

LIFE

Coffee award was a long time brewing

World barista title for Chinese winner sees precision, passion and patience foam to the top, **Li Yingxue** reports.

Under scorching stage lights in the Indonesian capital Jakarta, the air was electric. The host of the 2025 World Brewers Cup stood center stage, announcing the results in reverse order. Among the nine finalists, places three through to nine had already been revealed.

Only two names remained at the final, held last month: Bayu Prawiro of Indonesia and Peng Jinyang of China. One would be called; the other would be crowned world champion.

Cheers erupted — Indonesian fans roaring, Chinese supporters shouting with pride.

Then came the moment. “Bayu Prawiro,” the host called. The room exploded — not in disappointment, but in jubilation. Peng became the 2025 World Brewers Cup champion and the second barista from the Chinese mainland to claim the title.

It was a triumphant culmination of precision, passion and patience. In a competition where every gram, degree, and second matters, Peng rose above the rest — not just through technical mastery, but by infusing each pour with quiet confidence and storytelling flair.

Peng, better known by his nickname Captain George, is a fan of Marvel Comics’ superhero Captain America. With a soft spot for heroism, he just became a superhero in his own world — the world of coffee.

“I was overwhelmed by the deafening cheers at the venue,” the 34-year-old recalls. “It was the realization of a dream I’ve carried for so many years. I was emotional, but what truly moved me was the cheering from the Chinese fans. That meant the most.”

That was Peng’s second appearance at the World Brewers Cup. His debut, back in 2023, saw him finish fifth — an impressive result, but one that left him hungry for more.

“This year, I gave it everything,” he says. “Last time, I cut corners but still hoped for the best. This time, I truly have no regrets.”

When not at his cafe or roasting facility, Peng squeezed in practice wherever he could. A month before the competition, he flew to Jakarta with his team — and nearly 500 kilograms of gear. They rented an apartment, re-created the competition setup in their living room, and trained full time.

“We even hired a local carpenter to build a replica of the competition table,” Peng recalls.

He thought through every possible detail. The event would be held in a cavernous, open venue filled with thousands of spectators and the constant buzz of coffee exhibitors. All that noise, all that space — it could throw off a brew. So Peng adjusted.

“In a loud environment, coffee that tastes perfectly balanced at home or in a cafe can suddenly come across as bitter,” he explains. To prepare, his team created high-noise simulations so he could recalibrate his brews accordingly.

Even the presentation didn’t escape his perfectionism. The script

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Peng Jinyang, Chinese barista, 2025 World Brewers Cup champion



Peng Jinyang wins the 2025 World Brewers Cup and becomes the second barista from the Chinese mainland to claim the title.

he used onstage went through 16 revisions before he finally settled on the one that felt just right.

Captain and crew

Peng’s journey has never been a solo act. Among the key members of his team is Li Jinkun, a high school classmate and now his longtime business partner. Since 2013, the two have been building their coffee dream together — opening cafes, diving into roasting, and now running a 100-person roasting facility and four shops across Guiyang, capital of Guizhou province, and Shanghai under the Captain George name.

Seven years ago, they began competing in brewing competitions, taking turns representing their team. Between them, they’ve already claimed several national titles. “We’ve always backed each other,” Li says. “It’s a true team effort.”

In the month leading up to the 2025 competition, the team designed a detailed training plan tailored to the World Brewers Cup format. “It’s not just about brewing a great cup within the time limit,” Li explains. “You also have to articulate the entire process — explain the bean, the flavor profile, your technique. It’s multitasking under pressure. Both your hands and your words have to be precise.”

Unexpected challenges are common in competition. After every event, Peng’s team sits down to review what happened, dissecting

each moment to build experience for the next run.

Li recalls Peng’s first foray into competition back in 2018 — even before the China contest began, Peng was already preparing beans for the world championship.

“He told us then that he was going to become world champion,” Li says. “Back then, maybe only he believed it. But in 2025, he was still there, still focused, still chasing that same goal. And when the result was finally announced — I believed it.”

Looking ahead, Peng says he wants to help his team members prepare for future competitions and hopes to mentor the next World Brewers Cup. Personally, he’s also considering a new challenge: starting from scratch in coffee roasting competitions.

