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HEART STRINGS

Celebrating the 2024
China-Cambodia
People-to-People
Exchange Year

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Energy cooperation has been the flagship of economic and trade exchanges between China and Cambodia. With the support of the leaders of the two countries, China-Cambodia energy cooperation officially commenced in the early 21st Century. Alongside the in-depth implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the political and economic relations between the two countries have accelerated continuously, and energy cooperation has reached new heights. Work has ranged from investment in coal power stations to the development of clean energy sources such as hydropower, photovoltaic, and wind power; from power station construction to state power grid improvement and power grid access for remote rural areas; from policy alignment at the national level to the participation of non-governmental sectors such as enterprises and social organizations. China-Cambodia energy cooperation has promoted Cambodia's energy transition and provided green momentum for Cambodia's economic and social development.

Foundation for Energy Cooperation

To eliminate long-term power shortage in Cambodia, the Cambodian government devised the development strategy of prioritizing power generation in 2007. Encouraged by the Chinese government, Chinese enterprises have actively participated in the development of Cambodia's energy sector, providing high-quality electric power and a strong guarantee for Cambodia's economic and social development. In April 2019, Cambodia joined the BRI Energy Partnership, which enabled the two countries to deepen cooperation in green infrastructure and green energy.

In February 2023, state leaders of China and Cambodia agreed to build a "Diamond Hexagon" cooperation framework between the two countries. In the energy sector, China proposed ensuring green development and

Powering Growth

China-Cambodia energy cooperation contributes to Cambodia's sustainable development

By Dong Qingqing



✦ Cambodia's Ganzai Hydropower Station funded and constructed by the Power Construction Corporation of China (POWERCHINA).

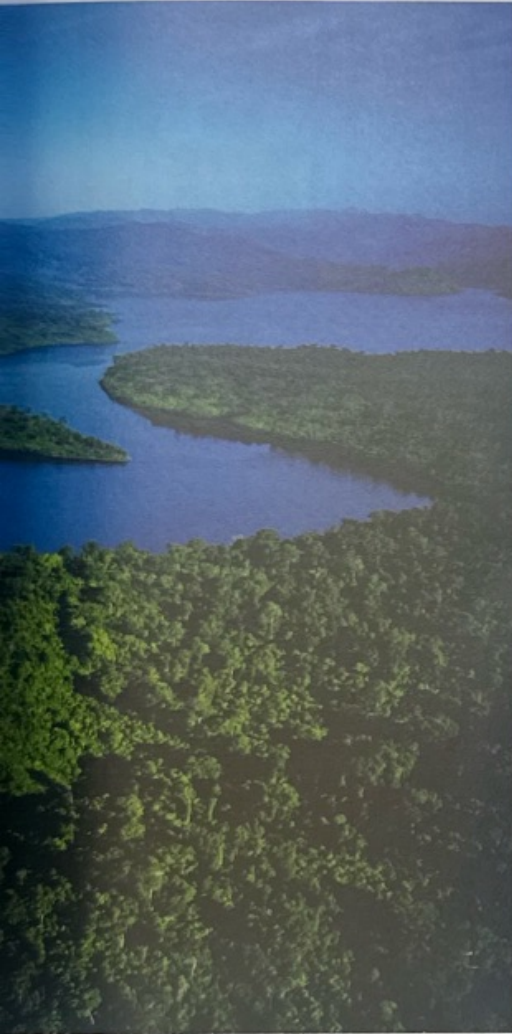
increasing investment in hydropower and photovoltaic power generation projects in Cambodia. During Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet's visit to China in September 2023, the two sides reached consensus on many cooperation intentions, with energy being one of the most important areas of common interest. The Chinese and Cambodian governments signed a number of cooperation documents including the *Action Plan on Building a China-Cambodia Community with a Shared Future in the New Era Between the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Cambodia (2024-2028)*. The two sides agreed to increase cooperation in hydropower, photovoltaic power, and other clean energy sources while exploring green, stable, and reliable energy cooperation plans.

Close relations between China and

Cambodia in the political arena and economic and trade cooperation have laid a solid foundation for bilateral energy cooperation, kindling more in-depth bilateral cooperation in the energy sector.

Hydropower Development

Cambodia is rich in water resources with great potential for hydropower development. However, due to its weak infrastructure and inadequate hydropower development, it had been importing electricity from Thailand and Vietnam for a long time. With successive opening of hydropower stations built with Chinese investment, Cambodia has gradually escaped dependence on imported electricity. According to statistics from the Economic and Commercial Office of the Chinese Embassy in the



Kingdom of Cambodia, by the end of November 2023, Chinese enterprises had built and put into operation 10 hydropower stations and two thermal power stations in Cambodia, with installed capacity accounting for 63.8 percent of Cambodia's total capacity.

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The Ganzai Hydropower Station was the first power plant funded by a Chinese company in Cambodia, with an installed capacity of 194,100 kilowatts. The power station significantly eased the power shortage in Cambodia and boosted the Cambodian government's enthusiasm for accelerating the development of hydropower resources and its confidence in Chinese-invested projects. Since then, other hydropower projects funded by Chinese enterprises have been built and put into operation successively in Cambodia.

