC’s important contribution in making friends for the country and carrying forward the friendship between Laos and China. They also thanked the association for inviting their family representatives to major events held in China many times. They said that they will stay true to their original aspirations and nurture the younger generations of the family in carrying forward the traditional friendship, living up to the profound affection and goodwill shown by the leaders of the CPC and the Chinese government, as well as the Chinese people, toward their family.

During the visit, the delegation also took the Lane Xang electric multiple unit (EMU) train of the China-Laos railway and carried out field research on China-Laos cooperation projects such as the China-Laos Railway Operation and Management Center and the Mahosot General Hospital.

Wang Chang, chargé d’affaires ad interim of the Chinese Embassy in Laos, and Zhang Hequn, acting consul general of the Chinese Consulate-General in Luang Prabang, attended relevant activities. ■

China-Laos Seminar on Poverty Alleviation and Common Development in Luang Prabang

Department of East Asian Affairs

On April 10, the China-Laos Seminar on Poverty Alleviation and Common Development was successfully held in Luang Prabang, Laos. It was co-hosted by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), the Chinese Consulate-General in Luang Prabang, the Laos-China Friendship Association (LCFA), and the Luang Prabang Provincial Government.

Yang Wanming, president of the CPAFFC, Zhang Hequn, acting consul-general of the Chinese Consulate-General in Luang Prabang, and Siriphone Souphanthong, vice-governor of Luang Prabang, attended and addressed the seminar.

Bamjan Savvang, former deputy minister of Information, Culture and Tourism of Laos and member of the LCFA, attended the event, together with nearly 100 people, including representatives from prefectures, cities, counties, towns and villages in Zhejiang, Hunan, Yunnan and other provinces of China, as well as heads of the five provincial governments of Luang Prabang, Oudomxay, Phongsali, Louang Namtha, and Houaphanh of Laos, and representatives of departments at all levels and

enterprises.

Yang said that since its founding in 1921, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has remained true to its original aspiration and mission of seeking happiness for the Chinese people and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, and has united and led the people to fight for a better life ever since.

Entering the new era, Yang said, General Secretary Xi Jinping has stood at the strategic height of completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects and realizing the Chinese dream of national rejuvenation, putting poverty alleviation in a prominent position. He has presented a series of important thoughts and proposals, made major policy decisions, and led the CPC and the Chinese government to establish a whole set of effective policies, working systems and institutional mechanisms, forming a Chinese theory on fighting poverty and pioneering a unique Chinese path of poverty reduction.

"In 2021, President Xi Jinping declared that China had secured a comprehensive victory in the fight against poverty, achieving the poverty alleviation goal of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable

Development, 10 years ahead of schedule. This miracle has made a significant contribution to the cause of global poverty reduction, and has also provided Chinese insights and solutions for the global governance of poverty reduction," he added.

Yang stated that China and Laos are socialist comrades and brothers. Poverty alleviation and reduction, a vital part of the exchange of experience in Party development and state governance, is also a priority area of practical cooperation between the two countries. He pledged that the CPAFFC is willing to work with people from all walks of life in Laos to implement the important consensus reached by the top leaders of the two parties and two countries and the guiding principles of the 2024-2028 action plan between the CPC and the Lao People's Revolutionary Party (LPRP) on building a China-Laos community with a shared future.

Yang said, "We will promote the sharing of poverty reduction experiences and exchanges and cooperation between China and Laos at the people-to-people and subnational levels, and create more success stories of China-Laos poverty alleviation

demonstration cooperation. We will make good use of the China-Laos Railway as a golden corridor to advance the process of regional integration. We will give full play to the role of China-Laos friendship cities and mechanisms such as the Forum on Lancang-Mekong Local Government Cooperation to strive for new progress in subnational practical cooperation. We will continue to strengthen personnel exchanges at all levels and in various fields, support people-to-people exchanges in border areas, and deepen good-neighborly friendship between the two countries.”

Zhang Hequn introduced the fruitful cooperation between China and Laos in poverty reduction, especially the Eight Major Aid Projects to Support Laos that were announced by General Secretary Xi Jinping during his visit to Laos in 2017. She said that China’s achievements show that no country or nation is destined to be poor. China has been able to end poverty, and so can Laos.

Zhang expressed China’s willingness to work with Laos to take development as the fundamental way to poverty eradication, strengthen policy dialogue and experience sharing on poverty reduction, establish a regular exchange mechanism, continuously deepen cooperation in areas such as agriculture, tourism, infrastructure construction and vocational skills training, and help Laos shift from direct

aid provision to capacity-building assistance.

Siriphone Souphanthong gave a brief introduction to Luang Prabang’s economic and social development, saying that the seminar will further promote the implementation of the latest version of the action plan for building a China-Laos community with a shared future signed by the top leaders of the two parties and two countries.

“Rural development and poverty alleviation are important strategic tasks for the LPRP and the Lao government. China’s valuable experience in poverty eradication provides important inspirations for Laos. Development-oriented poverty alleviation is not only one of the important contents of bilateral cooperation, but also a key point of sub-regional cooperation between the two countries,” Souphanthong said. “Laos highly appreciates the Chinese government’s emphasis on and support for poverty alleviation cooperation under the framework of the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation (LMC), and thanks China for its strong support and assistance to Laos’ poverty reduction and alleviation.”

As good neighbors, good friends, good comrades and good partners, Souphanthong said, Luang Prabang is willing to deepen cooperation and friendship with Chinese provinces and cities, learn from China’s experience in poverty alleviation, and make big

strides in poverty reduction.

Zheng Xinyou, deputy mayor of Huzhou city and executive vice-president of the Huzhou People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries; Shi Jintong, alternate member of the 20th CPC Central Committee, member of the 12th CPC Hunan Provincial Committee, deputy mayor of Shuanglong town, and secretary of the Party branch and chief of Shibadong village, Shuanglong town; Dong Jun, deputy secretary-general of the General Office of the People’s Government of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Yunnan province; Lu Zhou, deputy director of the Foreign Affairs Office of Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture; Yi Yang, deputy director of Luang Prabang’s Department of Agriculture and Forest; and Saiyavong Thavixay, deputy director of Luang Prabang’s Department of Public Works and Transport, respectively shared the experience and achievements of poverty alleviation of their places. Focusing on targeted poverty alleviation, they fully exchanged views and put forward constructive suggestions on strengthening mutual learning and sharing, deepening practical cooperation, achieving common development, and adding new dimensions to the China-Laos community with a shared future. ■

Celebration of the 75th anniversary of Sino-Indonesia diplomatic relations and the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference held in Beijing

Department of East Asian Affairs

On April 21, a celebration of the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Indonesia and the 70th anniversary of the Bandung Conference was held in Beijing. It was jointly hosted by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and the Embassy of Indonesia in China.

Member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Defense Minister Dong Jun, as well as Indonesian Foreign Minister Sugiono and Defense Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin, attended the event.

In his speech, Wang Yi noted that China and Indonesia are friendly neighbors across the sea and good friends with a shared future. Since

the establishment of diplomatic relations 75 years ago, the traditional friendship between the two countries has grown stronger over time, practical cooperation has yielded fruitful results, and bilateral relations have weathered storms and undergone trials, making remarkable achievements and leaving valuable lessons: adhering to the guidance of the heads of state, maintaining strategic autonomy, upholding mutual benefit and win-win outcomes, and insisting on fairness and justice.

Wang Yi said that 70 years ago, China and Indonesia worked hand in hand, making a historic contribution to the successful convening of the Bandung Conference. Today, the two countries have successfully held the First Ministerial Meeting of the China-

Indonesia Joint Foreign and Defense Ministerial Dialogue and established the China-Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Dialogue mechanism, adding new dimensions to bilateral relations in the new era.

Under the new circumstances, Wang said, China is ready to work with Indonesia to jointly carry forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and the Bandung Spirit; continue to serve as a pacesetter for mutual trust and assistance between major and neighboring countries, an engine for the modernization of developing countries, and a promoter of openness, inclusiveness and win-win cooperation; and sound the strongest note of unity and self-strengthening of the Global South.

Sugiono said that Indonesia

and China enjoy a strong partnership and continual expansion of practical cooperation. China has been a reliable development partner for Indonesia. In a world full of uncertainty, the two sides need to strengthen their unity more than ever before. “People with one mind and heart have the power to move a mountain.” Indonesia is willing to work with China to carry forward the Bandung Spirit and advance bilateral relations into a new era of common prosperity.

About 300 representatives from various sectors in both countries attended the event, including Lu Kang, vice-minister of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China; Sun

Weidong, vice-minister of Foreign Affairs; Yan Dong, vice-minister of Commerce; Li Bin, director of the Military Cooperation Office; Zhou Pingjian, vice-president of the China Institute of Foreign Affairs; Zhang Jun, secretary-general of the Boao Forum for Asia; Agus Subiyanto, commander-in-chief of the Indonesian National Defense Force, Djauhari Oratmangun, Indonesian ambassador to China; Abdul Kadir Jailani, Deputy Foreign Minister for Asian, Pacific and African Affairs; Andi Syamsuddin Arsyad, special adviser to the President for Infrastructure; as well as diplomats from the Indonesian Embassy in China and some foreign envoys to China.

Yuan Mindao, vice-president of the CPAFFC, presided over the event.

During the celebration, the foreign ministers of the two countries jointly unveiled the commemorative envelopes and stamps marking the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. Additionally, the foreign and defense ministers of both countries together visited the photo exhibitions titled “75th Anniversary of China-Indonesia Diplomatic History” and “Peace Envoy Zhou Enlai – Commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the Bandung Conference”.

Artists from China and Indonesia presented wonderful performances during the event, which took place in a warm and friendly atmosphere. ■



CPAFFC President Yang Wanming leads a delegation to visit the US

Department of American & Oceanian Affairs

From April 20 to 25, Yang Wanming, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), led a delegation to visit Cleveland of Ohio, Pittsburgh of Pennsylvania, and Des Moines of Iowa, in the United States. During the visit, he attended the 40th Anniversary Commemoration of President Xi Jinping's Historic 1985 Visit to Iowa, which was hosted by the Iowa Sister States Committee.

Yang Wanming and Zhao Xinhai, vice-governor of Hebei province, delivered speeches at the event. More than 150 guests from China and the US attended the event, including Wang Baodong, consul-general of China in Chicago; Li Xiang, counselor of the Chinese Embassy in the US; representatives of Shijiazhuang city and Zhengding county in Hebei province; Terry Edward Branstad, founder of the US-China Green Institute and former US ambassador to China; Kenneth M. Quinn, honorary president of the World Food Prize Foundation; Grant Kimberley, president of the Iowa Sister States Committee; and Sherill

Whisenand, president of the Sister States Committee of the Greater Des Moines Region.

