

CHINA



**Above:** Students from Hong Kong disembark from China Eastern Airlines' flight MU7192 at Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport on Saturday.  
**Left:** Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport welcomes the landing of the C919 jet from Hong Kong with a "water gate" ceremony on Saturday. PHOTOS BY TAO LEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

C919 debuts overseas service

Homegrown large jetliner makes round-trip flight from Shanghai to HK

By WANG YING in Shanghai  
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A C919 jet that is part of China Eastern Airlines' fleet launched its first overseas commercial chartered flight on Saturday, making the carrier the first to provide round-trip service between Shanghai and Hong Kong using a domestically made passenger aircraft, according to official sources.

China Eastern Airlines, the first international carrier to purchase a C919, operated the flight from Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport to Hong Kong International Airport on Saturday morning and made the return trip that aft-

ernoon, Xinhua News Agency reported.

The passengers on the return flight included over 120 Hong Kong students who are participating in a seven-week internship program in Shanghai, the airline said.

Chan Kwok-ki, chief secretary for administration of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, expressed support and gratitude to China Eastern for transporting the students.

A flight demonstration of the C919 was performed last year in Hong Kong, which inspired a wave of aviation passion and deeply impressed Hong Kong youth, said Chan, who made a speech during a

ceremony marking the flight's take-off at Hong Kong International Airport on Saturday.

The C919 flew over scenic Victoria Harbor in Hong Kong in December, giving visitors on the waterfront a glimpse of the aircraft. The jet celebrated the first anniversary of its commercial operation on Tuesday.

China Eastern, which is based in Shanghai, received its sixth C919 jet on May 27 from manufacturer Commercial Aircraft Corp of China, or COMAC.

Over the past year, its five other C919 jets have been used in 2,181 commercial flights and have accumulated a total of 6,090 hours of commercial operation, safely handling about 300,000 passenger trips as of May 27.

"As a new aircraft model, it has

taken quite a long time for the C919 to grow into a well-recognized and sophisticated one in the industry," said Qi Qi, an associate professor at Guangzhou Civil Aviation College.

"To reach the long-term goal of breaking the duopoly of Boeing and Airbus, the C919 needs to fly domestically and globally to win market recognition, develop its fleet, gain consumer confidence and strengthen its production and supply chain."

According to Zhu Rui, chief technology officer of aviation data and solution service provider Vari-Flight, C919 aircraft have flown to six major airports in cities on the Chinese mainland over the past year, including Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu in Sichuan province and Xi'an in Shaanxi province.

Qinghai-Tibet Plateau lakes expanding rapidly

By PALDEN NYIMA  
and DAQIONG in Lhasa

The area of lakes on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau has expanded by over 10,000 square kilometers over the past 30 years according to researchers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Qinghai-Tibet Plateau Research Institute.

There are around 60,000 lakes on the plateau, covering an area of approximately 50,000 sq km. The latest research by scientists from the institute's environmental change and multisphere processes team, led by researcher Zhang Guoqing, predicts that by the end of this century, the lake area will expand by another 20,000 sq km under a low-emission scenario.

That would increase water levels by an estimated 10 meters, resulting in a 652-billion-metric-ton increase in water volume — four times the

increase over the past 50 years.

The research, published in the international academic journal Nature Geoscience on May 27, is poised to provide crucial scientific guidance for future planning on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

Described as the "Asian water tower", the plateau boasts the world's highest and most extensive plateau lake group, accounting for over 50 percent of China's total lake area.

Zhang said that despite a global trend of decreasing large lake volumes due to climate change and human activities, the lakes on the plateau have experienced rapid expansion as the climate becomes warmer and more humid.

"This expansion has heightened the risks of lake inundation disasters and impacted ecosystems such as grasslands, wetlands and biodiversity," he added.

Xu Fenglin, one of the authors of

the paper and a doctoral student at the institute, said the greatest expansion of lake area is being seen in the north of the plateau, and they could double in size under a high-emission scenario.

"By integrating field surveys and remote sensing observations, the team projected changes in lake area, water level and water volume from 2021 to 2100 under various scenarios," Xu said, adding the study also evaluated the implications of the lakes' changes on basin restructuring, infrastructure and ecosystems.

"The lakes in the central region of the plateau are projected to expand by over 50 percent, while lakes in the southern region, previously in a state of shrinkage, are anticipated to transition to expansion in the near future," Xu said.

"The expansion of lakes on the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau will increase

lake-atmosphere exchanges, potentially leading to an increase in greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere, thereby exacerbating global warming."

He said increased precipitation was the biggest contributor to the expansion of the lakes, with the melting of glaciers also playing a role.

The expansion of lakes on the plateau will have wide-ranging impacts, including the inundation of high-quality grasslands around the lakes, affecting grazing, animal husbandry and local economic development, he added.

"Taking the region's Serling Tso Lake as an example, over the past 50 years, the lake has increased by about 800 sq km, submerging around 20,000 hectares of grasslands and numerous roads," Xu said.

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Xixi (left) and Angya at the Changchun Zoological and Botanical Garden in Jilin province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"This collaboration for breeding between Angya and Xixi is the first of its kind for Asian elephants in China, which will inject fresh blood into the genetic diversity of the captive Asian elephant population in China and open a new chapter for the cooperative breeding of rare and endangered

Lonely Asian elephant finds a mate

By LIU MINGTAI in Changchun  
and ZHOU HUIYING

The Changchun Zoological and Botanical Garden in Jilin province is abuzz with excitement after a new male elephant, Xixi, was introduced to resident female Angya.