For him, coffee competitions are more than personal milestones — they drive the entire industry forward. “Preparing for a competition forces you to push your limits,” he says. “And the dynamic of friendly competition and collaboration among baristas helps elevate the craft across the board.”

“In recent years, tournaments in China have become increasingly competitive. At the same time, our skills are getting closer and closer to global standards.”

Matter of taste

Victory hasn’t slowed him for a second. At home, his cafes are frequented by fans.

One user on Xiaohongshu, or RedNote, Li Yizhu, shared that she’s been drinking coffee from Peng’s cafes since 2015. Even when visiting other cities, she often finds coffee shops using beans roasted by Peng’s team. “This shop holds a special place in my heart,” she wrote. “I’ve been drinking their coffee for 10 years.”

She also offered tasting notes from Peng’s Guiyang locations: “The Wenchang location has higher foot traffic, but the drinks are consistently good — especially signature drinks. The Taiping Road shop is perfect for hand-brews, especially during quieter hours.”

In Shanghai, Peng calls his cafe a “flavor museum”. It’s where he hopes customers will slow down and truly taste the nuances of a cup of coffee. His Guiyang locations, by contrast, are his “daily clubs” — spaces that serve as community hubs for casual gatherings and coffee lovers alike.

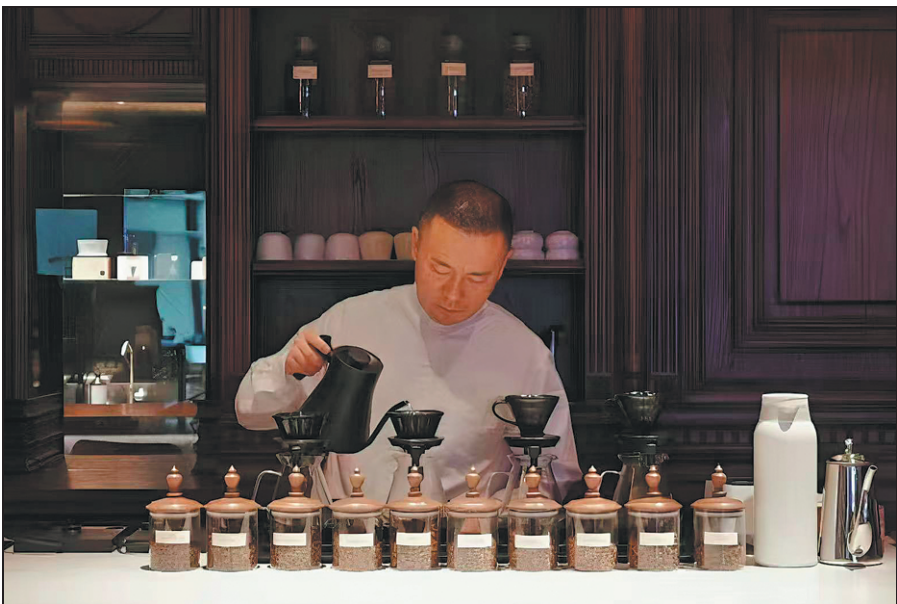
He’s also planning a second “flavor museum” in Guiyang, with more cities on the horizon.

His win is also emblematic of Guiyang’s fast-rising coffee scene. While the city doesn’t grow its own beans, its population of over 6 million and more than 3,000 cafes have brought forth one of the most vibrant coffee cultures in China.

The science of flavor

Temperature was the central theme of Peng’s presentation at this year’s World Brewers Cup — an idea drawn from years of roasting and brewing.

“In our cafe in Shanghai, we’ve installed an infrared thermometer



Clockwise from top left: Peng Jinyang’s cafe, Captain George Flavor Museum, in Shanghai. The interior of the cafe. The cafe is where Peng hopes customers will slow down and truly taste coffee’s nuances. Peng shows his expertise. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

for customers to see how flavor shifts at different drinking temperatures,” he explains. “That was the inspiration for this competition.”

To Peng, temperature runs through the entire coffee chain — from farm to roast to brew. “Even the warmth between people — good service in a cafe — is its own kind of temperature,” he says.

What fascinates Peng most is the journey from raw beans to a cup

that expresses the coffee’s full potential. Every step, from roasting to brewing, is a chance to experiment, a chance to refine.

