

Patterns of passion

Intricate Su embroidery is thread that binds generations of artisans

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Surging wave

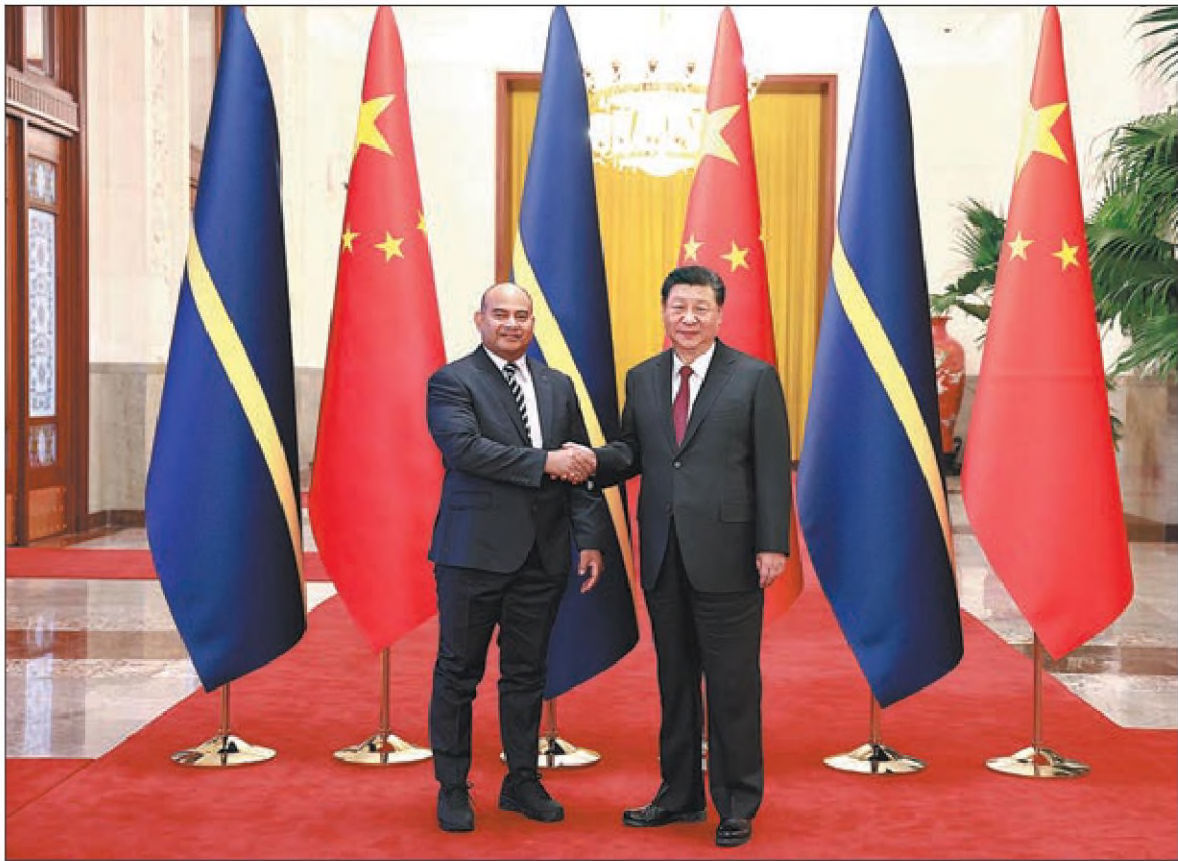
Chinese shipbuilders riding crest of increasing new global orders

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Xi welcomes Nauru's leader



President Xi Jinping meets on Monday with Nauruan President David Adeang at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

The two presidents witness signing of series of cooperation documents in Beijing

By CAO DESHENG
caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

China-Nauru relations are based on mutual respect, equality, mutual benefit and mutual support, President Xi Jinping said on Monday in talks with Nauru's President David Adeang in Beijing.

Adeang is making a six-day state visit to China that started on Sunday, the first since the South Pacific nation cut ties with the Taiwan authorities in January and resumed diplomatic relations with China soon after.

