

# “Cooperation and development”

## China – Switzerland’s third largest trading partner

Interview with Consul General Chen Yun\*



Consul General Ms Chen Yun. (Picture ma)

(CH-S) “Swiss Standpoint” had the opportunity to ask the Consul General of the People’s Republic of China, Ms Chen Yun, about relations between Switzerland and China. The occasion was an invitation to the celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the People’s Republic of

China in September.

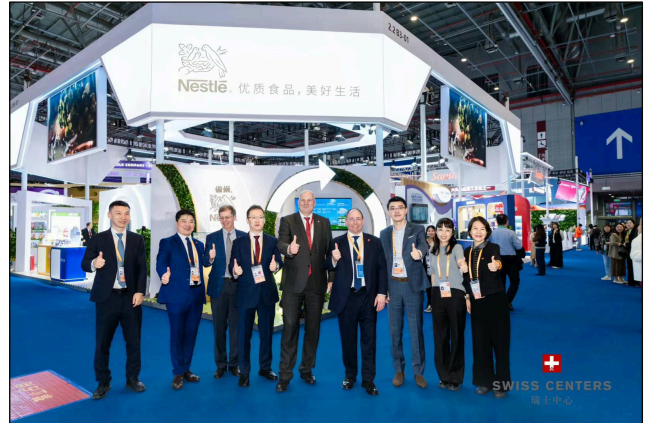
Switzerland was one of the first countries to recognise the People’s Republic of China after its founding and has sought to maintain good relations ever since. The free trade agreement between the two countries, which has been in force since 2014, is a milestone in this regard. Especially in geopolitically challenging times, it is important to maintain a broad network of positive relationships.

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*Swiss Standpoint:* Dear Consul General Chen Yun, we are pleased that you are taking the time to answer some questions. Seen from Switzerland, it can be observed that hundreds of millions of Chinese are now living in prosperity. A few decades ago, this would have been unthinkable. What is the recipe for China’s rapid economic development?

*Consul General Chen Yun:* China’s historic achievements in recent decades have been accomplished by hundreds of millions of Chinese through hard work and diligence. The *Communist Party of China* has played a strong leadership role in this. The reform and opening-up is signi-

\* Consul General *Chen Yun* (1974) was appointed Consul General of the People’s Republic of China in Zurich and for the Principality of Liechtenstein in 2023. Since 1996, she has worked, among other places, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, at the Chinese Embassy in the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, in the United States of America and in the Republic of Indonesia.



China International Import Expo CIIIE 2024 in Shanghai. (Picture ma)

ficant for today’s China to catch up with the times. In 1978, China decided to implement the reform and opening-up policy and place building up the economy at the centre of national work.

Within a few decades, China has become the world’s second largest economy, the largest manufacturing country, the largest goods trading country and the second largest consumer market. China’s ranking in the Global Innovation Index is now close to the top 10 in the world.

China’s economy is now transitioning from a high-speed phase to a high-quality development phase. China is applying the concept of innovative, coordinated, green, open and inclusive development to accelerate the development of productive forces of a new quality.

China’s socialist market economy, its huge market, its entire industrial system and its large number of highly qualified workers and entrepreneurial talent are four major advantages that create favourable conditions for China’s sustained economic recovery. Since the beginning of this year, China’s economy has made steady progress, and its recovery has become more stable and stronger. China will continue to make positive contributions to the development of the global economy.

*What role does Switzerland play for the People’s Republic of China?*

Switzerland is in the heart of Europe, and despite the great distance between the two countries,

China and Switzerland have enjoyed a valuable friendship for a long time. Switzerland was one of the first Western countries to recognise the People's Republic of China and establish diplomatic relations with it.

Sino-Swiss relations are at the forefront of Sino-European relations in many areas, and in 2016, both sides established an innovative strategic partnership.

Friendly exchanges and mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields such as politics, economy, finance, education, science and technology, and culture have become increasingly close, bringing tangible benefits to the people of both countries.

Next year, we will celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations. The China-Switzerland relationship is an example of friendship and cooperation between countries of different sizes and systems, and together they have made a positive contribution to world peace, development and global governance. We look forward to further progress in China-Switzerland cooperation.

*Where do you see further prospects for trade between China and Switzerland?*

China has been Switzerland's third largest trading partner for many years. Swiss companies have strong ties with the Chinese market. The China-Switzerland Free Trade Agreement (FTA), which has been in effect since 2014, is the first FTA concluded between China and a continental European country and has been recognised by both sides for its positive results in promoting bilateral trade in goods, services and investment over the past decade. The two countries have formally started negotiations on the expansion of the FTA.

China and Switzerland have strong economic complementarities and a broad scope for cooperation, with huge potential for both in traditional and emerging industries, such as the green economy, the digital economy, life sciences and other areas. China continues to promote high-quality development and a high level of opening to the outside world, offering foreign companies numerous opportunities for cooperation and development, as well as a streamlined, transparent and predictable business environment for investment and operations. We welcome Swiss companies to seize the "China opportunity".



