Two Sessions 2026

Dialogue with Foreign Experts

Editor's Note

China's annual sessions of its top legislature and political advisory body, known as the "Two Sessions," convened in Beijing on March 5 and March 4, respectively. As 2026 marks the first year of the 15th Five-Year Plan, the event carries heightened expectations. The discussions and decisions on sci-tech development, people's well-being and international cooperation will offer a key window into the policies shaping the years ahead.

In this special edition, international experts and observers share their insights on China's evolving role as a global sci-tech hub, the tangible results of its institutional opening-up, and the future industries poised to redefine global collaboration.

Global Voices on China's Sci-tech Voyage

French Professor Pierre Agostini, 2023 winner of the Nobel Prize in Physics, first came to China about 40 years ago, invited by the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS). What he saw back then was a scientific community rebuilding itself, with modest facilities and limited international connections. Today, what he sees is vastly different. A transition is in the making. He sees cutting-edge infrastructure, vibrant research- and a deep commitment to discovery.

"My recent visits have shown me the incredible advancement of Chinese research compared to my first visit to the Institutes of Optics in Xi'an and Shanghai as a guest of CAS decades ago. It makes me regret not having been more involved with the Chinese scientific community over those years," he said.

That regret speaks volumes not just of personal reflection, but of a broader shift. China has stepped onto the global stage not only as a manufacturing power, but as a rising center for sci-tech innovation. This is evident from the investment in basic research to the rise of world-class laboratories; the foundation is being laid for long-term breakthroughs.

Foundations of excellence

At the heart of this scientific growth lies a renewed emphasis on basic science, a domain where curiosity meets national purpose. Russian-American Professor Efim Zelmanov, Fields medalist and distinguished mathematician, has been living and working in China for over three and a half years and likes what he sees. "I'm very impressed by the support that mathematics and other sciences receive from society as a whole and from all levels of government. The support is amazing," he said.

Zelmanov, who solved a century-old problem in symmetry to win the most prestigious award in mathematics, sees China's progress as undeniable. What strikes him most is not just funding, but cultural depth. "China has a respect for education that goes back thousands of years." This enduring value system, now aligned with modern scientific ambition, has created fertile ground for intellectual growth. A decade ago, top Chinese students often pursued graduate studies abroad. But times have changed. "Top Chinese universities are very strong. And more and more young international talent is coming to China for postdoctoral training. Now that's normal," Zelmanov said.

This ecosystem thrives on institutional inclusivity. Dr. Md Altab Hossin, a Bangladeshi expert at the School of Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Chengdu University, noted that China grants foreign researchers "equal and stable access to research funds," enabling true integration into the national scientific fabric. "By fostering both fundamental research and its application," Hossin said, "China positions scientists here at the forefront of global progress. I am proud to be part of this journey."

The spirit behind China's sci-tech rise

For international experts like Francesco Faiola, an Italian scientist at the Research Center for Eco-Environmental Sciences of CAS, China's scientific transformation is rooted in three core strengths: a clear mission, seamless synergy and unwavering perseverance. To him, these are not just strategies, but the very essence of China's rise.

In China, research often addresses real-world problems, such as overcoming bottlenecks in specific fields, advancing green energy development or improving public health. Faiola describes this approach as a "tangible act of building the future." He attributes China's success to a synergistic system that connects universities, institutes, industry and local governments into what he describes as a "well-trained scientific symphony orchestra."

Hossin shares this sentiment, applauding China's "mission-oriented" vision of the future. It is a vision that leverages regional innovation clusters to tackle global challenges like climate change.

① The Meng Xiang, China's first domestically designed and built deep-ocean drilling vessel, in Guangzhou, south China's Guangdong province. (PHOTO: XINHUA)

Perseverance is equally important, said Hossin. China is increasingly willing to invest in fundamental science even when outcomes remain uncertain.

Projects like the FAST radio telescope, decades in the making, show a patience observers call "a decade-long sharpening of a single sword." Evaluation systems are shifting to reward long-term persistence rather than just quick publications, creating opportunities for high-risk, high-reward work.