Yang said in his speech that 40 years ago, President Xi Jinping sowed the seeds of friendship during his first visit to Iowa as the head of a Chinese delegation. In the past four decades, owing to President Xi's long-term personal cultivation and promotion, abundant achievements in China-US subnational and people-to-people exchanges have been made, as represented by the exchanges between Hebei and Iowa. President Xi has repeatedly expressed his belief that the hope of China-US relations lies with the people, the foundation is in the grassroots, the future depends on the youth, and the vitality comes from exchanges at subnational levels. Yang called on the participants to follow the path of friendship paved by President Xi, continue to write new stories of friendship between the two peoples, broaden the fields of practical cooperation, and write new chapters of friendship between the two peoples.

Zhao Xinhai said that the

friendship between Hebei and Iowa has developed under the attentive care of President Xi. In the past four decades, they have deepened friendly and pragmatic exchanges and cultivated increasingly closer friendship between the two peoples, setting an example of pragmatic Sino-US cooperation at the subnational level. He expressed the willingness to further strengthen friendly exchanges between Hebei and Iowa and promote mutually beneficial cooperation, so that they can jointly write new chapters of state-to-state and subnational people-to-people friendship in the new era.

Friends in Iowa, including Luca Berrone, Sarah Lande, Terry Edward Branstad, and Kenneth Quinn, recalled affectionately the touching moments of President Xi's two visits to Iowa in 1985 and 2012 respectively. Young people from Hebei and Iowa shared their unforgettable experiences during their exchange visits. They agreed that President Xi's high regard and valuable support for the cause of US-China people-to-people friendship is both touching and admirable, and they

were looking forward to taking the opportunity of this commemoration to further strengthen youth, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges, as well as collaboration between friendship cities, paying the way for new stories of friendship between the two countries to unfold.

Colorful activities were held at the event, including captivating performances given by young people from Hebei and Iowa, a photo exhibition of youth exchanges, and an exhibition of intangible cultural heritage. These activities contributed to fostering a warm and friendly atmosphere.

Prior to the event, Yang met with the old friends of President Xi in Iowa and other friends from various sectors. After the event, Yang attended the welcome banquet held by the Iowa Sister States Committee, together with nearly 200 representatives from diverse backgrounds in the US. During his stay in the US, Yang also met with Connie Boesen, mayor of Des Moines; Mike Matson, mayor of Davenport; Blaine A. Griffin, council president of the Cleveland City Council; Theresa Kail-Smith, member of the Pittsburgh City Council; Chuck Keiper, CEO of the Northeast Ohio Public Energy Council; Paul Hogle, president of the Cleveland Institute of Music; William M. Griswold, curator of the Cleveland Museum of Art; Clarissa von Spee,

curator of Chinese Art of the Cleveland Museum of Art; Anthony Yen, former president of the Cleveland China-US Chamber of Commerce, and He Su, its incumbent president; Rick Kimberley, a farmer in Ohio; representatives of the Chinese Room Committee Scholarship Foundation; and representatives of the Pittsburgh Chinese Cultural Center. Yang also attended the signing ceremony of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of friendship city relations between Shijiazhuang and Des Moines.

Yang said during the meetings that the CPAFFC always lays great emphasis on Sino-US subnational cooperation and bilateral cultural and people-to-people exchanges. In the past 70 years since its foundation, it has promoted the establishment of multi-level exchange mechanisms between provinces/states and cities of the two countries, and organized various and colorful activities, playing an active role in deepening mutual understanding and friendship between the two peoples, and advancing exchanges and cooperation at the subnational level.

Yang said, "At a time when China-US relations face difficulties, it is all the more important to tighten the bonds between our peoples and enhance heart-to-heart communication. We are willing to further intensify people-to-people friendship with all walks of

life in the US, strengthen subnational cooperation and youth exchanges, deepen mutual understanding, broaden consensus on cooperation, and promote the stable, sound, and sustainable development of China-US relations.

Representatives of US local governments and city councils expressed their willingness to support and continue to participate in the cooperative mechanism between Sino-US friendship cities, to deepen practical cooperation between the friendship cities of the two countries, and to promote the welfare of the two peoples.

Representatives of the industrial and business circles noted that trade wars and tariff battles have no future and offer no solutions, emphasizing that the US and China should be partners rather than competitors. They appreciated the opportunities brought by China to the rest of the world, and expressed their intention to continue to invest in China.

Meanwhile, representatives from foundations, universities, cultural and artistic organizations expressed their readiness to facilitate youth exchanges through participation in the "50,000 in five years" initiative, continuously promote mutual understanding and friendship between the younger generation of the two countries, and actively contribute to the improvement and development of Sino-US relations. ■

US-China Art Dialogue successfully held in Hong Kong

Department of American & Oceanian Affairs

The US-China Art Dialogue, co-organized by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC), the China-United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF), and the UCCA Center for Contemporary Art with support from the China Friendship Foundation for Peace and Development, was successfully held in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region on March 28.

The event brought together prominent figures from the international art world, including Alexandra Munroe, senior curator of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York; Noah Horowitz, CEO of Art Basel; leading art professionals such as Philip Tinari, director and chief executive of UCCA Center for Contemporary Art; renowned artist Xu Bing; Professor Huang Xiaofeng, dean of the School of Humanities of the Central Academy of Fine Arts; and Zhou Jiancheng, president of the CUSEF, joined approximately 100 scholars, experts, and artists from

China and the US engaged in a cross-cultural dialogue on art.

Shen Xin, vice-president of the CPAFFC, said that cultural exchanges between China and the US have a long and rich history, with artists building bridges of mutual understanding and appreciation between the peoples of the two countries. He noted that while Chinese and American cultures each have their unique strengths, this event aimed to leverage art—a universal language that transcends borders and speaks directly to the heart—to break down geographical and ideological barriers, inspire wisdom through intellectual exchanges, and foster friendship through shared experiences. He also expressed the hope that young artists and scholars from both countries will engage in more open dialogues, to exchange insights and explore the essence of artistic practices.

Wu Weishan, director of the National Art Museum of China and vice-chairman of the China Artists Association, delivered a video speech.

He pointed out that at a time when globalization faces new challenges, art, as a vessel of civilization, carries the mission of dialogue that transcends language and national boundaries. He noted that China-US relations, as one of the most consequential bilateral relationships in the world today, carry immense significance. The depth and breadth of cultural exchanges between the two nations not only influence the two countries themselves but also the trajectory of global civilization. This, he emphasized, is what makes such dialogues meaningful.

During the event, participants engaged in in-depth discussions on topics such as emerging academic trends in Chinese and American art, the role and significance of artistic creation in cultural exchange, and the catalytic function of art in contemporary China-US relations. They shared candidly the confusions and insights in their artistic creation, sparking new artistic inspirations through the exchange and collision of ideas. ■

2025 China-CEEC Mayors Forum held in Ningbo

Department of European & Asian Affairs

On May 23, the 2025 China-CEEC Mayors Forum, jointly hosted by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and the Ningbo Municipal People's Government, was successfully held in Ningbo, Zhejiang province. The theme of the forum was "Empowering Urban Development Through Global Partnership".

Yang Wanming, president of the CPAFFC; Tang Feifan, deputy secretary of the Ningbo Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and mayor of Ningbo; Jiang Yu, special envoy of the Foreign Ministry for China-CEEC Cooperation; Richard Rasi, chairman of the National Council of Slovakia; Meira Hot, vice-president of the National Assembly of Slovenia; Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă, former prime minister of Romania; and Janusz Piechocinski, former deputy prime minister of Poland, attended the event.

Jiang Jiang, vice-president of the CPAFFC, presided over the opening ceremony.

More than 200 participants, including officials and representatives

from local governments of over 40 cities across all the 14 international members of the Cooperation Between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (CEEC), as well as officials, business leaders, experts and scholars from over 30 cities across 16 Chinese provinces, engaged in in-depth discussions. They reached a robust consensus on strengthening cooperation between Chinese and CEEC cities in economic and trade cooperation, cultural heritage preservation, intercultural dialogue, urban governance, green transformation and other areas, aiming to further enhance China-CEEC relations.

In his speech at the opening ceremony, Yang Wanming said that China and CEEC have a profound traditional friendship. Many of them were the first to recognize and establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.

Since the mechanism of Cooperation Between China and CEEC was established in 2012, Yang noted, the relations between the two sides have achieved considerable development. President Xi Jinping pointed out that

China-CEEC cooperation adheres to the principles of extensive consultation and joint contribution, pragmatism and balance, openness and inclusiveness, and innovation and progress. It is a vivid practice of multilateralism and an important part of China-Europe relations.

"Exchanges and cooperation among cities are an important part of the cooperation between China and CEEC," said Yang. He emphasized that the world is currently experiencing accelerated changes unseen in a century. Economic globalization and anti-globalization are at a stalemate, multilateralism and unilateralism are in fierce competition, and the global governance system is undergoing profound adjustments. Against this backdrop, it is timely for local government leaders of both sides to send a strong message of jointly adhering to multilateralism and promoting international cooperation through the forum.

Yang expressed the hope that Chinese and foreign cities will continue to have a broad perspective and work together to strengthen national

relations through local cooperation; constantly build consensus and gather the vigorous force of mutual respect and trust through people-to-people friendship, so as to deepen cooperation and draw a brand-new blueprint for a sustainable future through coordinated development. He called on the two sides to join hands with young people to build a solid bridge of friendly cooperation with the power of youth.

Tang Feifan said that in recent years, Ningbo has been actively deepening friendly exchanges with the CEEC. The scale of economic and trade cooperation has continued to expand, transportation connections have become closer, and cultural and people-to-people exchanges have become increasingly frequent. Ningbo is willing to continue to work with cities of the CEEC to jointly create a

model of mutually beneficial and win-win cross-regional cooperation.

Foreign participants stated that the cooperation between China and the CEEC is built on a solid foundation and holds great potential for the future. Strengthening cooperation between cities on both sides will bring benefits to their people. Cities of the CEEC are willing to further expand exchanges with China in areas such as the economy and trade, investment, infrastructure construction and culture, and jointly promote economic growth and sustainable development.

After the opening ceremony, Chinese and foreign participants shared their urban development experiences and discussed cooperation prospects at the sub-forums titled “Enhancing Connectivity and Promoting Economic Cooperation Between Cities” and

“Preserving Cultural Heritage and Promoting People-to-People Exchanges”.

The forum released the Ningbo Initiative, calling on Chinese cities to further deepen cooperation with cities in the CEEC, and jointly create a bright future for urban development with a more open mindset and more practical measures. Additionally, the forum held a signing ceremony for local friendly cooperation projects between China and the CEEC.

