

XI'S VISIT

Chinese travelers find a portal to ancient Egypt

Exhibits broaden cultural horizons, pave way for further dialogue and cooperation

By XU LIN
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Stepping into the magnificent main hall of the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza, Egypt, visitors are instantly impressed by the colossal statues from an ancient world, including the gigantic monolith of King Ramesses II, dating back more than 3,200 years.

The making of these towering figures is among the most distinctive phenomena in ancient Egypt, and it reflects how ordinary people revered and deified their rulers.

If the museum's main hall is mesmerizing, its Tutankhamun collection is overwhelming. The galleries dedicated to ancient Egypt's famous boy king, who ascended the throne at age 9, display more than 5,000 artifacts unearthed from his tomb.

The discovery of Tutankhamun's largely intact 14th century BC tomb in 1922 by British archaeologist Howard Carter and his team is considered one of the most significant archaeological findings in the modern era. Tourists from across the globe, including China, visit the museum for a glimpse of Tutankhamun's gold burial mask, which features elaborate carvings and precious stone inlay.

"My very first impression of the museum was how fresh and modern everything feels, from the facilities to the overall design," said Mi Jie, an office worker from Beijing who traveled to Egypt with her family earlier this year.

"The massive collection of Tutankhamun-related artifacts, including clothes, jewelry, a gold throne and war chariots, traces his life from birth to death. From these exhibits, we also get an idea of the daily life in ancient Egypt," said Mi, who also visited the Pyramids of Giza, the Great Sphinx and the Valley of the Kings.

"The locals are incredibly hospitable, and they greeted us spontaneously. When one of my family members lost a pair of glasses, the ticketing officer alerted the museum staff to help search for them," she added.

Surging enthusiasm

The Grand Egyptian Museum, which fully opened to the public in November, houses more than 57,000 artifacts and is said to be the world's largest museum dedicated to a single civilization. It has become one of the most talked-about cultural destinations among Chinese tourists such as Mi.

Hussein Bassir, former general supervisor of the museum, described the sprawling facility as "a major cultural gateway to Egypt's ancient civilization."

"The relationship between Egypt and China has the potential to create a lasting bridge between two great ancient civilizations, connecting their shared historical legacy with future opportunities for dialogue and cooperation," he said.

Bassir added that he expects the Egyptian museum to become an increasingly important destination for Chinese visitors as people-to-people exchanges between the two nations continue to grow.

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visitors attended the exhibition, titled *On Top of the Pyramid: The Civilization of Ancient Egypt*, which was held at the Shanghai Museum from July 2024 to August 2025.

Chinese people regarding ancient Egypt can be gauged from the attendance at a relevant exhibition in Shanghai. The exhibition, titled *On Top of the Pyramid: The Civilization of Ancient Egypt*, which was held at the Shanghai Museum from July 2024 to August 2025, recorded over 2.77 million visitors.

"This shows that Chinese audiences, especially young people, have deep curiosity about and an emotional connection with ancient Egyptian civilization," said Ahmed Youssef, CEO of the Egyptian Tourism Authority.

As Chinese citizens traveling to Egypt have become eligible for both electronic visas and visas on arrival, the African nation welcomed around 360,000 Chinese tourists in 2025.

Starting on Aug 1, Cairo International Airport in the Egyptian capital also launched a digital Visa-on-Arrival system, which will gradually replace paper visas with dedicated QR codes.

Youssef noted that China has re-emerged as one of Egypt's fastest-growing and long-haul tourist source markets in Asia, supported by enhanced direct-flight connectivity between Cairo and major Chinese cities.

"We are seeing a cultural and leisure travel trend that blends Egyptian heritage with Red Sea wellness experience, as well as growing demand for experience-oriented products such as curated museum visits and photogenic travel itineraries," he said.

In order to cater to this growing demand, Egypt is ramping up Chinese-language support by introducing licensed Chinese-speaking guides and putting up signage and information boards at major attractions in Chinese, Youssef said.

The tourism authority is also working with hotels, cruise operators and attractions to boost pay-

ment convenience for Chinese travelers, while upgrading dining options and service readiness.

Cong Sen, an analyst at Shanghai-based multinational travel agency Trip.com Group's research institute, said that Chinese visitors to the museum in Giza seek professional Chinese-language guided tours to better understand the exhibits and their history. They also expect well-planned itineraries for in-depth civilizational experiences in optimum time, he said.

Bookings for Egypt by Chinese travelers have steadily increased on the platform over the past two years, with flexible itineraries combined with comprehensive guided tours and in-depth experience being the primary growth driver for small group tours, Cong added.

Mutual learning

As this year marks the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Egypt, both sides have organized a series of events to deepen mutual understanding between their cultures and advance people-to-people exchanges.

In recent years, the two countries have strengthened their archaeological cooperation, with joint excavation missions at the Karnak Temple Complex in Luxor and the Sekhmet Temple site in the ancient city of Memphis, which have led to significant discoveries.

