



Remarks

**Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn,
at the
Reception on the Occasion of the 77th Anniversary of the
Founding of the People's Republic of China and the Fifth Anniversary of
the ASEAN–China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**

Jakarta, Indonesia, 24 September 2026

Your Excellency Wang Qing, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to ASEAN,

Your Excellency Sarah Al Bakri Devadason, Permanent Representative of Malaysia to ASEAN and Country Coordinator for ASEAN–China Dialogue Relations,

Your Excellency Evangeline T. Ong Jimenez-Ducrocq, Permanent Representative of the Philippines to ASEAN and Chair of the CPR,

Excellencies, Members of the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN,

Excellencies, Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Evening.

1. It is a great pleasure to join you this evening to mark two important occasions at once: the 77th Anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, and the Fifth Anniversary of the ASEAN–China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership as well as the 35th Anniversary of the ASEAN-China Dialogue Relations. On behalf of ASEAN, I extend my warmest congratulations to the Government and people of China. I also express my appreciation for the enduring friendship between our peoples.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

2. These twin anniversaries invite us to look beyond the milestones themselves. China's journey over the past seven decades has profoundly reshaped the regional and global landscape. The ASEAN–China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership,

meanwhile, has developed into one of the region's most consequential relationships. Let me then reflect briefly on both journeys: how far we've come, and how that shared history points us toward what lies ahead.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. Seventy-seven years ago, China stood among the world's most impoverished nations. Across the four decades that followed, close to 800 million people were lifted out of extreme poverty. The World Bank has called this a scale and speed unmatched in human history. At the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, illiteracy hovered near 80 percent. Barely one in twenty children made it to secondary school. Decades of sustained investment in human capital transformed those figures beyond recognition and, of course, imagination. Adult literacy has risen above 97 percent. Gross enrollment in higher education has climbed from under one percent in the 1970s to over 60 percent of young adults today.
4. The physical transformation has been just as striking. China now operates more than 50,000 kilometres of high-speed railway, more than the rest of the world combined, reaching nearly every city with half a million people or more. That same pattern of sustained investment now shows up at the technology frontier. China's electric vehicle and battery industries lead global exports. In artificial intelligence, its researchers and firms have become major contributors to a field once dominated by only a handful of countries. These are not isolated successes. They reflect decades of investment in science, engineering and skilled people. They also reflect vision, determination, and leadership of the country, especially in recent year.
5. No transformation of this scale comes without new challenges. China's population is aging, placing real pressure on its labour force and social safety net. The economy is now working through the harder task of shifting from investment- and export-led expansion toward more balanced, innovation-driven growth. These are not small tasks. But China has met great challenges before, and it is already responding: through social reform, heavy investment in clean energy, and a deliberate push up the technology ladder.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

6. China's transformation has not taken place in isolation. Its rise has reshaped our region and the world and created new opportunities for cooperation with its neighbours and, of course, countries around the world. ASEAN-China relations have deepened in tandem. Since Dialogue Partnership began in 1991, our partnership has expanded to encompass virtually every area of cooperation. China has been ASEAN's largest trading partner for 17 consecutive years, and ASEAN

has been China's largest for the past seven years.¹ In 2025, two-way trade surpassed for the very first time USD 1 trillion.²

7. The establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2021 reflected the depth and breadth of our ties that had already been acquired. Five years on, it continues to serve as a key pillar to regional peace, stability and prosperity. We appreciate China's contributions to peace, stability and prosperity in the region and beyond, and its continued support for ASEAN Centrality, unity and integration, as well as the ASEAN Community-building, including ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future. We also appreciate China's support for the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), and our shared commitment to an open, rules-based regional order. We continue to maintain and promote cooperation in trade, investment, tourism, connectivity and people-to-people exchanges. Of course, I must take a look outside at all of these snapshots of all the key activities in the past five years. Every panel there captures the essence of our relations and cooperation. The new ASEAN–China Plan of Action for 2026 to 2030 carries this forward, in step with ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future. The ASEAN-China Free Trade Area 3.0 Upgrade Protocol will certainly deepen our economic integration further. New cooperation is also taking shape in digital transformation, clean energy, supply chain resilience, connectivity and certainly sustainable development. We also continue consolidating and strengthening ASEAN–China mechanisms. Of course, we now have 66 and there are several more that are being discussed with ASEAN Member States and are in the pipeline, including in education, housing and construction, health and energy sector. Strengthening ASEAN-China mechanisms will contribute to the advancement of our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
8. Perhaps nowhere is the deepening of our connections more tangible than in physical connectivity. Over the past decades, new roads and highways have brought our markets closer; new railways have carried more people and goods across borders; and now waterways are opening new routes between China and Southeast Asia. The recently opened Pinglu Canal in Guangxi is a striking example. By linking the Xijiang river system directly to the Beibu Gulf, it shortens the shipping distance between southwestern China and ASEAN markets by more than 500 kilometres. Direct air connectivity has also expanded significantly, with scheduled passenger flights between China and ASEAN countries averaging more than 2,500 per week just last year.³

¹ UN COMTRADE database, as of June 2026

² State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China/Xinhua, "China-ASEAN trade exceeds 1 trillion USD for first time in 2025", 1 September 2026

³ Viet Nam National Authority of Tourism, *Viet Nam – A Bright Spot in ASEAN+3 Tourism Cooperation*, 2025.

9. It is a fitting symbol of where this partnership is headed: building new routes and bridges that connect our economies, communities and futures. Physical connectivity, in turn, enables greater human connectivity, building on decades of educational, tourism and youth exchanges that have brought our peoples closer. In 2025, 21.8 million visitors from China travelled to ASEAN⁴, while over 100,000 students from ASEAN countries have studied in China⁵. And as our ties deepen, so too must our efforts to build bridges on the more complex issues that affect our shared security. This is reflected in our shared commitment to dialogue and international law, including the positive momentum towards an effective and substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

10. Friendships like this one only grow more precious with time. That has certainly been true of ASEAN and China. Five years into this Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, and more than three decades into our dialogue relations, the friendship between us continues to deepen. The photo exhibition opening this evening captures some of that shared journey. I hope it brings back fond memories of the distance we have travelled together, and warms us to the road of opportunity still ahead.
11. Once again, my warmest congratulations to the People's Republic of China, its government and its people, and, of course, the Mission of the People's Republic of China to ASEAN, on its 77th Anniversary. May China continue to prosper, and may its people enjoy continued peace, well-being and success. Of course, also for ASEAN and China, may our relations continue to grow, our partnership continue to expand, and our Comprehensive Strategic Partnership continue to deepen and strengthen.
12. We also look forward to working closely with China to build the next important chapter of our partnership, one that is more connected, resilient, dynamic, innovative, sustainable and people-centred. May the ASEAN–China Comprehensive Strategic Partnership continue to flourish and deliver lasting benefits for all of us, especially our peoples from both side.

Thank you, and I wish you all a very pleasant evening.

⁴ ASEAN Statistics, preliminary Tourism Data as of 12 February 2026.

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Progress Report on China's Efforts to Build a Peaceful, Safe and Secure, Prosperous, Beautiful and Amicable Homeland", 6 June 2024.