

CHINA

China-Europe freight train reaches milestone

Key logistics network marked 110,000th trip, boosting global trade network

By LUO WANGSHU
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A freight train loaded with smart home appliances departed from the eastern Chinese port city of Qingdao in Shandong province on Tuesday, marking the 110,000th trip of the China-Europe freight train service — a milestone for a logistics network that has become a vital artery in global trade.

The train, carrying 55 containers filled with goods including LCD displays and refrigerators worth nearly 20 million yuan (\$2.75 million), is bound for Moscow, Russia, and is

expected to reach its destination in 17 days. It will pass through key Chinese cities such as Jinan in Shandong province, Shijiazhuang in Hebei province, and Taiyuan of Shanxi province before exiting the country at Erenhot in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

Launched in 2011, the China-Europe freight train network has moved goods valued at more than \$450 billion, according to China State Railway Group. Once a modest logistical experiment, the network has evolved into a cornerstone of the Belt and Road Initiative, offering a faster and increasingly cost-ef-

fective alternative to sea shipping.

So far, 128 Chinese cities have launched outbound rail services, connecting with 229 cities across 26 European countries and over 100 cities in 11 Asian nations. The rapidly growing network has emerged as a stabilizing force in global supply chains, especially during times of crisis.

The 110,000th train is a snapshot of the network's transformation.

“Over the past decade, we've grown from handling a handful of shipments to managing daily freight flows from China, as well as transshipment cargo from Japan, South Korea and Southeast Asia,” said Gao Yitian, head of the Jiaozhou branch of the Jinan Railway Logistics Center in Qingdao.

Goods from East and Southeast Asia arrive in Qingdao port by sea, then continue west by rail to destinations across Europe. The route also facilitates eastbound shipments of European goods into Asia.

According to Gao, the operation has expanded from just one train a month to more than one each day, reaching destinations in 23 countries. The type of cargo has diversified from basic consumer goods to include high-value exports such as electronics, machinery and automobiles. Train speeds have also increased from 80 kilometers per hour to 120 kilometers per hour.

In the first five months of this year, 790 China-Europe freight trains departed from Shandong — a 4 percent increase from the same

period last year. The Jiaozhou central terminal in Qingdao, where the landmark train departed, has become a model for logistical efficiency. The terminal's entire yard operates as a customs supervision zone, enabling what insiders call a “full-yard customs” model.

“Clients can complete all customs procedures — bonded storage, inspection, fumigation — in the same location where rail operations take place,” said Ge Ran, deputy general manager of Qingdao branch at the China United International Rail Containers Co.

“This eliminates the need to shuttle containers between separate facilities, significantly cutting costs and time.”

Trucks entering the terminal pass

through a digital “smart gate” and gain immediate access to the customs zone — an innovation that has reduced handling delays and streamlined clearance. The improvements have proven especially valuable to manufacturers like Shandong Linglong Tyre Co, which began using rail in 2021 to ship critical materials to its factory in Serbia amid a spike in ocean freight prices and shipping container shortages.

“Though rail is slightly more expensive, it's much more reliable for high-value goods,” said Pan Wenfeng, head of the company's inland logistics department. “Transit times are cut in half, and that's crucial for our operations.”

Yang Ting contributed to this story.

Specialized relics rule mandates survey before construction in Shanxi

By ZHU XINGXIN in Taiyuan and LIANG SHUANG

Relic-rich Shanxi province becomes the first provincial-level region to establish locally specialized rule to better protect its cultural heritage through legislation, after the amended Cultural Relics Protection Law was put into effect in March.

The standing committee of the Shanxi Provincial People's Congress passed the regulation during a recent session, and the new regulation will take effect in July, the committee said on Friday in Taiyuan, the provincial capital.

The eight-chapter, 62-article document covers areas such as immovable relics, archaeological excavations, privately owned artifacts and research and usage.

Yan Moyu, an official from the local legislature, said that specific measures including a mechanism that requires all above-ground development projects to conduct archaeological surveys before proceeding, and that all land plots have to go through archaeological excavations before they are transferred for real estate or other construction purposes.