The China-CEEC Mayors Forum was initiated by the CPAFFC and the Ningbo Municipal People’s Government in 2017. It has successfully convened six sessions and serves as an important exchange platform for localities of China and the CEEC to enhance mutual understanding, promote people-to-people friendship and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation. ■



The 2025 China-CEEC Mayors Forum was held in Ningbo, Zhejiang province.

Third New Zealand-China Mayoral Forum & Festival held in Chengdu

Department of American & Oceanian Affairs

On May 21, the 3rd New Zealand-China Mayoral Forum & Festival was held in Chengdu. The event was co-hosted by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and Global Cities New Zealand (GCNZ) and organized by the Chengdu Municipal People's Government, on the theme "Mapping out a New Decade of Sister-City Relationships". Yang Wanming, president of the CPAFFC; Wang Fengchao, vice-secretary of the Chengdu Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China and mayor of Chengdu; Qian Bo, special envoy for Pacific Island Countries Affairs of the Chinese government; Grant Smith, president of the GCNZ and mayor of Palmerston North, New Zealand; and Michael Zhang, consul-general of New Zealand in Guangzhou, attended and addressed the opening ceremony. Wang Xiaolong, Chinese ambassador to New Zealand delivered a video speech.

Representatives of 10 local governments of New Zealand including North Palmerston, Hamilton, Marlborough, Rotorua, Tauranga,

Auckland, Hastings, Wellington, Christchurch, and Napier, attended the forum, together with representatives of local governments and relevant agencies of 12 Chinese cities: Beijing and those of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region and the provinces of Jiangsu, Jiangxi, Shandong, Guangdong, Sichuan, and Guizhou.

Yang said that the China-New Zealand Mayoral Exchange and Cooperation Mechanism was established through the personal promotion and close attention of President Xi Jinping, serving as an important platform for bilateral subnational exchanges and cooperation, especially those between friendship cities of the two countries.

He mentioned that this year coincides with the 10th anniversary of the inception of the New Zealand-China Mayoral Forum. The past decade has witnessed the firm commitment of the two countries to their original aspiration for exchanges and cooperation. At the new starting point of the second decade of the forum, Yang expressed high expectations

for future cooperation between the two countries. He hoped that relevant parties will do their best to advance and deepen exchanges and cooperation in various fields at the subnational level, especially between friendship cities, at a faster pace and setting new records.

On behalf of the CPAFFC, Yang expressed willingness to make concerted efforts with friends from all walks of life in New Zealand to promote bilateral people-to-people friendship and advance pragmatic collaboration, making contributions to the sound and stable development of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries.

Wang Xiaolong said that the New Zealand-China Mayoral Forum plays an important and unique role in consolidating the public foundation of bilateral relations, serving as an indispensable part of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries. He expressed his expectations that the friendship cities of China and New Zealand will promote cooperation and leverage their respective strengths, working together

to write new chapters of Sino-New Zealand friendly cooperation.

Wang Fengchao said that in recent years, through the China-New Zealand Mayoral Exchange and Cooperation Mechanism, Chengdu has constantly broadened close exchanges with cities in New Zealand, achieving abundant fruits of cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, investment, education, science and technology, culture, and sports. He expressed the hope that the forum will serve to deepen pragmatic cooperation, and increase economic and trade exchanges, so that the two sides can create a new dynamic featuring mutually beneficial urban development.

Qian Bo said that the vitality of Sino-New Zealand relations lies in subnational exchanges and the friendly cooperation between the two countries also benefits their local development. He spoke highly of the frequent exchanges and the extensive, in-depth cooperation between friendship states/provinces and friendship cities, and applauded their important role in enhancing mutual understanding and friendship, and advancing pragmatic cooperation.

Grant Smith and Michael Zhang said that New Zealand treasures its friendship with China. They highly appreciated the wonderful arrangement and preparation by the Chinese side for this forum. They said that the practices of exchanges and abundant fruits in the past decade have fully proved

that the New Zealand-China Mayoral Forum is an important platform for the two countries to enhance mutual understanding and realize common development. They also expressed their willingness to remain committed to expanding friendly exchanges between the two countries, advance practical collaboration, and develop people-to-people friendship under this mechanism.

After the opening ceremony, representatives of the two sides made in-depth exchanges on the three topics of Sister Cities Open Doors for Cooperation, Sister Cities Enhance Mutual Understanding, and Sister Cities Are About the People. They shared vivid examples of exchanges between the friendship cities of the two countries, highlighted the unique strengths of their own cities, and explored opportunities for broader cooperation in the future. The forum announced The Chengdu Declaration, which underscored the importance of continuous efforts to increase friendly exchanges between the two peoples through developing friendship-city relations. It also emphasized promoting cooperation in trade and investment to inject greater vitality and new driving force into bilateral relations. Attendees from the two countries agreed to host the Fourth New Zealand-China Mayoral Forum in New Zealand in 2027.

Other fruits of the forum include:

the CPAFFC and the GCNZ signed a memorandum of understanding on friendly cooperation; Chengdu and Hamilton exchanged gifts to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the establishment of friendship-city relations; and primary schools from Qingdao and Dunedin signed letters of intent on friendly exchanges.

Before the forum, the New Zealand guests were invited to the Cultural Park to experience Sichuan Opera mask painting, a unique charm of Chinese culture. They also visited the First Reclaimed Water Plant in Tianfu New District to learn about the advanced urban governance and green development, as well as Chengdu Hamilton Luxelakes Primary School, one of the fruits of pragmatic cooperation between the two friendship cities. They expressed admiration for Chengdu's innovative approaches to urban governance and inspired by the achievements of bilateral exchanges and cooperation in education. During the forum, the promotion of specialties from the two countries, exhibitions of innovative AI-driven scientific and technological products, and showcases of overseas study and tourism opportunities aroused strong interest among the attendees of both countries. The dance group of Te Matatini from New Zealand performed excellent Maori ethnic singing and dancing for the forum participants and residents of Chengdu. ■

Friendship Conference Between Chinese and Japanese Youth held in Beijing

Department of East Asian Affairs

On May 29, the Friendship Conference Between Chinese and Japanese Youth was held at Renmin University of China. On the theme of “Sincere Friendship for Shared Peace”, the event was hosted by the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and the China Japan Friendship Association.

Yang Wanming, president of the CPAFFC; Zheng Xinye, vice-president of Renmin University of China; Kenji Kanasugi, Japanese ambassador to China; Masafumi Sasaki, executive director of the Japan-China Friendship Association; Chihiro Kato, executive director of the Japan-China Cultural Exchange Association; and Yutaka Takakubo, professor of the Business School of Nihon University, attended and addressed the event. Nearly 600 people including young people



CPAFFC President Yang Wanming attends and addresses the event.

and representatives of media outlets from China and Japan attended the conference.

Yang Wanming said that China and Japan are important neighbors facing each other across a narrow

strip of water. He applauded the stable progress in bilateral exchanges and cooperation at different levels and in various fields since President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba met with each other last November in Lima, Peru, during the APEC Summit and commended the good momentum of the improvement of China-Japan relations.

Yang mentioned that this year marks the 80th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45) and the victory of the World Anti-Fascist War. He noted that the reason why we need to bear history in mind is not for continuation of hatred but for keeping the bell of peace ringing forever. Yang said that the foundation of Sino-Japan friendship lies in the people and the future of people-to-people friendship depends on the young generation. He appealed to the youth of the two countries to spread the idea of peace, explore innovative cooperation, and build bridges between the hearts of the two peoples, to jointly write new chapters of China-Japan friendship.

Kenji Kanasugi said that the development of Japan-China relations requires not only efforts from the two governments but also extensive participation and support from the two

peoples. Both sides should strengthen people-to-people exchanges, to live up to the important consensus reached by the two state leaders. He expressed the hope that the youth of the two countries will take the opportunity of this event to establish and continue bilateral friendship, and that the two countries will be future-oriented to build new relations to benefit the two peoples.

Zheng Xinye extended a warm welcome to the Chinese and Japanese youth gathering at Renmin University of China. He expressed willingness to continue to advance exchanges between the two countries in broader fields, in greater depth and with higher quality. He said that the university is committed to promoting China-Japan friendly cooperation through education, improving global welfare, and contributing to the building of a more just, beautiful and prosperous world.

The Japanese delegation said that the youth are a vital new force to propel Japan-China relations in the future, and it is of great importance to carry out youth exchanges. They expressed the hope that Japanese young people will treasure the opportunity of this visit to gain a comprehensive and correct understanding of China's history, society and culture, develop precious friendship with their peers in

China, and consistently tighten the tie of Japan-China friendship.

During the event, nearly 300 young people from different places of Japan made exchanges and gave performances with their peers from Renmin University of China, Beijing Normal University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing Language and Culture University, Beijing Sport University, Beijing International Studies University, and Beijing Dance Academy, in a friendly and warm atmosphere. Young people of the two countries agreed that the event has facilitated mutual understanding and fostered friendships between them. They expressed willingness to serve as envoys of peace and friendship and to contribute the power of youth to the cause of Japan-China friendship.

The visit of the Japanese youth delegation to China is one of the projects to implement the Memorandum on Strengthening Youth Exchanges Between China and Japan. During their stay, the delegates visited Beijing, Shanghai, Shanxi, Jiangxi, Guangdong and Yunnan, where they engaged in communication with their hosts. On the night of May 29, Yuan Mindao, vice-president of the CPAFFC, hosted a banquet for the delegation on behalf the CPAFFC. ■

CPAFFC honors Anar Alakbarov with the “People’s Friendship Envoy” Award

Department of European & Asian Affairs

On May 29, the ceremony for presenting the “People’s Friendship Envoy” Award was held by the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC). CPAFFC President Yang Wanming presented the badge and certificate of the honor to Anar Alakbarov, assistant president of Azerbaijan and executive director of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation. He also met with the delegation led by Alakbarov before the ceremony, which was presided over by CPAFFC Vice-President Jiang Jiang and attended by Bunyad Huseynov, the ambassador of Azerbaijan to China.

Yang extended a warm welcome to Alakbarov. He praised Alakbarov and the foundation’s long-term efforts to advance China-Azerbaijan relations, as well as the longstanding traditional friendship between the two countries. Yang said that in April this year, President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to Azerbaijan at the invitation of Heydar Aliyev, president of Azerbaijan. During the visit, the two heads of state announced the establishment of a comprehensive strategic partnership between China and Azerbaijan, drawing a new blueprint and a new chapter for future bilateral cooperation. On behalf

of the CPAFFC, Yang pledged further efforts to consistently advance people-to-people friendship between China and Azerbaijan under the strategic guidance of the important consensus of their heads of state to bring more benefits to the two peoples.

Yang appreciated Alakbarov’s great emphasis on collaboration with China as the executive director of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, and his strong support and promotion of China-Azerbaijan friendship. He commended Alakbarov’s important contributions to enhancing mutual understanding, trust, and people-to-people friendship between the two countries.