“It’s a problem of constant permutation and combination,” he says. “Every variable changes the outcome. Before the degassing period, for example — carbon dioxide levels shift daily. So your brew method has to adapt. Even the weather on the day you brew

can influence flavor.”

For him, the joy lies in trial, error, and discovering repeatable formulas. “That’s what I love — solving the puzzle, cup by cup.”

He entered Jakarta chasing a dream. He left it with a title — and a puzzle he’ll keep solving, cup by cup.

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Ensuring cinema sounds as good as it looks

QINGDAO, Shandong — In a 60-square-meter prop room in the port city of Qingdao, East China’s Shandong province, a collection of seemingly worn-out items, including rusty chains, yellowed textbooks and mismatched enamel cups, awaits their moment to shine.

For Han Ruida, a Foley artist (named after an American, Jack Foley, who specialized in sound effects in the early years of Hollywood) with 16 years of experience, these are not just old junk, but treasures that breathe life into the world of cinema.

“Foley artists use a variety of props and techniques to re-create and interpret sounds that cannot be captured on set during film and television production,” Han explains.

With a simple snap of celery, the sound of a bone breaking is perfectly synchronized with the visuals on screen. A piece of leather placed on a feather fan and vigorously waved can simulate the fluttering of birds



Left: Foley artist Han Ruida brushes a feather fan against his palm to simulate the fluttering of birds in flight at the prop room of his studio in Qingdao, Shandong province, earlier this month.



Right: The prop room of Han’s studio in Qingdao.

PHOTOS BY ZHANG LIYUAN / XINHUA

in flight. Pouring sand from a salt shaker onto tin foil at different heights creates the ebb and flow of rain. Chewing on a mouthful of chive leaves brings to life the scene of a cow grazing.

Over the years, Han has explored the sonic potential of ordinary objects, using sound to “act” behind the scenes.

Sometimes, the challenge lies in creating sounds that are more vivid

than reality. When footsteps on broken glass are needed, simply dropping ice cubes into a glass won’t do. The sound lacks the desired expressiveness and texture.

After countless trials, Han found the right mix by adding leaves, plastic sheets, and fine sand to a basin of glass shards. The combination gave the sound a richer, more dynamic quality, turning ice into something far more expressive.

In 2017, Qingdao earned the title of UNESCO City of Film, becoming the first city in China to receive the honor. Since then, with major productions like *The Wandering Earth* filmed there, China’s domestic film industry has taken significant strides toward industrialization.

The roles within the industry have grown increasingly specialized, and Foley artists, once seen as technical support, are now expected to think like directors and screenwriters, using sound to deepen storytelling and enrich the cinematic experience.

Even something as simple as footsteps holds a world of complexity. “Footsteps convey emotions. The sound of someone walking with enthusiasm is different from that of someone in sorrow. Children and the elderly also have distinct footsteps,” Han says, adding that he once spent three years just studying the nuances of footsteps.

“While computer-generated sound effects can achieve basic results, it is the organic, lifelike sounds that truly touch people’s hearts,” he adds.

For Foley artists, real-life sounds are not just auditory stimuli; they are a wellspring of inspiration. When a sound that does not exist in reality is needed for a plot, the Foley artist becomes a “magician”.

While working on a key prop sound for a science fiction film, Han tried rolling steel balls on different types of wood, but the results were unsatisfactory. Finally, he found a transformer at a scrapyard. The steel balls rolling on it produced a wide range of sound variations in a short time, creating the crucial sound needed for the plot.

Completing the Foley work for a film takes at least a month. Sometimes, just a few seconds of footage can correspond to hundreds of soundtracks.

Today, Han’s sound library contains thousands of sounds he has collected himself, including wind, cicada chirps and the sound of his loved one combing her hair.

“Extracting sounds from the noisy world, deconstructing and refining them into individual elements, and then using them to complete and enrich more film and television works is a wonderful and magical process,” Han says.

From film locations and production bases to a hub of the film industry, Qingdao has grown alongside China’s film industry. Today, the port city is building a comprehensive film ecosystem that spans creative development, production, IP commercialization, and AI-powered collaboration. Data shows that from 2018 to 2024, among the top 50 domestic box-office hits, eight have production connections with Qingdao.