In addition, the rule also requires authorities to conduct protection plans for immovable relics, as well as establishing protocols aimed at eliminating any hazards that may threaten the protection of relics.

Wang Zhenhua, deputy director of the province's cultural relics bureau, called the rule an important guarantee of the province's advance in pushing for high-quality development of the cultural relics sector.

“It's the first time that we put the ‘survey before construction’ and ‘archaeological excavation before land transfer’ rules into a local regulation,” he said. “We strive to guard the ‘golden plaque’ of the popular saying ‘Shanxi is the place to go when it comes to cultural relics above the ground’ with the power of legislation.”

Boasting nearly 54,000 items of immovable relics, including 531 national-level key sites, Shanxi holds more than 80 percent of the

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nation's ancient wooden buildings that date back to Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) or before, including China's only three existing wooden structures tracing back to the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

Renowned locations in Shanxi like Yungang Grottoes, Pingyao Ancient City and Mount Wutai are listed among UNESCO's World Cultural Heritage Sites, while the popularity of the video game *Black Myth: Wukong* injected new vitality into Shanxi's ancient structures last year, from where the game drew its inspiration.

Zhang Hanqi, another official in the provincial legislature, said that despite an abundance of relics resources, the province faces drawbacks and challenges.

The situation regarding the security of relics remains grim while the staff and personnel in the sector are relatively limited, he said, adding that innovation on the relics protection work is also lacking.

The province will summarize the experience during the protection work and transform successful practices into regulations to better guide future work, this includes the further integration of culture and tourism, and the exploration of ways to better present relics to the audience.

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Tourists visit the Huayan Temple in Datong, Shanxi province, on May 12. Huayan is currently one of China's largest Buddhist temples built during the Liao (916-1125) and Jin (1115-1234) dynasties.

ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY



Cultural bridge

American youths attending a Chinese Bridge summer camp put on She ethnic headpieces at the She culture experience hall in Jinhua, Zhejiang province, on Tuesday. The camp brought over 60 American high school teachers and students to experience Chinese culture, history and social development. More than 90 percent of the She ethnic group reside in Zhejiang and neighboring Fujian province. ZHANG JIANCHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Introduction of gaokao in Braille transforms lives

WUHAN — When Huang Ying sat for China's fiercely competitive college entrance exam, or *gaokao*, in 2015, she was making history, becoming the first student in Northwest China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region to take the exam using Braille.

Before blind students in the country could take the *gaokao* in Braille, they could only apply to a handful of universities by taking a special exam, and were restricted to majors related to either music or massage therapy.

“I don't have much musical talent, so it felt like I had only one career path,” recalled Huang, 30, now a doctoral student at Wuhan University of Technology and a social media influencer. Fortunately, the introduction of Braille test papers in the 2014 *gaokao* allowed blind students to take the exam alongside their sighted peers. Around 80 blind individuals in China have since had their lives transformed.

With 13.35 million students, including 16 blind candidates, having concluded this year's *gaokao* on Tuesday, Huang looked back on the exam she took 10 years ago, the one that changed her life and opened a world of possibilities.

Teachers encourage

Huang lost her sight to a fever at the age of 2. When she chose to enroll in senior high school — a path rarely taken by blind students at the time — *gaokao* test papers in Braille were unheard of.

“Opportunities come to those who are prepared. By continuing my education, I might discover other career paths,” Huang said, explaining her decision.

The wheels of fate began to turn in 2014, when acting on the proposal of a political adviser, the Ministry of Education stipulated that visually impaired individuals should have access to Braille or electronic exam papers and support staff to help them take the *gaokao*.

Huang was in her second year of high school when she recalled the school holding a rally to encourage blind students to seize the new opportunity. During the event, a chemistry teacher read out a sample test question to give them a sense of the exam, and most man-

aged to solve it. “The teacher encouraged us to be brave if we wanted to take the exam,” Huang recalled.

The *gaokao* is a standardized exam, and the total score from several subjects determines students' admission to their preferred schools of higher learning. As a significant social equalizer, the *gaokao* symbolizes fairness, opportunity, and the idea that personal effort can alter one's destiny. This standardized system ensures transparency and accountability in university admissions for a population of over 1.4 billion people.