The pairing, which has ended Angya's solitary life, could contribute to the conservation of Asian elephants in China.

After several days together, Angya and Xixi had some intimate interactions in their enclosure, attracting lots of visitors.

Angya, 39, has been living at the zoo for 34 years and was previously

the only Asian elephant in Jilin.

Three years ago, the garden began seeking a mate for her. Xixi, 26, was found to be a suitable candidate, and he arrived from Chongqing on May 20.

"With the strong support of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration and the Chinese Association of Zoological Gardens, after extensive communication and coordination, we finally reached a cooperation and breeding agreement with Chongqing Zoo in 2023," said Jia She, the deputy director of the Changchun zoo, describing Xixi as an "energetic animal star".

Asian elephants can live up to 70

years. Their mating season is in July and August, and females typically give birth to just one offspring at a time after a gestation period of around 22 months.

"Angya is middle-aged, and Xixi is still young and strong," Jia said. "We hope to see their loving story and their offspring soon at the garden."

To facilitate the successful union of Angya and Xixi, both zoos undertook extensive preparatory work, including on-site inspections, enclosure reinforcement, behavioral training, transport preparation and habitat arrangement, to ensure the elephants' safety and create a comfortable environment for Xixi's arrival.

Civil aviation bounces back from pandemic

By LUO WANGSHU  
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China's civil aviation industry rebounded significantly last year, showcasing steady growth across key metrics compared to the previous year, when the COVID-19 pandemic was coming to an end, according to a report released on Friday by the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

The report detailed progress in 12 key areas, including air transport, general aviation, efficiency, economic benefits, safety, service quality, education and technological innovation.

Passenger travel surged in 2023, with the industry handling close to 620 million passenger trips, up 146.1 percent year-on-year and approaching the nearly 660 million seen in 2019, before the pandemic.

Domestic routes comprised the bulk of passenger traffic last year, accounting for approximately 591 million trips, a 136.3 percent

increase from 2022. Travel to Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan accounted for 6.68 million passenger trips in 2023 — up 1,324.7 percent year-on-year.

International passenger trips totaled 29.05 million last year, up 1,461.7 percent year-on-year.

By the end of last year, the civil aviation industry boasted a fleet of 4,270 registered public transport aircraft, marking an increase of 105 from 2022. The industry also saw an expansion of its scheduled flight routes, operating 5,206 in total — 4,583 domestic and 623 international.

Five new airports opened on the Chinese mainland last year, taking the total to 259, with 38 each handling more than 10 million passenger trips in 2023.

Airports in Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou collectively accounted for 20 percent of the total passenger throughput for all airports on the mainland and also handled 60.8 percent of international passenger traffic.

Drone deliveries begin to take off in Shenzhen

By ZHOU MO in Shenzhen  
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People at a city library in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, can now have food delivered by drones following the launch of a low-altitude transport route.

The new service allows people to place orders at Shenzhen Library North, in the city's Longhua district, and receive their food within 10 minutes.

Few restaurants are allowed to operate near the library.

"Food delivery by drones has provided more convenience for us," Shenzhen resident Li Xiong said. "Within 10 minutes of placing an order, I received a message telling me that my order had arrived."

"The library has also set up a dining area for us near the drone landing site."

The Meituan online delivery platform, which offers the service, said that in addition to food vendors, retailers and other types of merchants are offering drone delivery of more than 1,000 types of products.

The development of China's low-altitude sector is gathering steam. The low-altitude economy, viewed as a strategic emerging industry and a new growth engine for the country, was included in the Government Work Report for the first time this year.

A report by market research firm CCID Consulting, a think tank affiliated with the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said China's low-altitude economy was worth nearly 506 billion yuan (\$69.8 billion) last year, up 33.8 percent year-on-year, and its value is expected to surpass 1 trillion yuan by 2026.

Unmanned aerial vehicles are playing a significant role in driving the low-altitude economy. According to official statistics, the number of UAV enterprises in China reached over 19,000 by the end of last year, with annual economic output hitting 152 billion yuan.

Shenzhen is home to more than 1,730 enterprises in the drone industry chain, which generate revenue totaling 96 billion yuan a year.

Paddle power



Crewmates raise their paddles in celebration after finishing a Dragon Boat race in Beijing's Haidian district on Sunday. This year's Dragon Boat Festival falls on June 10. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

species in China," Jia said. "It is also the first time in recent years that there are two elephants meeting with the public in our garden."

The zoos plan to keep the two elephants together for three years.

Zhang Hongjun, who has been Angya's keeper since she was 5 years old, and his colleagues reinforced and decorated the elephant enclosure to celebrate Angya's and Xixi's union.

"After Xixi's arrival, Angya and Xixi first got acquainted through a fence between their enclosures and familiarized themselves with each other's scents," he said. "To help Xixi adapt to the environment better, in addition to the main diet of grass, we added bananas, apples, carrots, greens and watermelons to increase nutrients."

A week later, the two elephants

successfully cohabited and appeared together in the outdoor exhibition area.

"Angya has always been gentle, while Xixi is a bit mischievous," he said. "However, it seems that they are getting along harmoniously now."

He also noticed a good sign — the two elephants leaning against each other — indicating they were communicating on an emotional level.

"We also hope that the public can continue to pay attention to and love Asian elephants, witness the reproduction of rare animals, protect biodiversity with practical actions and contribute to the promotion of an ecological civilization," Jia said.

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