Yang stressed that the CPAFFC awarded Alakbarov the honor of “People’s Friendship Envoy” as not only a commendation for his own deeds but also a full recognition of the efforts by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation to promote Sino-Azerbaijan friendship.

Yang said, “We hope that more envoys of friendship will join the cause of China-Azerbaijan friendship, and inject more positive energy into the development of bilateral relations. I believe the CPAFFC and the Heydar Aliyev Foundation can write more beautiful new chapters of people-to-people friendship between our two

countries through concerted efforts.”

Alakbarov said that Azerbaijan places great emphasis on its relations with China and is delighted at the tremendous achievements of bilateral cooperation in recent years. The Heydar Aliyev Foundation regards the CPAFFC as its important partner and the significance of the cooperation between the two organizations was demonstrated in the joint statement recently signed by the two state leaders. As the executive director of the foundation, he expressed willingness to work together with the CPAFFC to strengthen industrial, subnational, youth and artistic exchanges, to help enhance bilateral relations.

He also expressed his gratitude to the CPAFFC for awarding him the honor of “People’s Friendship Envoy”, viewing it as not only recognition for himself but also a testament to the Heydar Aliyev Foundation’s successful cooperation with China. He promised continuous efforts to make more contributions to promoting Azerbaijan-China friendship.

The “People’s Friendship Envoy” Award was established in 1990 by the CPAFFC, aiming to honor international friends who have made outstanding contributions to Sino-foreign friendship. ■

2025 China-Spain Mayors' Dialogue held in Chongqing

Department of European & Asian Affairs

On April 25, the 2025 China-Spain Mayors' Dialogue was held in Chongqing, jointly hosted by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and the Cátedra China Foundation of Spain, and organized by the Chongqing People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. The theme of the dialogue was "Sharing Governance Wisdom to Jointly Shape Resilient Cities".

Hu Henghua, deputy secretary of the Chongqing Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) and mayor of Chongqing; Jiang Jiang, vice-president of the CPAFFC; and Gerardo Pisarello, former vice-mayor of Barcelona, attended and addressed the opening ceremony. Eleven leaders from cities and prefectures (districts/counties) in China's Jiangsu, Guangdong, Sichuan, Guizhou and Gansu provinces and Chongqing Municipality, as well as 12 mayors and three councilors from six autonomous regions of Spain—Andalucía, Asturias, Castilla-La Mancha, Cataluña, Navarra and País Vasco—attended the dialogue.

Jiang Jiang said in his speech that cities play an important role in foreign exchanges and cooperation between cities is an important part of national relations. For a long time, cooperation between local governments of China and Spain has flourished, bringing

tangible benefits to the people of both sides.

He pledged that the CPAFFC attaches great importance to local exchanges and practical cooperation with the Spanish side. "We are willing to follow the important consensus reached by leaders of our two countries on China-Spain relations and build a solid, stable, interconnected bridge of friendship and cooperation for the cities of both countries. We are willing to work with Spanish friends to make openness a new driving force, green a new background color, and innovation a new engine for cooperation between cities in the two countries, so as to jointly create a bright future for cities," he said.

Gerardo Pisarello thanked the Chinese side for organizing the dialogue. He said, "While the world today is full of conflicts and uncertainties, China insists on resolving the problems facing global development through dialogue and resolutely defends multilateralism. Against this backdrop, China and Spain should uphold the spirit of mutual respect, enhance dialogue and exchanges, and deepen mutual understanding to promote mutually beneficial cooperation."

He said that the dialogue is an important meeting held in line with the important consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries, and hoped

that it will become a new starting point for local exchanges and promote fruitful results in friendly cooperation between Spain and China.

After the opening ceremony, representatives from Chinese and Spanish cities carried out in-depth discussions on three topics: Jointly Building a New Green Ecosystem for Cities and Towns, Unlocking New Codes for Grassroots Governance, and Creating a New Pattern of Win-Win Cooperation Among Friendship Cities. The representatives introduced their respective development situations and governance experiences, and jointly explored cooperation opportunities. All parties positively evaluated the rich achievements made in the cooperation between cities of both countries, and unanimously agreed that under the current circumstances, they should focus on areas such as energy transition, digital economy, and smart cities to enhance exchanges, learn from each other, and jointly achieve sustainable development, so as to facilitate the steady and long-term development of the China-Spain comprehensive strategic partnership.

Lu Hongwei, deputy director-general of CPAFFC's Department of European and Asian Affairs, and Julián Nieva, mayor of Manzanares, made concluding remarks. ■

First China-India-UAE Tripartite Dialogue held in Beijing

Department of Asian & African Affairs

On May 26, the First China-India-UAE Tripartite Dialogue, jointly hosted by the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries (CPAFFC) and Peking University, was successfully held in Beijing. The theme of the dialogue was "An Open and Cooperative Asia".

Yuan Mindao, vice-president of the CPAFFC; Fang Fang, vice-president of Peking University; Nickolay Mladenov, director-general of the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy in the United Arab Emirates (UAE); and Mohammed Saqib, CEO of the India-China Economic & Cultural Council and convenor of the Center for Geoeconomics of the Global South, delivered speeches at the opening ceremony.

Heads and representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China, Peking University, the Chinese

Academy of Social Sciences, the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy of the UAE, the Dubai Center for Public Policy Research, the Observer Research Foundation of India, the Indian Software Product Industry Round Table, as well as journalists from the United News of India and The Hindu, attended the dialogue.

Yuan Mindao noted that China, India, and the United Arab Emirates are all Asian countries and play their own distinct roles and exert different influences on both regional and international stages. In response to the intertwined changes and chaos in the international landscape, in 2013, President Xi Jinping put forward the concepts of building a community with a shared future for mankind, jointly building the Belt and Road Initiative,

and promoting neighborly diplomacy based on amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness. These have provided Chinese solutions to global challenges.

"The holding of the dialogue is not only a vivid practice of implementing President Xi's important initiatives, but also an important exploration for Asian countries to join hands to address global challenges and create a prosperous future together," said Yuan.

Fang Fang said, "The prosperity of Asia is inseparable from openness and cooperation. The current complex and volatile international situation requires us to enhance confidence, dispel doubts and explore win-win paths even more vigorously. This tripartite dialogue has established a high-level exchange platform connecting China, South Asia and West Asia. We hope

that guests attending the dialogue can reach a consensus through policy communication, deepen understanding through mutual learning among civilizations, and achieve win-win results through practical cooperation.”

“The holding of the dialogue reflects the common expectations of our three countries for multilateral cooperation,” Nickolay Mladenov said. “We should build consensus on issues such as maritime security, green

technology and climate change, and jointly address global challenges. It is not only of great significance to the people of Asia, but will also contribute to world peace and development.”

Mohammed Saqib said that the world is currently undergoing profound changes unseen in a century, and China, India and the UAE share a common aspiration to build a fairer and more prosperous world. Strengthened cooperation among the three nations

will bring stable and positive momentum to the current uncertain world.

After the opening ceremony, representatives attending the dialogue had in-depth discussions and candid exchanges on topics such as the building of cooperation mechanisms, regional connectivity and the vision of cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and reached a positive consensus. ■



CPAFFC Vice-President Yuan Mindao (4th right in the front row) has a group photo with Chinese and foreign guests attending the dialogue.

2025 Friendly Spring in Leshan City held in Sichuan

Sichuan Friendship Association

Spring brings warmth and vitality. From March 21 to 22, the Sichuan Friendship Association and the Leshan Municipal People's Government successfully co-hosted the event of 2025 Friendly Spring in Leshan. Nearly 30 foreign guests from 12 countries attended the event, including consul-generals and the consuls of Singapore, Spain, Germany, Brazil, the Republic of Korea, and Australia; representatives of Japanese business agencies and chambers of commerce in China; and international students from Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan studying at Leshan Normal University. They enjoyed the beautiful spring scenery, shared stories of friendship, and pledged to promote common development.

Liu Quansheng, president of the Sichuan Friendship Association; Wang Yan, member of the Standing Committee of the Leshan Municipal Committee of the Communist Party of China and vice-mayor of Leshan; and Joel Tan, consul-general of Singapore



Foreign guests experience tea picking and tea making.

in Chengdu, attended and addressed the event. Representatives of the Division of International Economic and Trade Relations of the Sichuan Provincial Department of Commerce introduced Sichuan's global business exchanges. They briefed the attendees on the

economic and social achievements of Sichuan province, and its practices to facilitate reform and development through opening up. They expressed their willingness to jointly carry out comprehensive, multi-level, and multi-dimensional exchanges and

cooperation in various fields, and build more bridges for non-governmental exchanges, practical cooperation, cultural and people-to-people exchanges, and youth friendship, so as to promote the sound development of friendly relations between China and other countries, contribute to the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, and create a beautiful future featuring world peace and development.

Leshan boasts the World Cultural and Natural Heritage Site of Emei Mountain-Leshan Giant Buddha, and the World Heritage Irrigation Structure of Dongfeng Weir. With a continuation of cultural traditions for thousands of years, Leshan is a culinary landmark city in China. It has established relations with more than 110 countries and regions, deepened cooperation with 33 international friendship cities or scenic spots, attracted 66 foreign-funded enterprises to settle here, and received more than 100,000 overseas tourists last year. During the event, international guests and students visited three counties/districts and had in-depth exchanges with local government officials and residents.

During their stay in the county of Jiajiang, the international guests visited Qianfo (Thousand-Buddha) Cliff and Dongfeng Weir, personally experiencing the world's heritage irrigation structure that still nourishes the fields in silence. They observed the national-level intangible cultural heritage of bamboo papermaking,

witnessing how bamboo, ramie, and sedge are transformed into pieces of paper for writing and painting through 72 processes.

In Shizhong District, the Leshan Giant Buddha, located at the confluence of the Dadu, Qingyi, and Minjiang rivers, amazed the international visitors. They listened attentively to the introduction, full of curiosity about the stories behind the construction of the giant Buddha. They stopped to take photos at Jiuqu Trestle Road, to experience firsthand the philosophy of harmony between humans and nature and the integration of natural beauty and Buddhist appeal in Eastern aesthetics.

In Qianwei county, the visitors boarded a steam train to travel through a sea of rape flowers, where the old-fashioned whistle and the golden flowers constituted a unique scene, unfolding a scroll of rural revitalization through the transformation of traditional mining areas into scenic spots of eco-tourism. In the tea plantation of Wangjia village, Shoubao town, the guests experienced tea picking and tea making and watched tea art performances to feel the infinite charm of the fragrant industry through smell and taste.

While enjoying the lovely spring scenery, the guests learned in detail about Leshan's resources, cultural charm, and vigorous development, perceived the new outlook of Sichuan's opening up and development, and explored new opportunities for

exchange and cooperation.