The *gaokao* was not previously available in Braille due to concerns about leaks and the quality of Braille translation, among other factors. As a result, visually impaired students were given a special exam that allowed them to apply to a limited number of universities.

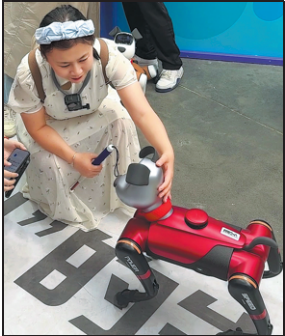
Taking the grueling *gaokao* can be physically demanding for blind candidates, as they are given 1.5 times more time than their sighted peers for each subject. For instance, while sighted students have two hours to complete the mathematics test, blind students are allotted three.

The extended time accounts for the sheer volume of the test papers. A single subject's Braille exam can contain more than 90 pages. Braille, a tactile reading and writing system, uses raised dots arranged in cells. Typically, each Chinese syllable requires two cells, with each cell comprising six dots.

Preparing for the exam is even more arduous for blind students, with Huang recalling geometry as particularly difficult to grasp.

While Braille cannot display three-dimensional graphics, she said, “I could only rely on my imagination based on the teacher's descriptions of the X, Y, and Z axes. However, since I lost my vision at a very young age, I don't have a clear concept of spatial structures. The difficulties felt insurmountable, and I felt like giving up countless times,” Huang recounted.

Nevertheless, she persevered with unwavering determination and was admitted to Wuhan University of Technology in 2015, scoring 85 points above the enrollment cutoff



Huang Ying interacts with a robot dog during a sci-tech exhibition in Beijing on May 16. XINHUA

for first-tier universities. She chose to major in social work.

Leading normal life

Huang said she loves dressing up like any girl her age, and describes herself as “someone who can do everything but see.” Now pursuing a PhD focused on the “behaviors and responses of disabled individuals during emergency events,” Huang has achieved what once seemed unimaginable, a testament to her indomitable spirit and the support she's received along the way.

She has fully embraced campus life, participating in daily routines — from academics to exercise — right alongside her fellow students. Each semester, her college counselor provides scanned electronic copies of all her textbooks so she can study using screen-reading software.

When she encountered challenges — particularly because screen readers cannot interpret mathematical symbols — a senior student would step in to help her navigate the Advanced Mathematics course. With that support, Huang painstakingly transcribed the lectures into more than 300 pages of Braille notes and ultimately aced the course with an impressive score of 97.

Beyond her academic pursuits, Huang was driven by a desire to empower others with visual impairments. She became a part-time tutor, teaching them practical skills, from running errands to navigating

smartphones, to help them step out of their homes and engage more confidently with the world.

In addition to giving public speeches, Huang began sharing glimpses of her life online in 2019. Over time, she started filming videos that documented her daily routines, from ordering takeout and applying makeup to shopping solo and enjoying leisure activities like ice skating, boating, and playing the piano, all captured from a first-person perspective. Her friend Che Meng helps edit the content, bringing her unique experiences to a wider audience through social media.

She has gained over 2 million followers across various social media platforms. A video of her navigating through crowds to buy a birthday cake for Che has received over 720,000 likes. One comment states, “I will never park my car on the blind path.” In another video, Huang expressed her gratitude to her followers, saying, “Any small change resulting from our advocacy makes me feel that my efforts are worthwhile.”

Huang's personal stories mirror the country's unrelenting efforts to improve the lives of its disabled population, including building barrier-free living environments, promoting inclusive education, and helping the disabled find employment.

On the academic front, China has implemented a range of supportive policies to enhance access to higher education for disabled individuals. This year, over 14,000 candidates with disabilities took the *gaokao*. As of September 2023, more than 90,000 students with disabilities were enrolled into colleges, and the enrollment rate for compulsory education among disabled children and adolescents had reached 95 percent.

Looking back on the past decade, Huang is proud of what she has achieved, from academic excellence to becoming a voice for her community.

“I've met so many incredible people and proven to myself that I really can do everything, except seeing,” she said.

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