Xi held a grand welcoming ceremony for Adeang at the Great Hall of the People on Monday.

Both presidents witnessed the signing of a series of cooperation documents in the fields of joint construction of the Belt and Road, implementing the Global Development Initiative, economic development and agriculture.

During the talks, Xi said that Nauru's political decision to adhere to the one-China principle and

resume diplomatic relations with China is in line with the trend of history and the times.

"Friendship knows no order of priority. As long as it starts, there will be a bright future. Cooperation knows no size. As long as it is sincere, there will be fruitful results. China-Nauru relations have opened a new chapter in history," Xi said.

China is willing to work with Nauru to create a bright future for bilateral relations and better benefit the two peoples, he added.

Xi emphasized that treating others on an equal footing is a distinctive characteristic of Chinese diplomacy.

China has always advocated that countries — big or small, strong or weak, rich or poor — are all equal members of the international community, he said, and it has always been a member of the developing world and its vote in the United Nations Security Council will always belong to developing countries.

He assured Adeang that China firmly supports Nauru in safeguarding its national sovereignty, security and development interests and in independently choosing a development path that suits its national conditions.

China is willing to strengthen

exchanges and dialogues at all levels and in all fields with Nauru, continuously enhance mutual understanding and trust, and consolidate the political foundation of the bilateral relationship, he added.

Xi underlined the need for both countries to expand practical cooperation in trade, investment and infrastructure construction.

China is willing to provide assistance to Nauru for its independent and sustainable development "without attaching any political conditions", he said.

Xi called on both sides to strengthen exchanges in education, culture, health, youth and other fields.

China welcomes more young people from Nauru to study in the country, and is willing to provide assistance to Nauru in addressing climate change within the framework of South-South cooperation, he said.

Xi also expressed China's willingness to strengthen communication and coordination with Nauru in multilateral frameworks, such as the United Nations and the Pacific Islands Forum, jointly support a multipolar world and economic globalization that is inclusive and beneficial for all, and safeguard the

common interests of developing countries.

Adeang said that Nauru's decision to stand on the right side of history to recognize and adhere to the one-China principle and, on that basis, to resume diplomatic relations with China is an important milestone in Nauru-China relations, and has opened a new chapter in Nauru's national development and bilateral ties.

He said that Nauru highly appreciates China's consistent adherence to the principle of equality among all countries, and is willing to abide by the one-China principle and deepen cooperation with China.

Nauru is willing to stick to mutual respect, enhance mutual understanding and develop a partnership of fruitful, mutually beneficial and win-win cooperation with China, he added.

Noting that the global initiatives proposed by President Xi are of great significance, Nauru's president said his country is willing to actively participate in the joint construction of the Belt and Road, implement the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, and strengthen cooperation with China in addressing climate change.

Suspects in Moscow attack charged with terrorist acts

By REN QI in Moscow
renqi@chinadaily.com.cn

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A Moscow court has ordered the detention of four suspects in the largest terrorist attack in Russia in nearly two decades, as the country held a national day of mourning on Sunday for victims of the attack, which killed at least 137 people and injured 180.

The suspects, who are accused of shooting concertgoers at a 6,200-seat music hall in suburban Moscow on Friday evening and setting the building on fire, appeared before Basmanny District Court late on Sunday. Their identities were confirmed for the first time, and they were placed in custody pending trial.

The four were charged on Sunday at the court with acts of terrorism in connection with the attack.

All the suspects were identified as citizens of Tajikistan, the Tass state news agency said. Several of the men asked for translators, as they could not speak Russian.

Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke with Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon in a phone call, in which Rahmon condemned the attack and said the two countries would continue working closely together to fight terrorism and extremism, the Tajik government's press service said on Sunday.

The Russian Investigative Committee said it had found two Kalashnikov rifles, 28 magazines and more than 500 rounds of ammunition at the scene of the attack.

On Sunday, the suspects were led into the headquarters of the Investigative Committee in Moscow for questioning, their hands tied and their eyes covered with bandages and scarves.

They were then transported to the Basmanny court, where they were accused of terrorism and placed in pretrial detention until May 22 as the investigation into the attack is conducted.