*Agricultural innovations. (Picture ma)*

*We are pleased very much that many Chinese tourists visit Switzerland. China is also increasingly establishing itself as a travel destination in Europe. Which destination in China would you personally recommend to people who want to get to know your country better?*

Switzerland is famous as the "Garden of the World" and Swiss products are known all over the world. Switzerland is an important destination for Chinese tourists. In the first three quarters of this year, the number of Chinese people travelling to and from China exceeded 440 million, and many Chinese tourists have also travelled to Switzerland.

At the same time, China's vastness, history and cultural diversity are also popular with foreign tourists. In the first three quarters of the year, more than 20 million foreigners entered the country, almost 60% of whom came under the various visa-free measures. China's modern and international side is evident in many of its big cities and coastal regions, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Shenzhen, but also in the vast central and western regions, which are rich in diverse and distinctive natural landscapes, regional cultures, traditions and cuisines.

China's visa exemption for Swiss citizens is in force and has been extended until the end of 2025. A visa-free stay in China is now possible for a maximum of 30 days.<sup>1</sup> We warmly welcome you and look forward to seeing more Swiss friends in China.

*Do you see any further opportunities for increasing the cultural exchange between the two countries?*

As far as I know, cultural exchanges between China and Switzerland are very active. It is encouraging to see that many Swiss people are in-

terested in China and that some of them are learning Chinese. Next year marks the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Switzerland. Both sides are jointly preparing for the “China-Switzerland Cultural and Tourism Year”, which will provide an important opportunity to further invigorate cultural exchanges between the two countries.

Tourism undoubtedly offers great opportunities for people in both countries to meet and exchange ideas. Educational cooperation, artistic exchanges, sports events and cultural performance exchanges are all forms in which people from different cultures can share with each other.

This summer, a Chinese dragon boat team made up of villagers came to the canton of Zurich to take part in the Eglisau dragon boat race. There they competed with the Swiss teams in a very exciting and intense race, while at the same time promoting intercultural friendships with their Swiss friends.

*What goals has China set for itself in the coming years?*

China’s rapid development over many decades has created a solid foundation, and the Chinese economy has entered a new phase of development and transformation. We are vigorously promoting high-quality development.

In July of this year, the Communist Party of China held the third plenary session of the twentieth Central Committee, at which a systematic commitment was made to comprehensively deepen reforms and promote modernisation, with the overarching goal of continuously improving and developing the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics and advancing the modernisation of our system of governance and the state’s ability to govern.

The Plenary Session proposed more than 300 specific initiatives for comprehensive reforms across the board, including deepening the reform of the economic system, making overall innovations, and promoting democracy, rule of law, culture, people’s livelihood, ecology, security, etc., and plans to complete the proposed reform tasks by 2029. Some policies have already been introduced one after another.

The plenary session also conveyed to the world China’s clear position of deepening reforms and advocating an open world economy,



*Modern cotton harvester in use. (Picture ma)*

which will contribute to the stability and development of the world economy.

*What do you think of the attempts by some media outlets to portray China as an enemy?*

“Seeing is better than hearing a hundred times.” China is an open country, and we warmly welcome friends from all over the world to travel, work and live in China. Since the beginning of this year, China has further expanded the list of countries that are granted unilateral visa-free access to China and introduced various types of visa-free transit and related measures to facilitate the entry and exit of foreigners to China. As I mentioned earlier, many foreigners have already travelled to China spontaneously and found that what they saw and heard in China is completely different from what is portrayed in some media.

In terms of policy and concepts, China pursues an independent foreign policy of peace and adheres to the path of peaceful development. “Harmony despite differences” and “cooperation in the same boat” are important concepts that the Chinese people have held for thousands of years. China believes that humanity shares a common destiny and should join forces to overcome common challenges. Chinese society is

open and tolerant, and its people are warm and friendly. What China brings to the world is co-operation and common development.

*A personal question: Do you have places in Zurich or in Switzerland where you can relax or that you particularly enjoy? How do you perceive the differences between the Chinese and the Swiss? What has amazed you, what has pleased you? When do you particularly enjoy your work?*

It is a great honour for me to work and live in this beautiful city of Zurich. I have gained a lot: whether in a city full of history and diversity like Zurich or in the tranquil and cosy rural area, Switzerland shows its unique style and charm. I am very grateful for the hospitality I receive from my Swiss friends.

It is a pleasure to get to know different histories, cultures, traditions, living environments and lifestyles. At the same time, I have found that the Swiss and the Chinese share many characteristics, such as being very hardworking, valuing honesty and sincerity, and placing a high value on family and friends. These impressions of me are shared by many Swiss friends. It gives me



*Chinese team at the dragon boat race in Eglisau, June 2024. (Picture ma)*

great pleasure to be able to share with my friends, both at work and in my free time, some of the differences between our two countries that we find attractive and even love, and to promote understanding and friendship between people of our two countries.

*Consul General Ms Chen Yun, thank you for the interview!*

*(Translation "Swiss Standpoint")*

<sup>1</sup> [http://zurich.china-consulate.gov.cn/det/zytz/202411/t20241125\\_11532627.htm](http://zurich.china-consulate.gov.cn/det/zytz/202411/t20241125_11532627.htm)