Consul-General Joel Tan said that the Leshan Giant Buddha, as the most iconic cultural landmark of Sichuan, holds a prestigious and time-honored reputation. The on-site visit deepened his understanding of this place and laid a solid foundation for future cultural and tourist cooperation between Singapore and Sichuan.

Wonjae Uhm, consul-general of the ROK in Chengdu, said that the frequent exchanges between Sichuan and the ROK will facilitate the opening of more direct flights and more new flight routes, further expanding the scope of cultural and people-to-people exchanges as well as economic and trade cooperation.

Cezar Amaral, consul-general of Brazil in Chengdu, said that he would be committed to promoting people-to-people friendship between the two countries and facilitating bilateral personnel exchanges, so as to bring the two peoples closer and strengthen friendship between them.

Nurshed Davlatov, a student from Tajikistan, said excitedly that the event offered him an opportunity to visit the rural areas of Sichuan and witness the extraordinary achievements of rural revitalization in China. He expressed his determination to acquire more professional knowledge, visit more places, learn more from good experience, and use what he learned to build his hometown and country, thus promoting long-standing friendship between Tajikistan and China. ■

Joseph Paul Baglio, first US military pilot to visit Yan'an

Richard Frey Jr.

With the approach of the anniversary of the Chinese people's victory in the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the world's victory in the War Against Fascism, people remember even more the heroes and martyrs who fought in the wars, and the internationalist fighters who helped China win national independence and liberation, and recall the international forces that supported China in defeating Japanese militarism, among which was the American Volunteer Group (AVG).

In recent years, every time this anniversary comes around, I often recall the stories carried by an old photo, left behind by my late father, of him and Joseph Paul Baglio, a US military pilot, on the anti-Japanese front in the Shanxi-Chaha'er-Hebei region.

During the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the Chinese army lacked air control capabilities. The Japanese army wantonly bombed Chinese cities, railways, ports, and strategic military

locations, causing severe damages. To assist China, the United States established the AVG in 1941, known as the Flying Tigers, which fought side by side with the Chinese Air Force against the Japanese invaders.

After the Pearl Harbor incident, the US declared war on Japan. The Flying Tigers were officially assigned to the 10th Air Force of the US Army in July 1942 and were expanded into the 14th Air Force in 1943. Its headquarters was located in Kunming, Yunnan province, and General Claire Lee Chennault, who formed the Flying Tigers, served as the commander.

In late May 1944, General Chennault dispatched eight pilots to fly the newly-arrived P-51B fighter planes to a secret airstrip in Liangshan, along with a maintenance team. They were the 26th Fighter Group of the 14th Air Force. Unfortunately, this part of history has now almost been forgotten.

This special team was supposed to take off from Liangshan and fly to a barren area about 800 miles north of Xi'an to block the Japanese

army's transportation on the Jing-Han (Beijing-Hankou) Railway line north of the Yellow River. This was no less than a suicidal mission: The pilots had to fly alone at low altitude over this vast area to strafe and bomb Japanese locomotives. Besides the lack of support by friendly forces, the liquid-cooled engine of the P-51B was highly vulnerable to ground fire when flying at low altitude. Once they encountered the shelling of a Japanese tank company near Beiping (present-day Beijing), they would probably never return. On top of that, if they encountered the common bad weather in the north, the survival rate of pilots lacking navigation equipment was almost zero.

This special task lasted until June 25. During the month-long battle, the eight P-51B pilots destroyed more than 60 Japanese locomotives and hundreds of other targets. The attacks by the 14th Air Force, especially the 26th Fighter Group, on the Japanese forces along the railway line in northern China led to a loss of at least 40 percent of Japan's railway capacity, and the number of

locomotives illegally transporting Chinese resources dropped sharply to the lowest level.

After the completion of this mission, only four damaged fighter jets remained in the 26th Fighter Group. In recognition of the pilots' bravery, they were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross of the United States after the war.

Lieutenant Baglio, a pilot of the 14th Air Force, was one of the eight heroes carrying out this special mission.

Joseph Paul Baglio was born in Boston, Massachusetts, in the US, on February 9, 1921. He joined the US Air Force in 1940. After graduating from the aviation school in 1942, he was assigned to the 10th Air Force.

In May 1943, he was dispatched to an air base in India. In October of the same year, Baglio arrived at the 14th Air Force in Kunming from India. Within less than a year, he carried out over 60 sorties in various war zones in southern, central, and northern China.

On June 9, 1944, the 26th Fighter Group continued its low-altitude attack missions, flying over Taiyuan and bombing the Japanese-controlled Zhengtai (Shijiazhuang-Taiyuan) Railway line. Baglio participated in this mission. He piloted a P-51B Mustang fighter jet and flew over the railway line. When he flew to the airspace west of Pingding county, Shanxi province, he was unfortunately hit by the ground artillery fire of the Japanese army.

Seventy years later, at an event of the Caterpillar Club in the US, Baglio recounted this extremely dangerous scene at the time: "My fighter jet was shot. The shell entered from beside the propeller, penetrated the cabin control panel and reached the tail of the aircraft. Incredibly, it missed the driver's seat, and almost all the instruments on the panel were still working. I only felt pain all over my body and wondered if the surging adrenaline had not noticed that I had been shot. Soon, I found that I was indeed unharmed. I simply couldn't believe it was true."

The plane began to emit thick smoke. Baglio tried hard to control the fighter jet and continued to fly for about 50 miles. When he flew to the north of Yuci, Shanxi province, the plane began to descend continuously, only 600 feet above the ground, and the Japanese military airport north of the railway line was clearly visible. He knew for sure that this place must be in the area controlled by the Japanese army, but the fighter jet lost altitude and could no longer move forward.

"The plane began to shake and spin. It was time to leave it. But the controller for opening the cockpit canopy had malfunctioned. I frantically punched the canopy with my fists and eventually managed to knock it open. I immediately unfastened my protective belt and tried to stand up, but it was by no means easy to stand against the

wind during a flight at 110 miles per hour." Finally, Baglio broke free from the pilot's seat. As the plane flipped, he seized the opportunity when the cabin was upside down and quickly broke away from the smoke-filled fighter jet.

"The ground was right below. I reached out to grab the parachute ring on the safety belt, but it was nowhere near the position mentioned during training." A few seconds later, Baglio, having calmed down, finally grasped the life-saving D-shaped umbrella ring and pulled it with great force. "This is the most beautiful thing you have ever seen in the world. What is it? It's that 26-foot by 28-foot canopy parachute above your head." Baglio held up the D-shaped parachute ring and showed it to his colleagues at the flying club. He had kept this "amulet" by his side all along.

Seventy years ago, Baglio also held this umbrella-opening ring and told the people in the Shanxi-Chaha'er-Hebei region about his breathtaking escape experience.

At 2:30 p.m., Baglio parachuted and landed in a farmland about one mile from the road. Surrounded by railway lines on three sides and opening southward on one side, it is about 20 miles southeast of Taiyuan city.

Just as he was about to land, he noticed that more than ten meters away, three farmers were staring at him in confusion, while in the distance, a group of Japanese soldiers were surging

towards him like ants. He quickly untied the strap of his parachute, taking only his pistol and life knife, threw down other items, and rushed towards the northern hill, which was the only hiding place he had observed from the air.

"I reckon it wasn't until around 5:30 that I could catch my breath for the first time." At 6 p.m., he fled to the edge of the mountain. "Climbing up to the top of the mountain, I saw the lights of Taiyuan city in the distance in the night." Baglio knew that the Yellow River he was going to was on the west side, but he had to cross the railway line north of Taiyuan before he could go west to cross the Yellow River. The top priority now was to escape from the Japanese army's pursuit.

At dawn, he came to a village entrance and asked an old farmer by the roadside for some water, his first drink since evacuating his plane. In the following days, with the help of local farmers and guerrillas, he managed to evade the Japanese troops who had been searching for him day and night.

After the outbreak of the Pacific War, the Communist Party of China (CPC) promptly issued the Declaration on Establishing an International Anti-fascist United Front, formulating a policy of uniting all anti-fascist forces and combining the National Liberation Movement of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression with the World Anti-Fascist United Front.

This also included joining forces with the then US government and the Chinese Nationalist Party it supported. Therefore, when the AVG was fighting against the Japanese army, the military and civilians in the anti-Japanese base areas led by the CPC immediately launched rescue operations for the US military pilots who had crashed.

On June 18, nine days after Baglio's parachute jump, Chen Hsiao Ching, company commander of the Eighth Route Army of the Shanxi-Chaha'er-Hebei region, led over 50 plainclothes soldiers to come and support him. Company Commander Chen said that Baglio could obtain permission to go to Yan'an from the headquarters of the Shanxi-Chaha'er-Hebei Second Military Sub-region.

Due to the sudden increase in Japanese activities nearby recently, Baglio had to immediately change into plain clothes and move with the Eighth Route Army. It was at this moment that he realized they were only 12 miles away from where he had parachuted. It turned out that these days the guerrillas had been taking him around in circles to dodge the Japanese troops in the same area.

The troops moved and stopped during the march. When Baglio parachuted, he sprained his ankle. He also saw the soldiers carrying the seriously injured Company Commander Chen on a stretcher. Only then did he learn that the day before the Eighth

Route Army came to support him, they had encountered the Japanese army. The company commander must have sustained the injury in the battle.

At 5 p.m. on June 24, six days after their departure, they finally reached the territory of the Shanxi-Chaha'er-Hebei Second Military Sub-region. The leaders there specially sent troops to welcome them, and then they continued to advance eastward along the Hutuo River together, arriving at the headquarters of the Second Military Sub-region on June 27. Here, Baglio saw for the first time the well-organized regular troops of the Eighth Route Army.

He wrote in his diary: "The next day, the arrival of Austrian doctor Richard Frey greatly encouraged me. He spoke fluent English and came all the way from the front line to treat me and help me." At the headquarters, Baglio took a bath. The delicious food and comfortable bed allowed him to have a good rest. Just as he said, "I was treated like a king!" But what he was not accustomed to was that everything he received, including that given by the farmers and guerrillas along the way, did not require him to pay a single copper coin. This was completely different from what he saw in the nationalist areas.

On July 1, after a brief rest, Baglio, accompanied by Dr. Frey, went to the headquarters of the Shanxi-Chaha'er-Hebei Military Region in

Fuping county.

Every village they passed along the way had a sign that read “Welcome American Pilot” posted, and the roadsides were crowded with cheering crowds. The villagers, who had never seen an American pilot before, crowded around him and asked him to talk about his thrilling experiences. The journalists who came all the way from places like Beiping (present-day Beijing) for interviews made him quickly become a local news figure. However, he was very worried that this would endanger the safety of those rescuers and hoped that Dr. Frey could persuade the cheering people and reduce some gatherings.