The suspects were brought before the court and media individually, each sitting in a glass box, and three

of them pleaded guilty to all charges, Tass said.

The Islamic State terror group has claimed responsibility for the attack. It shared a photograph taken before the attack of the four alleged assailants with a black ISIS flag, as well as a graphic video made by one of the attackers during the rampage.

Friday's attack was the deadliest on Russian territory since the 2004 Beslan school siege, when Islamist militants took more than 1,000 hostages. Over 300 people died, more than half of them children.

Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chairman of Russia's Security Council, said Russia would target those behind the deadly shooting wherever they are from and whoever they are.

He had previously spoken of the need to meet "death with death", and some lawmakers have begun to discuss whether the death penalty should be reintroduced.

Russia's Federal Security Service said the gunmen had contacts in Ukraine and were captured near the border.

The claim was dismissed by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said in a statement on the social media platform X on Sunday that "there is no evidence to support such claims".

The White House said that Washington had shared information with Moscow early this month about a planned attack, and issued a public advisory to United States citizens in Russia on March 7. It said Islamic State bore sole responsibility for the attack.

"Nothing was passed," Russian Ambassador to the US Anatoly Antonov responded early on Sunday, saying that Washington did not share any specific information with the embassy before the terrorist attack.



Russian President Vladimir Putin lights a candle on Monday in a church at the Novo-Ogaryovo state residence outside Moscow, Russia, in memory of the victims of the Crocus City Hall attack. MIKHAIL METZEL VIA REUTERS

Symbiotic ties between China, foreign companies growing

The China Development Forum, held on Sunday and Monday in Beijing, was attended by the CEOs of more than 80 foreign companies from a large variety of industries, such as financial services, energy, semiconductors, technology, pharmaceuticals, industrials and consumer products and services.

The forum has been a major meeting place over the years for foreign CEOs and top Chinese officials as well as Chinese corporate leaders to get together and exchange ideas. This year's forum sent an important signal as China recovers from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the world enters a rather uncertain period.

China and multinational corpo-

rations have developed a symbiotic relationship since China's reform and opening-up began several decades ago. Multinationals brought investment, know-how and capabilities to China over the years, while China offered them a reliable and cost-effective supply base as well as a market that has grown to become one of the world's largest.

China's State-owned and privately owned enterprises also benefited through mutual learning, cooperation and competition. This dynamic

exchange is one of the core reasons for the rapid development of the innate capabilities of many Chinese companies to compete.

Over the past decade or so, the relationship between multinational corporations and China has entered into a somewhat uncertain period. This was driven largely by geopolitical factors as well as the pandemic.

Some commentators have even said that Western companies' confidence in China has dwindled. But has it?

Due to a much more complicated global context, some multinational corporations might have retreated from China, and some may have relocated some of their supply chains outside of China.

But on the other hand, many multinationals have stayed in China and some have increased their investment in China. While FDI in China dropped 8 percent to \$159 billion year-on-year in 2023, it has otherwise grown 3.3 percent on average every year since 2018, a period during which COVID and geopolitical issues were prevalent.

Apple CEO Tim Cook, who visited Shanghai last week, underscored the importance of China as a market as well as a hub of supply chains for Apple, and he announced more investment in China. Many other multinational corporations are in a similar mode.

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Breaking news: UN Security Council demands Gaza truce

The United Nations Security Council adopted on Monday a resolution that demands an immediate cease-fire in Gaza for the holy month of Ramadan. The resolution won 14 votes in favor among the 15 members of the council. The United States abstained. XINHUA

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SINGLE MOTHERS RESHAPING IDEAS OF FAMILY, PARENTHOOD

'Divorce dazi' who stay together to cut costs and raise children spark online debate

By ZHANG XIAOMIN
in Dalian, Liaoning
zhangxiaomin@chinadaily.com.cn



Li Huan, a divorced single mother with a 7-year-old son, and her childhood friend Wang Jie, who is getting a divorce and has a 5-year-old daughter, have been living under the same roof for six months, caring for the children together and sharing daily expenses.

