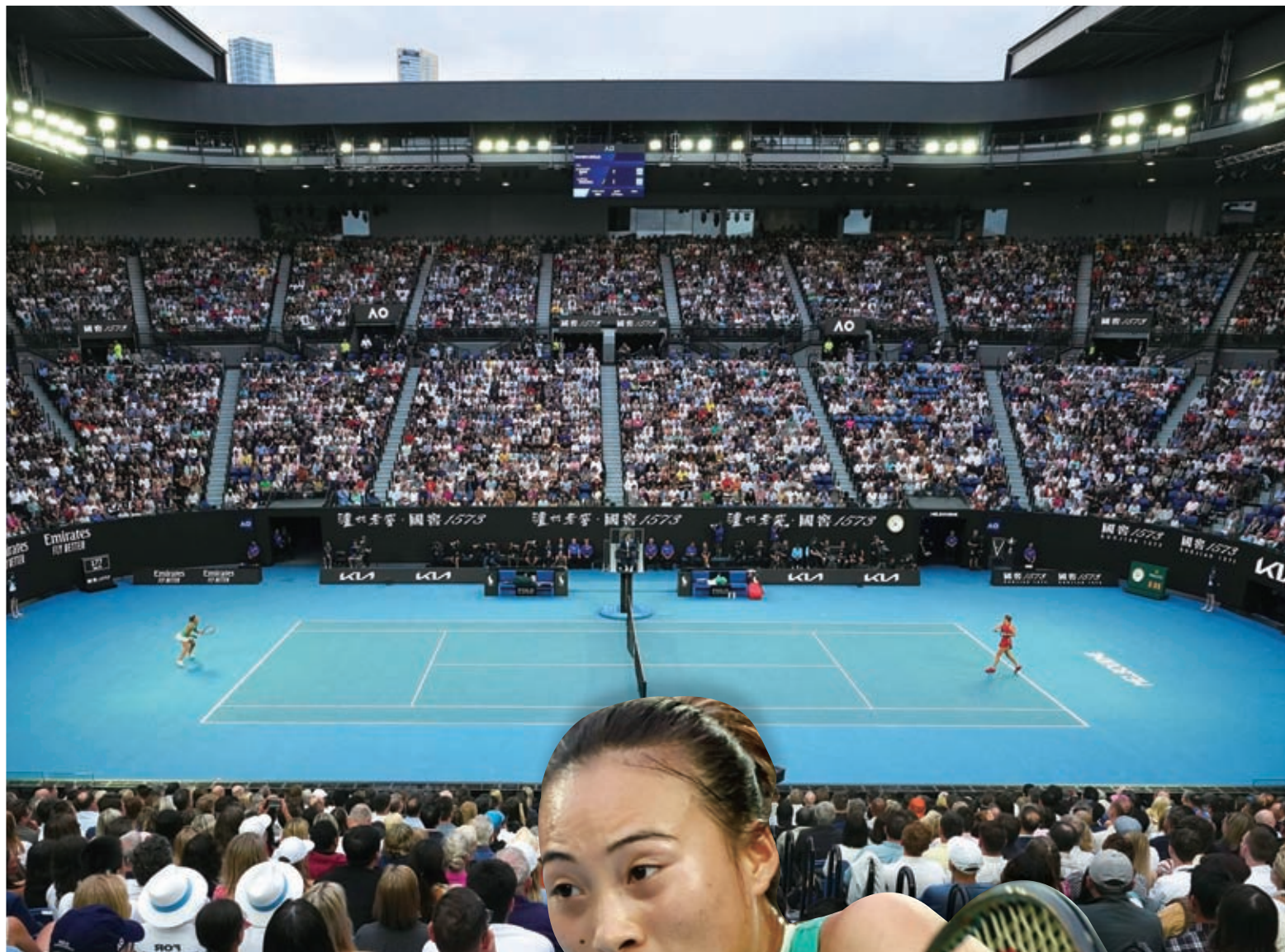


“

In Grand Slams, everyone must work hard to make breakthroughs, and there will definitely be various opportunities. My breakthrough here came slower than I expected, but I still want to say that I am very proud of myself. I want to take my time and enjoy the process.

Zheng Qinwen (left) contests the women's final against Aryna Sabalenka in Melbourne on January 27.
— All photos by Xinhua



Ten years later, when younger generations inspired by Li returned to Melbourne Park, the Indian journalist spotted new meaning.

“We have been waiting for a long time for an Asian player again to come. And so for her to come and be in the final, I think this is really important because it's proof that it is possible,” Brijnath said.

This year, in addition to Zheng, a group of Chinese players have made their mark in history.

Seven female players from China, including Zheng, can be seen in the WTA top 100 rankings with four of them aged 22 or under.

Men's tennis has also seen a breakthrough in China.

Shang Juncheng, 18, beat India's Sumit Nagal 2-6, 6-3, 7-5, 6-4 on Thursday to become the first male tennis player from the Chinese mainland in the Open era (since 1968) to reach the third round at the Australian Open.

Zhang Zhizhen, China's top-ranked men's singles player, also became the first player from the Chinese mainland

to reach the quarterfinals of the men's doubles at any Grand Slam in the Open era. Last year, he also won the men's singles title at the Asian Games, representing the first time that China has done so in nearly three decades.

“I think that generally China has really good tennis players in women and men,” Zheng said. “All of us are trying to develop and improve as best as we can. Some of us are young. We are trying to explore how is our game style. Right now, we are in a really good position for Chinese tennis.”

With more younger players coming to the fore, Zheng is not a lone wolf shouldering the responsibility of opening up a new era of Chinese tennis.

“What Zheng has is that she doesn't have to do it alone. She's got a bright future ahead of her. Shang Juncheng has a bright future ahead of him, and also Zhang Zhizhen,” said Futterman.

“There are several players, young players under 25 years old, who are going to do this along with Zheng Qinwen,” the journalist added.

(Xinhua)



Zheng hits a return during the final.