Baglio stayed at the headquarters for a total of 21 days. During this period, he visited the arsenal, newspaper offices, printing houses, and hospitals in the base areas, watched the military training of the Eighth Route Army, participated in many celebration activities, and gave several speeches. He witnessed with his own eyes the villages that were destroyed by the Japanese army’s large-scale sweep and saw soldiers and civilians bravely resisting the invasion of Japanese fascists under difficult conditions and defending the territory of their motherland. From the perspective of an ordinary person, he witnessed one vivid scene after another, felt the true feelings people had for him, and was deeply impressed by the fearless spirit

of the Eighth Route Army.

Baglio expressed his sincere affection for the Eighth Route Army to the Shanxi-Chaha’er-Hebei Daily, “At this point, I’d like to express my admiration and gratitude to all the officers and soldiers of the Eighth Route Army. With an indomitable spirit, you have achieved such remarkable victories under such difficult conditions. The many successes you have made are the inevitable result of your heroic spirit. I wish you even greater success and hope that all the battles against fascism will achieve ultimate victory promptly.”

Baglio lost all his documents when parachuting. The military region reported his situation to Yan’an via radio. After confirming his identity by contacting the US embassy through its Chongqing office, Yan’an invited him to visit. Baglio also took the opportunity to send a telegram to his mother in the US, telling her that he had fallen behind while on a mission.

Before leaving, the military region gave Baglio a captured Japanese warhorse, but he refused to accept it no matter what. It became Dr. Frey’s task to persuade him to accept the warhorse. Dr. Frey told him that not accepting the gift was a sign of disrespect to the other party, which was a custom in China. To this day, he still remembers the situation when he accepted the warhorse.

On July 24, the Shanxi-Chaha’er-

Hebei Military Region held a grand gathering to bid farewell to Baglio. Cheng Zihua, deputy political commissar of the military region, delivered a speech, enthusiastically praising the 14th Air Force and pilot Baglio. Baglio also highly praised the brilliant achievements made by the people in the border areas and expressed his sincere gratitude to them.

On July 25, Baglio bid farewell to the people in Fuping with great reluctance and to Dr. Frey. Escorted by a translator and three soldiers of the Eighth Route Army, he set off for Yan’an on that tall warhorse.

They first arrived at the former headquarters of the military region in Jingangku, Shizui town in the west of Fuping, and then passed through the old base area of Gaohongkou village in Shanxi province to Nanru village in Wutai county. When they set out from Wutai county in the early morning of August 3, they found that there were a large number of Japanese troops active in this area during the day, so they changed their march to night.

The next night, Baglio’s warhorse unfortunately fell off a cliff and died. At that time, he was walking and really held his breath. Along the way, they carefully avoided Japanese military strongholds and patrol teams.

On the evening of August 16, they reached the headquarters of the Shanxi-Suiyuan Sixth Military Sub-region in the east of Kelan county.

After a brief rest, they continued their journey and reached Xing county on August 22. From there they went on to enter Wulongpu in Yulin of Shaanxi province, and finally headed for Yan'an from Suide county on August 31.

On September 2, the 85th day after his parachuting, Baglio finally arrived in Yan'an. All along the way, they moved from one base to another, escorted by the Eighth Route Army. At each place they arrived, they were warmly welcomed and had a short rest. Especially at the headquarters of the Sixth Military Sub-region, in Baglio's own words, "I have been treated like a king once again!" Throughout the journey, he kept a diary and marked each section of the route in detail on the map.

After entering the war, the US actively sought cooperation with the CPC, a key force in the anti-Japanese rear battlefield, to obtain effective military and meteorological intelligence and gain support in rescuing US military pilots who had crashed. The US Army once dispatched two batches of Military Observation Groups to Yan'an. When Baglio set out from the Shanxi-Chaha'er-Hebei region, the first batch had just arrived in Yan'an. Soon, they welcomed the first rescued US military pilot here.

"On September 3, Lieutenant Baglio spent the entire morning recounting his thrilling journey in detail to us." The observation group listened to the report, examined his diary and

the route map, and wrote in the official document to the US government: "The significance of Baglio's report lies not only in that it provides a lot of help for our future military operations, but also in stating a convincing fact that the Eighth Route Army is a well-organized and disciplined army."

Colonel David Dean Barrett, head of the observation group, also wrote in the official document, "Baglio is an observer with absolutely no prejudice. In fact, he has never heard of the Eighth Route Army, let alone the guerrillas. He traveled through most of the areas of the Eighth Route Army under extremely dangerous circumstances and witnessed everything there with his own eyes. There is a very impressive fact in his report: The Eighth Route Army did everything for him without asking for any compensation at all."

According to Baglio's report, the US Army Observation Group promptly dispatched three investigation teams to the Shanxi-Chaha'er-Hebei and Shanxi-Suiyuan areas respectively, conducting on-site studies of the combat situation between the Eighth Route Army and the Japanese forces and reporting to the US government.

During his 17 days in Yan'an, Baglio was received by leaders such as Mao Zedong, Zhu De, Zhou Enlai, Nie Rongzhen, and Chen Yi.

As the first US military pilot to arrive in Yan'an, Baglio also gave interviews to many domestic and foreign journalists and was reported by

many newspapers both in China and abroad. After him, many other rescued military pilots from the US came to Yan'an and other bases one after another. According to the archives of the People's Liberation Army of China, the 14th Air Force of the US lost 500 fighter jets in China alone, many pilots sacrificed their lives, and about 120 were rescued.

"On September 19, the plane carried the elated Baglio away from Yan'an," Major W. J. Peterkin of the observation group recorded this day in his diary.

More than ten days after Baglio left the Fuping base area in July, Dr. Frey also set off for Yan'an to represent the Shanxi-Chaha'er-Hebei region to attend the Eighth Route Army Medical and Health Joint Conference held by Commander-in-Chief Zhu De in Yan'an in October. However, when Frey arrived, Baglio had just left. (The historical record, which says that Frey and Baglio went to Yan'an together, is incorrect).

After parting ways in Fuping, Baglio and Frey never met again for the rest of their lives. Following the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US, Baglio traveled to China three times in an attempt to find Frey but failed.

After my father passed away, I discovered a photo of him with Baglio in the album he had left me. Later, with the help of an American friend, I was eventually able to get in touch

with Baglio. Overjoyed upon receiving my letter, he sent me the information he had collected about Frey from the internet over the years, along with brief memories of that time. Meanwhile, the daughter of Peterkin, the third head of the US Military Observation Group, also sent me the letters her father had exchanged with Baglio before his death, which gave me a better understanding of their past.

As soon as Baglio arrived in Chongqing from Yan'an, the US ambassador invited him to meet at the ambassador's residence and have dinner together. What surprised and puzzled him that day was that from Marine Corps Lieutenant Colonel Evans Fordyce Carlson, who had spent many days in the Shanxi-Chaha'er-Hebei region, the embassy had learned a lot about the CPC base areas. "But why didn't anyone tell our pilots that if the plane crashed, we could get help from them?"

On September 22, Baglio left Chongqing and returned to the Kunming base, where he rejoined the flight squadron. Although he was promoted as captain, he received a notice that he no longer needed to carry out flight missions in China. He could only do some management work in the squadron and was soon sent to the US Air Force Base in India to tell the base crew about his experience of parachuting and being rescued in north China.

On December 15, 1944, Baglio finally left China and set off for the US.

In 1963, Baglio, who had served for 23 years, ended his military career at the MacDill Air Force Base in the US with the rank of lieutenant colonel. He has been stationed at multiple air force bases in the US and Europe, serving as a pilot and a test pilot for new fighter jets, piloting over 20 types of fighter jets, and holding positions such as flight instructor, deputy commander of the flight squadron, military aircraft equipment officer, flight squadron inspector general, and chief operating officer. After leaving the military camp, he worked successively in federal government departments, Seattle Bank, and local government departments of Washington State. He retired in 1982.

In his later years, Baglio lived by the beautiful Lake Seattle. After experiencing the ravages of war, he loved life and cherished it more. He enjoyed sports and traveling. Even at the age of over 90, he was still active on the golf course six days a week and left his footprints in many cities across the seven continents of the world. His humor and wit are always evident in his letters. His optimistic personality and the habit of exercising have kept him healthy in his old age.

Baglio was married twice and all three of his children have achieved success in their careers. His eldest son wrote in the letter to me, "My dad is still in good health now. In recent years, he has been particularly fond of talking about the past during World War II. He is always very happy to receive your

greetings."

In my card to Baglio for his 103rd birthday, I wrote, "May your humor and optimism continue to brighten your days for many more years."

Baglio was an ordinary American soldier. In the early days of his service in the US Army Air Force, he participated in the Chinese people's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. He was the first rescued American soldier to enter the Shanxi-Chaha'er-Hebei Anti-Japanese Base Area and also the first US military pilot to visit Yan'an. His impartial, straightforward, and accurate reports on the Eighth Route Army and the anti-Japanese base areas actively contributed to the anti-Japanese military cooperation between the CPC and the US during that period. In this regard, the Chinese people will never forget him.

The author is the son of Dr. Richard Frey, an international communist fighter. Born in Vienna, Austria, in 1920, Richard Frey passed away in Beijing, China, in 2004. He joined the Communist Party of China in 1944 and became a Chinese citizen in 1953. He was awarded the Third-Class Order of Freedom and Independence and the Third-Class Medal of Liberation of the People's Republic of China.

For relevant information, please refer to Issue 181, Voice of Friendship. ■

Megumi Sunahara, legendary Japanese PLA soldier

He Yan

I have long heard the name of Megumi Sunahara, an old Japanese friend to China. It is said that when his mobile phone rings, it sounds a bright and stirring song: “Forward! Forward! Forward! Our troop faces the sun, our feet tread on the land of our motherland, and we carry the hope of our nation. We are an invincible force...”

That is part of the lyrics of *The Military Anthem of the Chinese People's Liberation Army*. I wondered what kind of life experiences Sunahara had that made him use the Chinese military anthem as the ring tone. I was not able to meet him until January 18, 2018 at a New Year's Eve party. He sat at a round table with the staff of the Japanese Embassy in China. I walked up to him, sat down, and greeted him. This was a man aged over 80 with a lean face. He politely handed me his business card. I took it with both hands and responded in Japanese, “Thank you very much! I only know a few simple Japanese sentences.” He smiled and responded, “That's enough.”

Sunahara speaks Chinese fluently and idiomatically, just like the local Chinese people, so there was no barrier to communication between us. I learned that he was born in 1933 into a samurai family in Fukuoka prefecture, Kyushu, Japan, as the eldest son. Two years before his birth, the September 18 Incident took place and Japan occupied the three northeastern provinces of China. When Sunahara was four years old, the Lugou Bridge Incident broke out and Japan launched full-scale invasion of China. Soon after that, his father was sent by the Japanese government to northeast China as a technician at the South Manchuria Railway Company, engaged in mining exploration and extraction. That year, Sunahara was only five years old.