In August last year, Wang and her daughter, Yang Yi, moved in to Li's apartment in Hefei, Anhui province, and formed a new "family of four". The two mothers, who are not

affluent, divide household responsibilities and get along well.

"It's much simpler and happier than married life," said Li.

This new family structure, where two divorced mothers live together and jointly raise their children, has been labeled "divorce dazi" online and is the latest version of dazi culture, which is popular with young people in China.

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Dazi: New solution found for single motherhood



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Dazi involves activity partners for specific pursuits such as playing games, taking classes, traveling, or hiking and camping, and promotes the idea that everything can be done with a like-minded companion.

The pair's daily life, captured in short videos shared on social media platforms, has attracted attention from many who see it as an alternative model for family life.

Li and Wang were both born in 1990, and their harmonious and supportive cohabitation has led to numerous expressions of admiration from online viewers.

"This provides a new way for single working mothers," said one viewer. "There are many forms of family, why must we have a man?" asked another.

However, their arrangement has also sparked controversy, with some questioning the stability of the cohabitation model and others insisting that a father's involvement is necessary for a child's upbringing.

In response, Li said: "We share our story not to encourage others to divorce. We choose to live together because we need to lend each other a hand after our divorces."

A new family

In early 2023, Wang found herself in the depths of emotional turmoil. After enduring five years of denial and being belittled while living with her husband and in-laws, she made the decision to divorce.

Following her agreement to divorce, she took her daughter back to her hometown, but soon realized that she felt out of place and was a burden on her parents.

At that time, her close friend Li extended an invitation to her to live under the same roof.

Li, who understands the hardships faced by single mothers trying to balance work and child care, said the arrangement was intended to help Wang save on rent. A place in Hefei costs at least 2,000 yuan (\$278) per month in rent.

Li's home, purchased with a loan several years ago, is a three-bedroom apartment with a spacious living room. Under the arrangement, Li and her son Sun Jiacheng sleep in one bedroom, Wang and her daughter in another, and the third room serves as a study and play area for the children.

"At first, I simply wanted her to break free from the shadows of her past marriage. However, our life together turned out to be even more harmonious than I had imagined," Li said.

She emphasized that they have hardly experienced the awkward adjustment period typical of new blended families, seamlessly adapting to their new life.

"After all, we've been best friends sharing everything since we were 15," Li said.

After moving in, Wang soon found a job in an office. Li does freelance work that allows her to operate from home while managing a monthly mortgage payment of 2,000 yuan.

On weekdays, each of them takes on specific responsibilities. Wang handles the morning routine of getting the kids to school, and Li takes charge of picking them up and preparing meals. They both clean the house together in the evenings.

On weekends, they take the children outdoors and during longer holidays, like National Day, they have a rotation system for taking care of the children, sharing the responsibility equally.

When she receives her salary, Wang transfers 2,000 yuan to Li for daily expenses to cover the month.

Additional high-cost expenses are shared equally. When it comes to paying for snacks and treats for the children, neither of them keeps track of who spends what.

While Li pays off her mortgage, Wang is saving up to buy a house nearby. In order to save money, both rarely dine out, and when they take the children for weekend outings they usually visit free recreational spots.

"As long as we're together, the kids always have a great time," Li said.

When it comes to disciplining the children, Li takes greater responsibility. If one of the children performs well they are both praised.

Similarly, if one makes a mistake, both children are reprimanded. Gradually, this breaks down barriers and fosters mutual trust.

Changes to children

Over the past six months, the children's personalities have also undergone positive changes.

"When they first moved in my son was a bit hypocritical, complaining about his little sister at home but defending her fiercely outside. Now, he naturally helps and cares for her," Li said.

"And our girl, who used to be highly sensitive and demanding, has become more emotionally stable and less prone to tears," she said.

Li believes that one of the secrets of their success is that neither of the women shies away from household chores and child care duties. "If parents could do the same as us, perhaps the divorce rate would be cut in half," she said with a smile.

After Li shared short videos of their arrangement on social media, some netizens questioned the authenticity of their story and suggested it was a publicity stunt with a scripted narrative. Others criticized their unconventional lifestyle, claiming it promoted an "anti-marriage" value system.