The Lower Sesan 2 Hydropower Station is Cambodia's largest hydropower project, with a total installed capacity of 400,000 kilowatts. Since it opened in 2018, it has delivered green, clean, and efficient electricity to Cambodia, earning a reputation as the "Three Gorges" project of Cambodia.

Since the Lower Stung Russei Chrum Hydropower Station began operation, it has played an important role in ensuring energy supply for many major events in Cambodia. It has become a model of China-Cambodia clean energy cooperation.

Operation of the Stung Tatay and Upper Stung Tatay Hydropower Stations has not only eased the power shortage in Cambodia, but also effectively curbed the flooding of the local rivers in the rainy season, which has been welcomed and supported by the local people.

The completion and operation of Chinese-invested hydropower stations in Cambodia has not only provided green momentum for Cambodia's economic and social development, but also promoted the adoption of Chinese standards, technology, and equipment abroad.

Power Grid Supporting Facilities

Since the completion of so many large-scale hydropower stations, Chinese companies have been actively involved in improving Cambodia's state grid and building power supply lines in rural areas.

The Phnom Penh-Bodhisattva-Battambang 230kV Power Transmission and Transformation Project, funded by China Datang Corporation, is the first state grid project of Cambodia as well as China's first overseas power grid investment project. Its completion provided Cambodia its own power grid and solved many persistent electricity challenges.

The China Heavy Machinery Corporation (CHMC), a subsidiary of the China National Machinery Industry Corporation, has undertaken the construction of five EPC power transmission and transformation projects in Cambodia, including the Phnom Penh Loop-Line, the Phnom Penh-Bavet Line, the Southwest Loop-Line, and the Eastern Loop-Line. More than 10,000 kilometers of power transmission lines and 31 substations have been built in Cambodia—a major step in improving the layout of Cambodia's state grid, meeting rural residents' demand for electricity, and promoting local economic and social development.

Cambodia's 500kV state grid power transmission and transformation project, jointly built by the CHMC and the Cambodian National Electric Power Company, was successfully completed in May 2023, marking the official upgrading of Cambodia's state grid to the highest voltage level in Southeast Asia. The project has also ensured Cambodia's power connectivity with Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam, which is highly significant for the development of power supply in Cambodia. Now, the power transmission and transformation projects built by the CHMC cover every province of Cambodia and bring affordable and stable electricity to the remote regions of the country, which has met local demand for electricity and contributed to the development of local economies.

'Small Yet Smart' Projects

Although Cambodia's state grid has grown rapidly in recent years, it

Business & Industry

On May 20, 2021, the 230kV Southern Section (Kratie-Monduliri) and the 230kV Monduliri Substation of the first phase of Cambodia's Eastern Loop-Line project built by the China Heavy Machinery Corporation were connected to the power grid. This is an aerial view of the substation.



An intelligent patrol robot at the Battambang Substation invested and built by the China Datang Corporation can perform 24/7 intelligent inspection and monitoring of the substation. (DONGHUA DAILY)



The Lower Sesan 2 Hydropower Station, built and operated by the China Huaneng Group, is the largest China-Cambodia cooperative hydropower project. (IN-EN.COM)

still does not yet cover some remote mountain forests and islands. Power supply and consumption remains a problem for the residents there.

In 2018, Shenzhen International Exchange and Cooperation Foundation joined hands with a local photovoltaic company and the governments and charities of Mekong River countries to launch the Mekong River Sun Village project. The first phase of the project has already been smoothly carried out at 10 villages in Takeo Province in southern Cambodia, providing 300 offline solar power generators, 100 solar desk lamps, and 10 solar television sets with antennas to 300 local poverty-stricken families and public places such as schools and hospitals. Implementation of the project includes two training sessions each year to train three persons for

each village to maintain relevant facilities.

In 2020, the Chinese government donated considerable carbon-reduction equipment to the Cambodian Ministry of Environment through a low-carbon pilot project in the Preah Sihanouk Province including 2,800 solar lamps, 200 solar panels, 200 electric motorcycles, and other green energy equipment, which would be installed in schools and other public places.

In October 2023, Huada Lighting, a member company of the Guangdong Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia, donated 50 smart solar street lamps to the Royal Academy of Cambodia, which would improve the lighting infrastructure of the Preah Vihear Cambodia National Forest Park.

In 2023, the Yunnan Association

for Friendship with Foreign Countries carried out the Connectivity with Yunnan series of projects including the donation of 30 solar street lamps to a village in Cambodia's Siem Reap Province, which would help the local people travel safely at night.

Implementation of these "small yet smart" livelihood projects has not only brought light to the remote villages of Cambodia, but also improved the villagers' quality of life and satisfaction, building a bridge of friendship between China and Cambodia.

Cambodia is now at a critical juncture of its energy transition. The Cambodian government has incorporated the development of renewable energy into its long-term national development strategy and constantly increased investment in this sector to promote energy transition. In recent years, China-Cambodia energy cooperation has gradually expanded to the sectors of wind power and photovoltaic power, providing strong support for Cambodia's energy transition. With the further implementation of the BRI, China-Cambodia energy cooperation will get even closer, which will contribute to the bilateral relations and sustainable development of the region. ■

About the author **Dong Qingqing** is an assistant researcher at the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences and the Chinese (Kunming) Academy of South and Southeast Asian Studies.