The whole family arrived in Dalian, China, from Fukuoka via ship. After some rest, they continued their trip to Shenyang and settled down in Fuxin, Liaoning province, in March 1938. “The Japanese media called the arrogant Kwantung Army ‘the No.1 Army in Asia’ and ‘the Invincible

Kwantung Army’. As teenagers, we were taught militarism from childhood and were expected to advocate militarism.” In his childhood, Sunahara attended a local Japanese school and dreamed of serving the empire as a soldier. But his father forbade him to be enlisted when he grew up, telling him that would be like helping the devil.

Sunahara lived in a community of Japanese expatriates. The first Chinese he got close to was Liu Yisheng, who was his father's student and secretary. Liu once studied at a private university in Tokyo but dropped out halfway and returned to China. He worked in a coal mine and often came to Sunahara's home to borrow books. Sunahara called him “elder brother”. “Sometimes, he took me to play with some local Chinese children. There was no hostility among the children,” said Sunahara.

In December 1941, after the outbreak of the Pacific War, supplies became scarce. Military training at school intensified and many members of the Kaitaku Team were enlisted in

the army. Sunahara asked his father what was going on. His father replied coldly, "This unjust war has reached a low point and Japan is doomed to be defeated." These words shocked him because at school, teachers and instructors often told them "the victory of the holy war is guaranteed."

In the mind of Sunahara, his father was an eccentric in his family. While other family members were deeply influenced by Japanese militarism to support the war, his father was the opposite. When he was a student, he organized anti-war movements and was known as an anti-war activist. Swept by the prevailing tide of Japanese policies, he had to leave his hometown and came all the way to China. That was why he hoped his children would not become tools of war.

In the spring of 1942, Sunahara was admitted to Fuxin Middle School. However, his father arranged a friend to send him to Dalian No. 2 Middle School instead, believing that Dalian, as a port city with convenient maritime transportation, would allow Sunahara to quickly return to Japan if the war situation changed.

"I received typical Japanese-style education back then." At Dalian No. 2 Middle School, military training was a compulsory course, and any slight mistake would result in corporal punishment. Moreover, if one person made a mistake, the entire group would be punished collectively. The Japanese

military instructors left a terrifying impression on Sunahara.

In July 1945, he hurriedly returned to Fuxin because his father fell seriously ill. His father told him with a heavy tone, "Once Japan is defeated, we will be abandoned." He widened his eyes in disbelief and exclaimed, "We are also Japanese!" His father looked at him with a firm gaze and said, "Even though we are their compatriots, they don't see us as human beings."

On July 14, his father passed away. At the age of only 12, Sunahara hugged his mother and two younger sisters, and they wept bitterly together. In that moment, it felt as though he had grown up overnight. "Bringing the whole family back to Japan was my father's last wish," he said.

One month later, on August 15, 1945, Japan announced its unconditional surrender. The Japanese expatriates living in northeast China were in a panic. "Everyone hurriedly sold valuable items in their homes, desperate to return to Japan. The next day, they found that the currency of Manchukuo (1932-1945, the Japanese puppet regime in northeast China) was no longer in circulation, and few people could successfully flee back to Japan."

Meanwhile, the Kwantung Army and the high-ranking officials of the South Manchuria Railway Company abandoned Japanese civilians in China and retreated to Japan. After witnessing the oppression and betrayal by the

Kwantung Army, Sunahara finally understood why his father strongly opposed him becoming a Japanese soldier.

Before passing away, his father entrusted Liu Yisheng with a plan to help his family to travel south from Fuxin to Huludao, and then explore the possibility of going to Japan by sea. "During wartime, no one knows what will happen tomorrow." As they arrived in the Beizhen county of Liaoning province by carriage, the situation became increasingly chaotic. For safety reasons, they decided to temporarily reside there.

In the village of Liutaizi in Beizhen county, the villagers accepted the family in distress. "I spoke with a different accent. The local people asked me curiously whether I was a Chinese or not. An old villager taught me that if I was asked where I came from, I could tell them I came from south China, so that I couldn't speak well the northeastern dialect. Although many villagers knew that we were Japanese, they didn't expose us or bully us. Who would care if a Japanese woman and her several children were bullied? However, no one beat us, though they knew that we were Japanese."

To make a living, Sunahara worked as a long-term laborer for a landlord and his mother did some needlework. "In the second half of 1945, I raised swine for the landlord, and in 1946, I herded cattle. I got up at

4 o'clock in the morning to make tofu, but we could only eat the leftovers of the landlord's family, which were too little to fill our stomachs." The villagers affectionately called him "Little Sanyuan'er", which is a homophone of his Japanese surname "Sunahara". "At that time, an old man suggested that I should learn at least 2,000 Chinese characters so that I could live in China without a language problem. Back then, learning Chinese was just for survival."

Every time before herding the cattle, he would give a steamed bun to his fellow herders. As an exchange, they would take turns helping him look after the cattle. He could then run to the village school, sneakily crouching by the windows to listen to lessons. The first lesson he learned was *A Hundred Family Surnames*. When the teacher found out, he gave Sunahara some textbooks and personally taught him to read. The villagers often offered food and clothing to his family.

As a laborer for the landlord, it didn't take much time for Sunahara to realize the hardships of peasants. "In the first year, I didn't receive any wages. In the second year, I began receiving my wages, which were divided into four quarterly payments of 9 *dou* (one *dou* equals roughly 10 kilograms) and 6 *sheng* (one *sheng* equals roughly one kilogram) of sorghum rice. For the first two times, the sorghum rice was of good quality, but the third time, it was mixed with bran, and the fourth time it was almost all bran. Why didn't the landlord give

me quality sorghum rice? The landlord cheated me. This was the first time I knew what exploitation was and what resistance meant."

Sunahara noticed that the cattle of the landlord liked to lick the salt seeping out from the edge of the soy sauce jar. After licking, they would drink much water out of thirst. "Therefore, when I was herding the cattle, I would put salt on my hands. The cattle would lick my hands and then go to the river to drink a lot of water. They arrived at home with big stomachs, and the landlord would think that I had fed them well. Then I would get some pickled Chinese cabbage as a reward." Unfortunately, the cattle shed was then flooded by the cattle's urine. The landlord realized that he had been cheated. He was so angry that he beat Sunahara hard.

In the summer of 1947, the armies of the Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China (CPC) engaged in fierce battles in northeast China. The Chinese Northeast Democratic United Army liberated Liutaizi village and carried out land reform there. Sunahara's family was designated as "hired farmers". They not only received homestead and production tools, but also 37 *mu* (one *mu* equals about 666.67 square meters) of fertile land. "Everyone, including the landlords, was allocated a piece of land of the same size regardless of their class, but hired farmers had the priority to choose first. We got the best land, but when it was the landlords' turn, there was only barren land left for

them."

Sunahara's family, as liberated farmers, no longer had to endure oppression from the landlord. "The Kwantung Army were grumpy. When we met them on the streets, we needed to salute them. Any slacking off of the etiquette would incur punishment, which made me scared. The Central Army of the Kuomintang were equipped with American-style equipment, but they had lax military discipline and forcibly took things from villagers. The CPC Army only had old-fashioned Japanese-made rifles, but they greeted the villagers with 'How are you, my fellow villager?' every time when they met us, sounding like they were part of us. I found out that only the army of the CPC is the people's army."

At the rally to air grievances against the landlords, Sunahara vowed to liberate the poor people of the world. "After the land reform, many young people in the village joined the army. If the Kuomintang came, the land would be taken away by the landlords again. I wanted to defend the hard-earned land." He told his mother that he wanted to join the army, but his mother strongly opposed it and only wished to return to Japan.

Sunahara wouldn't change his mind and said to his mother, "Although I was not born in China, I have always lived here. I write Chinese characters, speak Chinese, wear Chinese clothes, and eat Chinese food. I am already Chinese!"

Soon after, he joined the Independent Ninth Regiment of the Chinese Northeast Democratic United Army. “When I was enlisted, I needed to fill in my identity information. I wrote ‘Born in Liutaizi village, Han ethnicity, hired laborer. Since I liked Zhang Fei in *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* from a young age, I chose ‘Zhang’ as my surname and filled in ‘Zhang Rongqing’ in the name column.” He was only 15 years old at the time, so he intentionally reported himself as three years older.

After his enlistment, the regiment was reorganized into the 170th Infantry Division of the Northeast China People’s Liberation Army, and was finally classified as the Fourth Field Army of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army. As a scout, Sunahara participated in the Liaoshen Campaign and the Pingjin Campaign. He was awarded numerous commendations due to his bravery and intelligence.

Before the Pingjin Campaign, Sunahara went deep into enemy-occupied areas to gather intelligence on the deployment of the Kuomintang troops. He disguised himself as a cigarette vendor, roaming the streets and alleys every day to covertly observe the situation. He chatted with customers, inquired about the latest news in the city, and collected useful information. A few days later, he returned to the army safely.

One of the most memorable experiences for Sunahara was that, disguised as a vendor selling *tanghulu*

(sugar-coated haws strung on a stick), he investigated outside the residence of a Kuomintang official. “The guards at the gate were very lax. They either sat there to rest or smoked, with guns not properly held. I offered them cigarettes to get close to them and soon made ‘friends’ with them. There were many children around me, asking for *tanghulu* to eat. However, I couldn’t give them for free. I had to pretend to be a vendor, otherwise my identity would have been exposed.”

After the Pingjin Campaign, he wrote a letter to his mother to report his safety. His mother replied and told him that his family was designated as a military family in the village and was respected for that.

On October 1, 1949, the founding of the People’s Republic of China was officially declared. “At that time, I felt that China had truly become independent and the history of being wantonly bullied by foreign powers had come to a complete end.” In June 1950, the Korean Peninsula was once again plunged into war. The US military landed on and occupied Incheon, and then quickly brought the flames of war to the 38th Parallel, and occupied Pyongyang. Moreover, they deployed aircraft to bomb the Chinese city of Dandong and had troops stationed on the banks of the Yalu River, threatening China’s northeastern border.

At the end of that year, Sunahara volunteered to go to Korea as a member of the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army and stood by in Dandong. He proudly

said, “According to international practice, Japanese soldiers are not allowed to participate in the war. The 38th Army had many Japanese soldiers who followed the troops to Dandong, but they were not allowed to cross the Yalu River. There was no problem for me! I am Chinese! When the troops assembled in Dandong, I filled ‘China’ in the column of native place. I was also a member of the Chinese New Democratic Youth League. Therefore, I could cross the Yalu River to engage in the fight.”