"If my child's father were reliable, would

I have become a single mother?" Li said.

She said that her divorce was due to her ex-husband's infidelity, and she chose not to forgive him.

Initially, they agreed that she would raise their son, and he would provide child support. However, her ex-husband was sent to prison for economic crimes, leaving her to shoulder the burden alone.

Wang said she decided to divorce due to her husband's refusal to do household chores and his frequent, unjustified outbursts.

Through publicizing their lives, Li and Wang are aiming to draw attention to the struggles faced by single mothers and provide a narrative of "ordinary single motherhood."

"We may not have much money, and life may not be exceptionally exciting, but supporting each other and being understanding makes for a contented and fulfilling life," Li said.

While cohabitation has brought them great joy, both women don't recommend that others replicate their lifestyle without careful consideration of compatibility.

They believe that the success of their "family of four" is rooted in a friendship that has lasted for over 18 years.

Both encouraged single mothers to connect with other women in similar circumstances. "Even if we don't live together, mothers of similar ages can still support each other, take strolls with their children, and enjoy outings," Li said.

Internet buzzword

The divorce dazi phenomenon has gained significant attention on social media platforms such as Douyin and Xiaohongshu, with many users sharing their life stories and collaborative ventures, and

even more expressing their admiration and seeking similar experiences.

On Sina Weibo, a topic titled "Two Post-1995 Mothers Living Together After Divorce" has garnered an astounding 190 million views.

The central figures are a single mother surnamed Zou and her close friend, another single mother surnamed Guo from Liupanshui, Guizhou province. Zou has a 3-year-old daughter and Guo has a 5-year-old son.

After their respective divorces, the two women, along with their children, embraced the divorce dazi lifestyle.

Besides working to earn money, their main focus is on spending time with their children.

In one of Zou's videos, she mentions that she owns a car worth 70,000 yuan, while Guo says she has paid off a house worth 200,000 yuan.

Living together, they have none of the conflicts typically associated with in-laws, no family obligations, and no need to cater to each other's preferences, Zou said.

Her Douyin account has amassed 19,000 followers, and her storefront features dozens of links to purchase children's clothing.

Deng Liming, a lecturer at the School of Public Administration at Dongbei University of Finance and Economics, said whether it's divorce dazi or elderly care dazi, such relationships reflect the self-selecting approach of modern individuals when dealing with life's pressures, emotional dilemmas, and aging issues.

"People today place a greater emphasis on personal happiness and freedom. From a positive perspective, when traditional models fail to meet their needs, people can seek new innovative solutions," he said.

"However, from a negative stand-

point, these relationships may weaken the stability of traditional family structures and could potentially expose participants to legal risks and moral controversies," he added.

Deng recommended improving the legal framework to provide the necessary legal support and protection for nontraditional family forms. Additionally, he suggested bolstering counseling services to assist individuals to better deal with personal relationships and emotional issues.

Feng Lei, a specialist from the Dalian Psychological Society with a doctorate in applied psychology, said dazi culture meets people's emotional needs without the burden of emotional entanglement.

"We are currently seeing the emergence of divorce dazi, mainly voiced by women. This new relationship model can be seen as a product of female power," Feng said.

"Although they live together, they are relatively independent, providing emotional security, comfort, support, and companionship to each other," she added.

Feng said being with a like-minded woman temporarily helps the other one heal from the emotional trauma, loneliness, and sense of defeat brought about by divorce, leading to self-affirmation, self-acceptance, and inner reconciliation.

"However, it's important to note that divorce dazi is also temporary. Any relationship requires growth and cooperation," she said.

If one party finds a new boyfriend or remarries, it becomes challenging to maintain the previous arrangement, Feng said.

Unexpected visitor

In mid-March, Li and Wang faced a new challenge when Li's ex-husband was released from prison.

"He came to stay with us temporarily for five days right after being released. After all, I couldn't deny him the opportunity to spend time with his son," Li said.

Before his return, Wang said she had wanted to beat him for letting her good friend raise their children alone for so many years.