Bassir, the former general supervisor of the Egyptian museum, said he believes that the facility provides an important platform for expanding cultural and archaeological cooperation between Egypt and China. He pointed out that there is considerable potential for joint archaeological research, academic exchanges, exhibitions, conservation projects and digital heritage initiatives.

Bassir said he expects the Egypt-China relations in this field to develop beyond tourism and evolve into a broader cultural partnership based on archaeology, knowledge exchange, heritage protection, and dialogue between the two countries.

While working with his counterparts in Sino-Egyptian cooperation programs, Beijing-based archaeologist Gao Wei said he found that the people of Egypt are very expressive and warmhearted.

"We noticeably share pride in our respective ancient civilizations. This sense of pride motivates our collaborative work in scientific archaeological excavation," Gao said.

He recalled that, during the installation of the pre-opening exhibit work at the Egyptian museum, local conservators and restoration specialists took on a large part of the workload, striving to present artifacts in optimal condition. This level of precision reflects both their expertise and passion, he said.

"Professional-level archaeological exchanges have led to more public lectures and special exhibitions on ancient Egypt in China, bringing another ancient civilization closer to Chinese audiences and widening their horizons," Gao added.

Wang Huan, deputy director of Shanghai International Studies University's Institute for the Global History of Civilizations, said that mutual learning between the Chinese and Egyptian civilizations has gradually evolved into long-term operational mechanisms.

"Governments lay out cooperation frameworks, archaeological bodies and universities conduct joint historical studies, and museums deliver heritage conservation and public outreach, while tourism, education and social engagement bring the general public into the process," he said.

Wang said he believes that tourism can serve as a vital channel for mutual learning between civilizations. He added that the key lies in high-quality exhibits, guided tours and clear interpretations, and knowledge dissemination, so that a simple visit can provide insight into the history and culture of another society.

Sara El Ashrafy in Cairo contributed to this story.



Peng Liyuan, wife of President Xi Jinping, and Entissar El-Sisi, wife of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi, visit a small handicrafts exhibition on Wednesday in Cairo, the capital of Egypt. LIU BIN / XINHUA

Peng calls for strengthening exchanges

By ZHOU JIN
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China and Egypt share many cultural similarities, Peng Liyuan, wife of President Xi Jinping, said on Wednesday, adding that she hopes artists from the two countries will strengthen exchanges and cooperation to

allow traditional crafts to continue to shine with renewed vitality through inheritance and mutual learning.

Peng made the remarks while chatting over tea and visiting a small handicrafts exhibition in Cairo, the capital of Egypt, with Entissar El-Sisi, wife of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi.

Peng had a cordial exchange with Entissar El-Sisi on China-Egypt friendship and people-to-people exchanges. Egypt has a long history and a profound cultural heritage, Peng said, noting that the exquisite exhibits fully showcase the wisdom and unique aesthetic sensibilities of the Egyptian people.

Ties: Popularity of courses keeps growing

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As online tutors appear on the screens, local teachers stand by to provide face-to-face support.

"Over 100 people inquire about our online Chinese courses daily. That shows just how popular learning Chinese has become across the Arab world," said Essam Audam Adam Ahamed, general manager of international marketing at Wisdom House International Culture Communication Group, a company dedicated to teaching Chinese to Arabic-speaking communities.

"For young Arabs, learning Chinese used to be a hobby; now it is increasingly seen as a pathway to future careers," he said. "Learning Chinese opens up new opportunities."

The surging enthusiasm for learning Chinese and Arabic stems from a shared desire to deepen mutual understanding between China and Arab states. For centuries, Chinese and Arab civilizations have connected through trade and people-to-people exchanges. Today, that connection is being rejuvenated amid the trend for learning each other's languages.

Noting that language is the best key to understanding a country, President Xi Jinping said he is sincerely glad that the youths in Saudi Arabia have learned about a colorful, multi-dimensional and comprehensive China through learning Chinese.

Learning each other's language and understanding each other's history and culture will help promote mutual understanding and bring the two peoples closer together, Xi said in a reply letter in 2022 to students learning Chinese.

From barriers to bonds

When Sobhy first came to China in 2015, he never expected that language would be such a huge barrier. He struggled to order meals at restaurants and negotiate with garment suppliers, relying entirely on hand gestures.

Constant interactions with Chinese friends and business clients helped him gradually grasp the language. Today, he makes phone calls, sends text messages effortlessly in Chinese, and runs seven companies in China.

Sobhy started teaching local merchants Arabic in 2019, when he found that most Arab buyers, like him at one time, spoke little Chinese or English.

Among his students is Zheng Lang, an English-major-turned-merchant at Shishi clothing city, where clients mainly come from Arab states, South America and Central Asia. "Mastering the language gives me an upper hand," Zheng said. "At the very least, I can communicate smoothly and grasp their demands instantly."

