

SPOTLIGHT

Charting the Polar Silk Road: A Faster, Greener Path Linking China and Europe

By Jin Yuhan

After a 26-day voyage, the container vessel *Istanbul Bridge* arrived at the Port of Gdansk in Poland via the China-Europe Arctic container express route on October 19.

The new route marks the opening of a third route between China and Europe, complementing the century-old Suez Canal route and the China-Europe Railway Express. Departing from Ningbo Zhoushan Port in eastern China, the *Istanbul Bridge* will continue to ports in Netherlands after unloading part of its cargo in the UK, Germany, and Poland.

Dubbed the "Polar Silk Road," this Arctic passage signals that China's openness will continue to expand despite global uncertainties.

A Faster, Greener Route

The new China-Europe Arctic route offers a clear time advantage. The journey from Ningbo to the first call UK takes just 20 days, arriving in time to meet Europe's high-demand shopping season—compared with 40 days via traditional routes.

"Twenty days—half the time of traditional routes, and even a week faster than the China-Europe Railway Express," said Fang Yi, CEO of Sea Legend Line Limited. "This isn't just about speed—it's about reshaping the supply chain."

"Our company exports energy storage equipment—high-value and time-sensitive goods," said Zhou Chujing, logistics procurement manager at Sigenergy Technology Co., Ltd. "This route cuts our overall logistics costs by about 40% and helps us capture key market opportunities."

Beyond speed, the route contributes to greener shipping. The vessel runs on



The container vessel *Istanbul Bridge* completed a pioneering journey. [Photo by Sun Yuzhuo]

low-sulfur fuel, reducing carbon emissions by about 50% per voyage. Following its first call at Felixstowe, the *Istanbul Bridge* continues to major European ports including Hamburg, Gdansk, and Rotterdam.

By connecting the right ports with the right cargo and timing shipments to match demand, the Arctic route provides an efficient, customized logistics solution for Chinese goods headed to Europe.

A Backup Route for an Uncertain World

Global trade is facing mounting challenges, from geopolitical tensions and canal congestion to volatile freight rates. The China-Europe Arctic route underscores the strategic importance of diversifying shipping routes.

"Its value is not in replacing existing routes, but in supplementing them," said

Zhang Handong, a researcher at the Department of Commerce of Zhejiang Province. "It functions as both a backup option in critical moments and a strategic alternative for China's foreign trade."

For businesses, the route offers the confidence that comes with having an alternative during disruptions. The route acts as a stabilizer in response to geopolitical shifts. When land routes face disruptions, the Arctic route provides an alternative. Navigating north, the *Istanbul Bridge* carved a new path, creating a direct and resilient corridor for Asia-Europe trade.

The Arctic route also adds a crucial layer of resilience to China's diversified logistics network. According to Sun Yanhong, director of the Department of European Economy at the Institute of European Studies under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the new route offers greater flexibility compared

with the congested and often volatile Straits of Malacca and the Suez Canal. As an alternative corridor for China-Europe shipping, it enhances the stability and security of global supply chains.

The Rise of the Polar Silk Road

"The China-Europe Arctic Express is more than a shipping route—it demonstrates China's commitment to high-standard openness," said Li Zhiyuan, professor at Fudan University's School of Economics.

The route represents a key step in turning the "Polar Silk Road" from vision into reality. In 2018, the white paper China's Arctic Policy emphasized the country's willingness to cooperate internationally to develop Arctic sea routes.

"This marks a major breakthrough for the Belt and

Road Initiative in polar regions," said Sun Xuejun, chairman of Zhejiang Seaport Logistics Group.

Along the Arctic corridor, China is opening new shipping lanes while exporting green technologies, scientific expertise, and a spirit of openness. Materials developed by the Ningbo Institute of Materials Technology & Engineering, CAS, have been applied to the icebreaker Xuelong 2, equipping it with advanced capabilities for polar navigation.

"From the Pacific to the Arctic, from traditional canals to polar seas, China is playing an increasingly central role in global trade," said Xue Qunji, academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

As Arctic navigation conditions improve and the route network expands, the "Polar Silk Road" is expected to see growing traffic. The arrival of the *Istanbul Bridge* is just the beginning.

From Pens to AI: Beifa's Tech Leap

By Zhao Yu

On the opening day of the Canton Fair, Qiu Zhiming, chairman of Beifa Group, greeted visitors at his exhibition booth with ease. Known as the "King of Pens in Asia", Qiu has rarely missed the fair's second and third phases—but this first-phase appearance marked a new chapter for both him and Beifa.

At 10:30 a.m., amid the growing crowd in Hall 8.0, Qiu showcased his company's latest innovation: AI audio translation glasses.

"These glasses are powered by ChatGPT 4.0 and Microsoft's large language model, supporting real-time translation in more than 145 languages. When a Chinese export professional wears these glasses, they can converse directly with foreign clients in any language," Qiu explained. "The client speaks in their own language, and a real-time translation appears instantly on the wearer's connected smartphone. The system also includes a specialized database of international business terms, ensuring key terminology is accurately conveyed—up to 98% of the time."

Beifa's booth also displayed smartwatches with built-in headphones, standalone translation devices, and other AI-powered products—all designed around one central function: translation.

For Qiu, the shift to AI is the result of years of experience in exporting Beifa's products.

"Almost everyone on our team speaks English, but few are fluent in other foreign languages," he explained. "Last year alone, I spent over \$20,000 on translation services, and the company's annual translation costs exceeded \$100,000. Language barriers have caused setbacks and losses, and I'm sure the challenge is even greater for smaller companies."

With domestic markets highly competitive, Beifa sought new ways to innovate. The solution: AI empowered translation devices. At this year's Canton Fair, Beifa introduced mobile and desktop translation devices that, within six months, were sold in 18 countries, helping the company achieve double-digit growth.

Looking ahead, Qiu outlined ambitious plans:

"We're refining our AI products for the domestic market while expanding into cities such as Dubai, Jakarta, and Sao Paulo. By the end of the year, we plan to roll out integrated AI service solutions overseas, launch an AI-powered robot, and open our first experience store in Ningbo. We welcome everyone to visit and experience the technology firsthand!"

Beifa's pivot illustrates a broader trend among Ningbo companies: leveraging a single AI innovation to power multiple applications and unlock market opportunities, combining technology insight with export trade experience.

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Ningbo Chamber of Commerce Launches in Brazil with Cultural Showcase

By Jin Lu

The Ningbo Chamber of Commerce in Brazil was officially inaugurated on Oct. 11 in Sao Paulo as a new hub for Ningbo businesses and local Chinese communities.

The launch at Sao Paulo's Champs Élysées Hotel featured a Ningbo-themed cultural exhibition showcasing calligraphy, seal carvings, silk crafts, and porcelain. The display offered

visitors a window into Ningbo's history and maritime heritage, with familiar landmarks and artistic traditions drawing many to pause for photos. A lively lion dance and drum performance added festive energy to the occasion.

Chamber President Sun Zongmin said the organization aims to serve as a home base for Ningbo expats in Brazil, adding that the exhibition makes their hometown culture "more visible" to the wider community.

"It was especially moving to see iconic symbols like Tianfeng Tower and Ningbo Zhoushan Port presented here," said Wang Haixia, head of Brave Import and Export Co., who grew up in Ningbo.

The exhibition will continue at a warehouse operated by Zhejiang Hengwo Cross-border E-commerce Co., offering a lasting showcase of Ningbo culture and helping to strengthen connections between Chinese and Brazilian communities.



The display offered visitors a window into Ningbo's history and maritime heritage. [Photo by Shan Yuzifeng]