"But when he returned, he seemed at a loss and she (Wang) didn't do anything," Li said, adding that her ex-husband played with both children equally, and they liked him.

Li shared her discussions with her ex-husband on Douyin. They were more popular than her previous updates on "two single mothers raising children". Her account, which had only 1,000 followers a year ago, gained over 13,000 followers in just a few days.

As of March 18, the videos of her ex-husband had 6.92 million views on Douyin, over 6.39 million on her WeChat account, and 360,000 on Xiaohongshu.

"Many people commented that they wanted to see him repent and start anew. Some expressed their wish for us to get remarried, while others advised me to make use of this popularity to increase my income," Li said.

She has said she won't forgive her ex-husband for his past actions, and they won't remarry.

However, she is considering making the most of the attention her ex-husband's return has brought to improve the lives of their "family of four."

As for the future, both Li and Wang are not overly concerned. They believe that even if they part ways, the relationship between the two families will remain intact.

"If we overcome the current difficulties and part ways, isn't that a good thing?" Li said.



Above: Li Huan (left), a single mother with a 7-year-old son, and her childhood friend Wang Jie, who is getting a divorce and has a 5-year-old daughter, play with their children. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

A firm handshake

Premier Li Qiang meets with International Monetary Fund Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva in Beijing on Monday. During their meeting, Li expressed hope that the IMF will sustain its positive influence, safeguard economic globalization and promote an open world economy, while Georgieva appreciated China's substantial support for the IMF and emphasized the global significance of China's economic health.

FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY



Country plays leading role in international patent application

By YAN DONGJIE
yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

China tops the global list of international patent applicants, and many factors, including policy support and efforts by researchers to innovate, contribute to that leading position, experts and insiders said.

"This is a natural occurrence. China is already a technological powerhouse," said Professor Zhai Yuanliang, from the Faculty of Life Sciences at the University of Hong Kong, whose work figured in the top 10 scientific and technological achievements in China in 2023.

"China has a large population, with an increasing number of science and engineering students. Also, as everyone knows, Chinese people are very intelligent and carrying out research is not difficult for them," he said.

He made the remarks during an interview with China Daily after a recent report released by the World Intellectual Property Organization said that Chinese innovators led the number of international patent

applications filed in 2022 under the Patent Cooperation Treaty, with the United States, Japan, South Korea and Germany taking the second to fifth place.

China's share of patent applications is more than one-fourth of all applications filed. Huawei Technologies is the biggest applicant to date, filing 7,689 patent applications in 2022, the report said.

A recent report on US news website Axios said that China holds the highest number of patents in the three major patent categories of machine learning, computer vision, and personal devices and computing.

Robert Atkinson, president of the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, said he has seen no country other than China file so many patent applications in such a short time.

China has been a member of the Patent Cooperation Treaty for 30 years. Shen Changyu, head of China National Intellectual Property Administration, said that over the past 30 years, the number of PCT

international patent applications submitted by Chinese applicants has grown rapidly, and since 2019, China has ranked first for four consecutive years.

Shen said the PCT is an important international treaty in the field of intellectual property, unifying the patent application procedures among contracting states. Applicants only need to submit one PCT international patent application to seek protection in multiple states.

"This treaty plays an important role in facilitating overseas applications and layout of patents, expanding the international market, and attracting more foreign applicants to apply for patent protection in China, thereby achieving greater utilization of foreign capital on a larger scale," he said.

In 1994, the year China joined the treaty, Chinese applicants submitted only 98 applications through the PCT. By 2019, the number had touched 59,000. In 2022, it further increased to 70,000.

Zhai, from the University of

Hong Kong, believes that in recent decades, China has increasingly focused on investment in scientific research.

"In terms of policy guidance, researchers are given enough space to explore freely, especially in basic research. In fact, many significant and valuable breakthroughs are often discovered unintentionally," he said.

At a news conference in January, Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin stated that currently, the global patent application volume for solar cells in China is more than 126,000, the highest in the world, and the global valid patent volume for the top 10 new energy vehicle sales companies in China exceeds 100,000, leading the green and low-carbon industry and aiding global economic recovery.