For Zheng, language has opened a door that leads not merely to business, but more importantly, mutual trust. Having worked in the garment trade for a decade, Zheng said her



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Arab clients all speak highly of made-in-China goods, saying that China is incredibly capable.

As mutual trust has deepened between Chinese and Arab traders, a growing number of Arabs have flocked to the clothing city. Mohammed Alqubati, who earned his doctorate in mathematics in China, spotted untapped business opportunities amid this trend and opened a restaurant serving Arab cuisine.

"Many new Arab merchants have no idea where to source factories, retail outlets and raw materials, so they often come to the restaurant for advice," Alqubati said, stressing that the venue has gradually become a hub for cultural exchanges, social gatherings and business negotiations.

Both the clothing market and the Arab restaurant stand as vivid footnotes to the exchanges between China and Arab states over the past 70 years, a journey tracing back to 1956 when Egypt became the first Arab and African country to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.

Ahmed Mustafa Fahmy, head of the League of Arab States' China representative office, said: "The China-Arab relationship is defined by a high degree of strategic mutual trust. This trust has been built not only over the past seven decades, but can be traced back to the era of the ancient Silk Road."

The relationship between the two sides has always been characterized by mutual trust, mutual learning and mutual benefit, and there never have been strategic differences, he told China International Communications Group in a recent interview.

Deeper understanding

China has signed cooperation documents within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative with all 22 Arab states and the League of Arab States. As the two sides continue to deepen cooperation across a wide range of sectors, observers have highlighted the role culture plays in bringing people together.

Hussain bin Ibrahim Al Hammadi, ambassador of the United Arab

Emirates to China, said that through education, language learning, publishing, artistic collaboration and academic exchanges, the two countries continue to strengthen the people-to-people connections that underpin long-term cooperation.

"The true strength of any enduring partnership extends beyond economics. It is ultimately measured by the connections between people," he said in a signed article published by Global Times.

Ahamed, the general manager at Wisdom House, expressed hope that more Arabs will learn Chinese, and more Chinese people will learn Arabic. "Language is one of the most beautiful bridges between civilizations. Through language, we get to know, understand and respect each other," he said.

In recent years, a "Chinese language boom" has been taking place across the Arab world. From the Middle East to North Africa, Chinese language classrooms are multiplying. More than a dozen Arab countries have established Confucius Institutes, and an increasing number of Arab states, including the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Oman, have formally incorporated Chinese into their national education systems.

Ahamed said that the demand for local professionals who are fluent in both Arabic and Chinese will keep rising, as numerous Chinese companies have set up operations across Arab states, covering the areas of energy, infrastructure and e-commerce.

"That's why I believe learning Chinese means more job opportunities and broader career choices for young Arabs," he added.

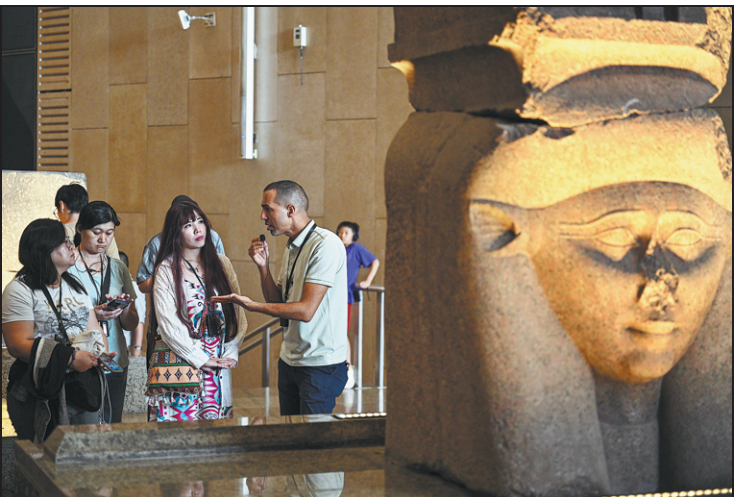
Besides Chinese language education, Zhang Shirong, chairman and founder of Wisdom House, said he has witnessed a clear rise in demand for Chinese books, films and TV series since the first China-Arab States Summit in 2022, as more people across the Arab world seek to learn more about China.

"We have noted that political parties, prominent figures, scholars and students in Arab states are paying close attention to China's governance theories and practices," he said. "Among all the books we have sold, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* draws the greatest attention and ranks first in single-book sales," Zhang said.

Ahamed said the company has set up Chinese language education institutes in 10 countries, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Egypt and Libya.

Calling language the finest bridge for mutual learning among civilizations, he laid out an ambitious target, saying that "our next goal is to roll out our programs to cover all 22 Arab states".

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Chinese visitors get a guided tour of the Grand Egyptian Museum in Giza, Egypt, on July 2. The granite capital of a column dedicated to Egyptian goddess Hathor is seen in the foreground. XIN MENGCHEN / XINHUA