"Genuine original innovation cannot be scheduled," Faiola said. He believes that this strategic patience, combined with a clear vision, will elevate China from a major scientific player to a global powerhouse, offering genuine solutions to shared human challenges.

Future Industries Take Center Stage

The spotlight at this year's Spring Festival Gala fell on a new kind of performer. As the world's most-watched television program unfolded, Chinese humanoid robots commanded the stage with a display of agility that captivated audiences worldwide.

Videos of the event quickly circulated online, showing machines executing precise kung fu moves, synchronized dances, and elaborate gymnastics. This leap from tentative movement to athletic precision reflects a broader trend: the rapid maturation of China's future industries.

Official data released last week underscores this momentum. In 2025, approximately 1.13 million companies were established across eight emerging and nine future industries, a 9.9 percent increase from the previous year.

Behind these figures lies a strategic approach that international experts say blends long-term vision with immediate, real-world application.

② A robot in the exhibition area of the 2025 Global Industrial Internet Conference in Shenyang, northeast China's Liaoning province. (PHOTO: XINHUA)

The power of collaboration

Professor Giampaolo Buticchi, interim vice provost for Research and Knowledge Exchange at the University of Nottingham Ningbo China, views Chinese model as "compelling evidence of how sustained investment in education and innovation can accelerate technological progress."

"In recent years, remarkable advancements in areas such as digital services, renewable energy and robotics have shown how dedicated support for talent cultivation and research collaboration can drive tangible outcomes," he added.

Buticchi also highlighted the ecosystem formed by close cooperation among universities, enterprises and research institutions, where ideas move efficiently from the laboratory to practical use.

"These mechanisms, education, openness to entrepreneurship and cross-sector collaboration, are essential in any country seeking to translate research into societal benefit," he remarked. "China's experience demonstrates how these elements can be effectively mobilized to foster enduring progress."

From technology push to demand pull

In frontier fields like quantum technology and brain-computer interfaces, specific strategies are accelerating success. Professor Francesco Faiola, an Italian researcher deeply involved in China's biomanufacturing sector, points to two distinctive approaches: "gradient cultivation" and "industry-driven problem definition."

"China's promise lies in not treating future industries as isolated experiments," Faiola explained. The nation employs "gradient cultivation," leveraging its comprehensive supply chain to extend mature industrial capabilities into frontier technologies.

For instance, the current boom in biomanufacturing builds directly upon the robust foundation of the traditional chemical industry.

More critically, Faiola described a shift from "technology push" to "demand pull." In this model, "industry poses the questions, science provides the answers." By allowing enterprises facing real bottlenecks to define research agendas, China bridges the gap between laboratory discovery and market application.

"This organized, demand-driven research ensures that outcomes possess translational potential from the outset," Faiola said, citing how medical needs directly guide advancements in stem cell technologies. "This alignment of strategic vision with practical execution offers a feasible roadmap from the present to the future."

From catch-up to frontier

This strategic evolution is visible in sectors like commercial spaceflight, synthetic biology, and next-generation AI. Dennis Simon, senior fellow at the U.S. foreign policy think tank Quincy Institute, says China's push into these fields reflects a "maturing innovation strategy — one that is increasingly frontier-oriented rather than catch-up-focused."

China has "demonstrated an ability to scale complex engineering systems quickly." The iterative rocket testing resembles the "fast-fail, fast-learn" model pioneered elsewhere, but is "embedded in a state-coordinated system."

According to Simon, "China's advances regarding systems integration capability has been the key to Chinese progress," a situation he compares to high-speed rail. With this capability, he said China can turn long-term bets into real-world impact.

A global blueprint

These strategies extend far beyond the laboratory, reshaping the very fabric of daily life. The results are clearly visible in China's urban transformation. Professor Mohammed S. Obaidat, former president of the Society for Modeling and Simulation International, describes China as a "global pacesetter" in converging AI, high-fidelity simulation and digital twin technology.