He said that the data shows that in the past decade, 115 countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative have applied for 253,000 patents in China, with an average annual growth rate of 5.4 percent. By the end of 2022, the valid quantity of foreign-invested invention patents in China reached 861,000, a year-on-year increase of 4.5 percent, demonstrating the recognition of foreign-funded enterprises for China's intellectual property protection.

China ready to elevate its ties with Dominica

Xi, Skerrit agree to align nations' development strategies, advance win-win cooperation

By MO JINGXI
mojingxi@chinadaily.com.cn

\$73.5 million

Two-way trade between China and Dominica in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 111.5 percent.

China is ready to work with the Commonwealth of Dominica to better align the two countries' development strategies and transform their friendship into the driving force of win-win cooperation, in order to benefit their peoples with greater achievements, President Xi Jinping said on Monday.

In a meeting with visiting Prime Minister of Dominica Roosevelt Skerrit in Beijing, Xi said that China and the Caribbean nation have set a fine example of South-South cooperation since they established diplomatic relations in 2004, which Skerrit said was a correct decision made by him after severing "diplomatic ties" with Taiwan.

Xi noted that the key to the smooth development of bilateral relations lies in the high-level political mutual trust between the two countries, as well as the mutual understanding and support on issues concerning each other's core interests and major concerns.

As China advances its modernization at full throttle, Dominica is welcome to board the fast train and expand cooperation with China in fields such as trade and economy, infrastructure construction, agriculture and healthcare, Xi said.

In 2018, China and Dominica signed a memorandum of understanding on Belt and Road cooperation. Last year, the two-way trade between the countries exceeded \$73.5 million, a year-on-year growth of 111.5 percent, according to statistics from China Customs.

Xi said that China welcomes more young students from Dominica to study in the country, and will continue to provide scholarships and training opportunities for them.

Emphasizing that China upholds the belief that all countries, regardless of their size or strength, are equal members of the international community, Xi said that China attaches importance to the concerns and appeals of small island developing countries in the field of climate change, and supports Dominica in playing an active role in global and regional affairs.

He also expressed China's sup-

port for Caribbean countries in seeking national prosperity and development as well as in improving their public well-being.

Skerrit said as a great nation, China has not only made remarkable achievements in areas such as poverty alleviation and its overall development, but has also made important contributions to peace and development in Caribbean countries and across the world.

He reiterated his country's adherence to the one-China principle, saying that Dominica supports China's just cause of realizing complete reunification and opposes any external interference in China's internal affairs.

Dominica is willing to work with China to strengthen strategic communication, deepen friendship between their peoples, boost all-around cooperation and become all-weather strategic partners, in order to raise bilateral ties to a higher level, Skerrit added.

Premier Li Qiang, who held a welcoming ceremony for Skerrit, said at their meeting on Monday that China supports Dominica in safeguarding Dominica's national sovereignty and independently choosing a development path that suits the country's national conditions.

China is willing to continuously strengthen cooperation with Dominica in traditional sectors under the framework of Belt and Road cooperation, create new high-lights of cooperation in fields such as new energy and the digital economy, and help improve the Caribbean country's disaster prevention and reduction capabilities, Li said.

Li and Skerrit witnessed the signing of multiple cooperation documents between the two countries after their meeting.

Zhao Leji, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, also met with Skerrit on Monday.

Industrial upgrade to offer foreign firms better prospects

By FAN FEIFEI
fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

China's efforts to advance new industrialization and accelerate the establishment of a modern industrial system will not only provide broad space for deeper international cooperation in industrial and supply chains, but also create enormous opportunities for multinational corporations to invest in the country, said government officials and business executives.

They added that scientific and technological innovation will inject strong momentum into China's economic recovery, while foreign companies can play a bigger role in bolstering the high-quality development of the world's second-largest economy.

Jin Zhuanglong, minister of industry and information technology, said that China will continue to expand high-level opening-up, implement the measures regarding the complete removal of restrictions on foreign investment in the manufacturing sector and deepen mutually beneficial cooperation with companies across the globe, so as to bolster the optimization and upgrade of industrial and supply chains.