He served on the Korean battlefield for over two years as a ground soldier in the Air Force. His company was tasked with reconnaissance and exploration of the enemy’s situation, and preparation for the construction of an airport. “Although we were in the air force, we didn’t have air supremacy and often had to go into caves to escape air raids.” He and his comrades went deep into the front line for reconnaissance multiple times. When they encountered time bombs dropped by the US military, they would use their vehicles to tow the bombs away for safe disposal.

On the battlefield, Sunahara had multiple close encounters with death. During the war, he wrote his will and submitted an application to join the CPC. In a battle, he engaged in a fierce gunfight with the enemy and was injured by a bomb. Due to excessive blood loss, he passed out and was carried off the front line by his comrades. When he woke up, he found

himself lying in a military hospital in the rear. The doctors performed surgery on him and saved his life.

After recuperating for a period of time, he began to miss the days of sharing joys and sorrows with his comrades. "Many volunteer soldiers died in battle soon after their first meal in Korea. Some sacrificed their lives on the Korean battlefield even with empty stomachs."

In the spring of 1953, when he was about to apply to return to the battlefield, the political commissar of the regiment suddenly called him in for a talk. "He summoned me to the air raid shelter and asked, 'Xiao Zhang, who are you?' I said that I was a soldier. No matter how he asked me, I insisted that I was a Chinese revolutionary soldier. 'No,' he said, 'the higher authority has conveyed the message that you are Japanese!' I replied, 'I am Chinese!' The political commissar became anxious and asked me what the first item of the Three Major Disciplines and Eight Points for Attention was. That hit the nail on the head. The regulation stipulated that 'all actions should obey the command', so I had to admit that I was Japanese."

It turned out that two weeks ago, Sunahara's mother suffered from severe pneumonia and on her deathbed kept calling out "go home" in Japanese. The China Red Cross informed the headquarters of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army, and only then did the military leadership learn that Zhang

Rongqing was actually Japanese. Sunahara had to leave the Korean battlefield. When his comrades knew this, they held a farewell party for him, but he felt very much wronged. "The leader thanked me for my contributions to the cause of Chinese revolution as a Japanese, but the more he thanked me, the more saddened my heart was. I felt I was Chinese. My mother had just passed away, and my comrades also pushed me away. I felt abandoned by all the people close to me."

Sunahara was transferred to the Political Department of the Northeast Democratic United Army Aviation School to study Japanese engineering. The aviation school, located in Mudanjiang, Heilongjiang province, was established in March 1946. It had more than 300 Japanese technicians, many of whom were former members of the elite unit of the Kwantung Army Air Force

"When I saw that these Japanese were served rice, I couldn't accept it at all. What did we eat on the Korean battlefield? These Japanese were devils! They didn't deserve such good food!" he recalled.

He refused to eat anything upon arriving at the aviation school. "That night and the entire next day, I didn't eat anything. Why did the Japanese devils eat rice? That was all I could think about. My mindset at that time was completely that of a Chinese soldier."

The leaders of the aviation

school heard about that and patiently persuaded him, "Although they are Japanese, they have also made great contributions to the Chinese people. As comrades-in-arms, you should more readily accept each other." At the end of September 1945, led by Major Yaichiro Hayashi, more than 300 soldiers of the Japanese Air Force Battalion stationed in Liaodong surrendered to the Chinese Northeast People's Autonomous Army (the predecessor of the Chinese Northeast Democratic United Army). Many Japanese air force technicians became instructors and received generous treatment. They trained the first generation of air force pilots for the People's Republic of China.

"The leaders said that I and other Japanese soldiers in China were supposed to work together, live together, and fight together. I believed what the leaders said was right, so I gradually accepted the situation. Later, I studied the history of the aviation school and finally understood its significance. I learned a lot from studying history." In March 1953, China and Japan reached an agreement on the issue of Japanese expatriates returning to Japan. As part of the effort, China began registering Japanese soldiers serving in the Chinese military to facilitate their return. That autumn, Sunahara officially demobilized from the army. In 1954, he was assigned to work in the Electrical Management Bureau of the First Ministry of Machine-Building Industry in Beijing.

Later, he came to Yibin, Sichuan, for mining exploration.

On March 24, 1955, he boarded the Xing'an Maru cruise ship and set sail from the port of Tanggu in Tianjin to Japan, bidding farewell to China, where he had lived for 17 years. When the other Japanese on the ship looked forward to reuniting with their families, he felt at a loss: "I had no home in Japan." His parents were buried in China, and his two younger sisters got married and stayed in China. For him, returning to Japan was like leaving his hometown.

Japan at that time was engulfed in a widespread atmosphere of anti-Communism. After returning to Japan, he faced discrimination and exclusion from Japanese society, and was even monitored by the government. "They kept sending people, especially public security officers and other kind of police, to keep an eye on me."

He traveled to Osaka, Kyoto, and other places, and finally settled in Tokyo, where he found a job as an interpreter at the Japan International Trade Promotion Association. At the end of 1955, he served as an interpreter during the visit of a Chinese science delegation to Japan. When he met Guo Moruo, head of the delegation, he said excitedly, "I used to be a soldier of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army and I met you before in China."

Back then, China and Japan had not yet restored diplomatic relations, but commercial exchanges were

already taking place. "In 1955, a Chinese Commodity Expo was held in Tokyo. In 1956, a Japanese Commodity Expo was held in Beijing and Shanghai respectively. In 1957, a Chinese Expo was held in Nagoya, and in 1958, a Japanese Expo was held in Guangzhou and Wuhan. I traveled back and forth between China and Japan, not only for economic activities, but also for many cultural exchanges."

Following the advice of his friends, Sunahara founded Shinshin Trading Co., Ltd. in Japan in 1967 to promote friendly trade between China and Japan. He deliberately chose July 1 as the opening date because "it is the birthday of the Communist Party of China". However, due to boycott and pressure from the right-wing forces in Japan, the company eventually went bankrupt.

In September 1972, Japanese Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka visited China, marking the normalization of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Sunahara was overjoyed. He recalled, "I had the honor to meet with H.E. Kakuei Tanaka several times through introduction from my friends. On one occasion, he asked me, 'How's the business going recently?' I replied, 'Not very well, but I'm trying my best.' He suggested I increase imports from China instead of exports to it. He said, 'You can import Chinese goods, including small commodities. We need to allow the Chinese people to increase foreign exchange reserves, so that they

can buy things needed for domestic construction, and afford the quality commodities made in Japan.' This suggestion gave me great inspiration."

As China carried out the reform and opening-up policy, Sunahara introduced the pickled vegetable technology from Japan Yamaya Co., Ltd. to China in 1997. Tianjin Yamaya Food Co., Ltd., a joint venture, was established in Jixian county, Tianjin. He served as its consultant for 22 years, dedicating himself to improving its operations and ensuring its success, yet he refused to accept any dividends. In his own words, Jixian was once the headquarters of the Pingjin Campaign. He chose Jixian as the location of the company to honor his original aspiration and the lifelong mission of an old soldier: to serve the people.

When he saw that many Japanese members of the People's Liberation Army lived a miserable life after returning to Japan, he felt deeply saddened. "Several instructors in the Air Force lost their surnames after returning to Japan. Their families did not allow them to use their original surnames, leaving them with no choice but to adopt their spouses' surnames. Additionally, many technicians couldn't find a job upon their return to Japan. They had no other choice but to become taxi drivers, warehouse caretakers, or manual laborers to make a living. This situation was very common among the veterans of the People's Liberation Army who returned to Japan."

So, while dining with Air Force General Liu Zhenqi, who was also serving as the deputy director-general of the General Political Department of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), during a visit to China, Sunahara took that opportunity to make a request to General Liu, "It is a great pity that the Japanese veterans of the PLA haven't had a chance to see the great changes in China. To cut the point, would it be possible for them to come back to China for a visit before they pass away?" Without hesitation, Liu Zhenqi responded, "Let's do it!"

On July 28, 2010, on the eve of the 65th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, the first 36-member delegation of Japanese veterans of the PLA were invited to visit China. They were received by General Li Jinai, director-general of the General Political Department of the PLA, and General Liang Guanglie, state councilor and minister of National Defense. Sunahara served as the secretary-general of the delegation. "We were also invited to attend the reception held by China's Ministry of National Defense at the Great Hall of the People to celebrate the 83rd anniversary of the founding of the PLA. The Japanese veterans were seated at Table No. 4 while Table No. 3 was reserved for retired generals and Table No. 5 for wartime model heroes." At the reception, the Japanese veterans reunited happily with their former leaders and comrades.

"Every morning when I wake up,

what I think about most is still China." Sunahara returned to China every year to get together with his old friends and enjoy dumplings stuffed with pickled Chinese cabbage, a typical dish in northeast China. He traveled back and forth between Japan and China more than 350 times. His daughter said, "Dad couldn't stay at home in Japan for too long. When he was restless, I would buy him a plane ticket back to Beijing and everything would be OK."

In July 2013, he returned to Liutaizi village for the first time after he left decades ago. When he asked the villagers if there were any Japanese in the village many years ago, an old lady recognized him and said, "Aren't you Little Sanyuan'er? What brought you here?" She knew exactly my whereabouts after I left the village." Sunahara felt deeply touched, "Many years had passed, and there were still people who remembered me."

On September 3, 2015, Sunahara was invited to Beijing to participate in the military parade commemorating the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. On the viewing stand on the Tian'anmen Rostrum, he watched the PLA troops under inspection marching and couldn't help feeling excited. He stood up and saluted. The voice of the political commissar of the regiment echoed in his ears, "Xiao Zhang, who are you?" "Good question. Who am I? I have one hundred percent Japanese blood, but my heart belongs to China. For me, Japan is the country of my birth, but

China is my motherland."

During his last visit to China, on the afternoon of November 8, 2019, Sunahara attended a symposium on the publication of the Chinese version of *Blood and Heart* organized by the Beijing People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries. It is a comic book that tells the stories of Sunahara's life. Earlier that year, on September 25, he was awarded the commemorative medal for the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

In April of the following year, the TOHO Books on China released the Japanese version of *Blood and Heart* in Tokyo. "My friends and colleagues had never understood why I am so enthusiastic and active about the cause of Sino-Japanese friendship. After reading the comic, they learned that I had once joined the Chinese People's Liberation Army. They were surprised to know this and finally understood my deep love for China."

On the evening of June 24, 2021, Sunahara's remarkable 88-year journey came to an end. According to his final wishes, half of his ashes were buried in his hometown of Fukuoka, Kyushu, Japan, and the other half in northeast China. The following year, the 12-episode animated series *Blood and Heart* was released in China. "Forward! Forward! Forward! Our troop faces the sun..." Time and space seemed to be forever frozen in the rhythm of *The Military Anthem of the Chinese People's Liberation Army*, a song he held dear throughout his life. ■