A Chinese town becomes a key link in trade and exchange with neighbors in Southeast and South Asia  By Yu Lintao

When Hong Kong headquartered headwear com-
pany Yangzhou Everbright decided to open a
base in Yunnan province in southwest China, it took only
45 days from the first field trip to the spot it had chosen, the
industrial park in Ruili, to production beginning at the
new plant on May 8.

“IT was not just Ruili’s advantageous location as
a Chinese gateway to the Southeast Asian market that
made us invest here,” said Xiao Xiaobo, director of Yangzhou Everbright’s new
plant in Ruili.

The city’s strategic position as one of China’s
key experimental zones for development and opening up and the all-around service and customized solutions that the
industrial park provides were the clinching factors in his
company’s quick decision to open up to frontier trade and
tourism.

Today, Ruili has evolved into the largest land trading port
between China and Myanmar. The export and import between the
two countries via Ruili ac-
counts for about 30 percent of all China-Myanmar trade annually. Every year, more
than 700,000 tons of fruit from Myanmar are exported to China via the Wanding Port in Ruili. It is the only land trade port for
Myanmar’s aquatic products to reach China, and around
25,000 tons of crabs and other aquatic products are imported to
China from Myanmar each year through the port.

In 2010, Ruili was named a pilot zone for greater opening up, which has boosted cooperation between China and Myanmar.

“The central government’s special policies for Ruili have
stimulated its development, particularly after the Ruili Key
Development and Opening-Up Experimental Zone was set up in
2010,” Hu Chunhua, assistant director of the Development and
Reform Bureau of Ruili, told Beijing Review. For instance, Ruili’s import and export vol-
ume in 2012 was 14.3 billion yuan ($1.45 million) in its new plant to build it into a
40,000-square-meter headwear
industrial park that will create
more than 2,000 jobs.

Yuan attributed the speed with which his plant could start
production to the services offered at the Ruili Industrial Park. He said the park authori-
ties promptly fixed teething problems, such as staff recruit-
ment, water, electricity and
fuel supply, and even arranged a
dormitory for the workers.

Said with pride. “I am happy to work here. The plant provides us with free
dormitory accommodations, much better than the living conditions in my village. Some of
my fellow villagers are also working here in Ruili.” Htoo said.

In the past decade, due to the establishment of the Ruili Experimental Zone and the
development of the Belt and Road Initiative that China
proposed in 2013, Ruili has seen a rapid upgrading of its
infrastructure. Several highways have been built to strengthen
connection with other regions in Yunnan, and a new highway
connecting Ruili and Myanmar’s historical Mandalay City is in
the planning stage. The Dai-Ruili Railway connecting Dali, in
central Yunnan, with Ruili will be completed and start running by
2023. It will eventually link with Myanmar’s railways, forming the
western route of China’s rail link with
Southeast Asia.

When these transportation projects are completed, Ruili’s
role as a bridge to Southeast Asia will strengthen, Hu
said. Then it will become a
key transport junction between China and Myanmar,
providing the development of
bilateral trade, tourism, logis-
tics and manufacturing.