Obaidat observed that while traditional simulation was used for static predictions, "AI-enhanced simulation" in China has evolved into a living, responsive system.

Experts agree that China's approach holds significance beyond its borders. Faiola emphasized that the efficiency of China's innovation resource allocation accelerates the translation of science into practice. Similarly, Obaidat called China's experience highly scalable and transferable to other rapidly urbanizing regions.

Consistent Commitment to Global Prosperity

In 2025, China continued to expand its policies of institutional opening-up and optimization of personnel exchanges, with topics such as "Becoming Chinese" and "China Travel" going viral on foreign social media platforms. Backing this up, trendy consumer products like Labubu dolls and China-produced sci-tech devices have emerged as new mediums for the global community to gain an authentic, multi-dimensional understanding of China.

As the country enters a new year of development, a series of policies is being discussed at the ongoing Two Sessions. These policies will not only provide important references for the outside world to understand China's development trajectory but also outline China's posture as a major power that approaches the world through openness and achieves win-win results through increasing exchanges.

In a recent written interview with *Science and Technology Daily (S&T Daily)*, Irina Bokova, former director-general of UNESCO, emphasized that China has a deep understanding of cultural power. From her perspective, with 60 World Heritage sites and 44 intangible cultural heritage elements, "China is one of the leading countries that innovates and expands the interpretation of the World Heritage Convention."

Beyond preserving its own heritage, China is actively sharing its experience globally. Bokova highlighted the robust cooperation between China and ASEAN countries, where Chinese technical expertise and funding have supported heritage conservation and nominations across Southeast Asia. She pointed to the restoration of Cambodia's Angkor Wat as a shining example of this collaborative spirit, where Chinese and Cambodian teams worked together, symbolizing mutual respect and enduring friendship. Furthermore, emerging digital collaborations, such as 3D scanning of monuments, are now safeguarding heritage against climate change and the erosion of time.

This ethos of sharing extends seamlessly from cultural preservation to solving pressing global development challenges.

In the Wuling Mountains, Shibadong village, known as the birthplace of "targeted poverty alleviation," has transformed into a "global classroom." This transformation stems from China's successful campaign that lifted 98.99 million rural residents out of poverty by 2020. The Shibadong model has inspired nations worldwide. According to Xinhua, training institutions authorized by the Ministry of Commerce, such as the Hunan International Business Vocational College, have hosted over 15,000 participants from more than 120 developing countries. Many of these participants visited Shibadong for on-site learning, to adapt these practical solutions to their own local contexts.

Complementing these grassroots development efforts, China is also fostering high-level scientific partnerships to empower the Global South. Professor Felix Dapare Dakora, a member of the African Academy of Sciences, applauded the pivotal role of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in promoting international sci-tech exchanges and supporting mega-science projects. "China's leadership in promoting global scientific partnerships through the BRI has allowed the Global South to realize that unity is strength," Dakora said. "Together, we can solve problems faster, innovate more effectively, and ensure no country is left behind."

China, renowned for its wisdom in development and science, is driving the global green transition with unprecedented speed. Erik Solheim, former UN under-secretary-general, described China as the "indispensable nation" for global green transition.

③ The kiangs (Equus kiang) at the Changtang National Nature Reserve, southwest China's Xizang autonomous region. (PHOTO: XINHUA)

On February 27, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment held a press conference to announce that China's air quality in 2025 reached the best level since monitoring records began. This impressive achievement shows the country's sustained efforts in pollution control and green development.

"China is now the total dominant force in all green technologies," Solheim said, citing the nation's production of 90 percent of the world's solar panels and over 60 percent of electric vehicles and batteries. He emphasized that China's advantage lies not in cheap labor, but in super-efficient, robot-driven manufacturing and systemic innovation.

Adding that China is also the world's largest tree planter and boasts the largest national park system, Solheim underscored how China's green innovations are developing scaling solutions that benefit humanity as a whole.

China's progress is not happening in isolation; it is increasingly intertwined with global prosperity, offering tangible benefits to the world.

◀ Please scan the QR code to watch the video.