Jin made the remarks on Monday at the China Development Forum 2024 in Beijing, emphasizing that foreign-funded enterprises are playing a vital role in stabilizing China's industrial economy and promoting high-quality development. The two-day forum ended on Monday.

Despite facing mounting uncertainties and challenges, including a complicated and grim external environment, China is willing to work with other countries to establish a global industrial and supply chain system that is secure, stable, smooth, efficient, open, inclusive and mutually beneficial, Jin said.

More efforts will be made to support foreign businesses to establish research and development centers in China, carry out technological research and industrial applications in collaboration with Chinese companies, and expand international cooperation in digital transformation as well as green and low-carbon development of the manufacturing industry, he added.

With its output accounting for more than 30 percent of the global total, China is the world's largest manufacturer, ranking first for 14 consecutive years, according to the ministry.

Mercedes-Benz Group Chairman of the Board of Management Ola Kallenius, who attended the forum, expressed the company's commitment to deepening its footprint in China, advancing electric and digital transformation along with Chinese partners and supporting China's ongoing modernization and the development of new quality productive forces.

"Today, China is not only the largest market for new energy vehicles, but also an innovation hub with industry leading companies and a mature NEV supply chain. We believe the Chinese market will continue to grow and play a leading role in bringing new innovations to our industry," Kallenius said.

China has been sending positive signals to advance high-level opening-up in recent years, significantly strengthening the confidence in the market, he added.

"The modernization of industrial systems hinges on collaboration and openness," said Stefan Hartung, chairman of the board of management at Robert Bosch.

Bosch, as one of the first foreign companies to invest in China, has witnessed rapid growth alongside local partners and customers. Currently,

the German company has a robust presence, boasting 34 manufacturing sites and 26 research and development centers in the Chinese market.

Liu Liehong, head of the National Data Administration, said at the forum that to further propel the deeper integration of digital technologies with real economy and unleash the value of data resources, the country will step up efforts to improve the basic system for data elements, expand industrial application scenarios of data and accelerate the construction of digital infrastructure like computing networks.

Denis Depoux, global managing director of consultancy Roland Berger, said foreign enterprises have been and will hopefully remain key contributors to China's industrial modernization drive, particularly in areas like automation and digitalization of industrial and supply chains.

Li Dongsheng, founder and chairman of Chinese consumer electronics maker TCL Technology Group, called for strengthening exchanges and cooperation with foreign counterparts to bolster digitalization of China's manufacturing sector, exploring mutually beneficial and orderly international rules related to digital economy.

Business: Nation sends strong signal on advancing reform, opening-up

From page 1

In his keynote speech at the China Development Forum, Premier Li Qiang underscored China's plan to carefully study issues of market access and cross-border data flows and said the nation will soon issue new regulations in these areas.

Global CEOs have reinforced their confidence in the importance of China to their businesses. Philips

CEO Roy Jakobs said, "I firmly believe that China will become a strong pillar of the world economy, enabled by sincere cooperation that unleashes the vitality of the world economy and benefits all of humankind."

In fact, China's entire manufacturing industry is now open to foreign companies, and the same applies to the financial services industry. Beijing has also initiated a strategic move to create a unified

national market. Through these measures, the Chinese government has sent a strong signal on additional reform and opening-up.

Clearly for multinational corporations, there may still be some concerns about doing business in China. Geopolitics, local protectionism (for some industries), local competition and issues such as national and data security are on the minds of business leaders.

Increasingly, multinational

corporations feel that they will need to be in China in order to participate in the fast-growing, China-led innovation ecosystems. Otherwise, they may be left behind.

China itself is undergoing a transformation as it embraces the notion of "new quality productive forces," which refers to the pursuit of higher-quality growth through more technological innovations. As China pursues such a path, it will need the participation of plen-

ty of capable foreign companies that, together with Chinese companies, can help China advance even further. More new corporate relationships will be formed, resulting in win-win situations.

Between opportunities and risks, the majority of multinational corporations know where they stand, and business leaders make decisions based on business logic.

China plays a large role in the logic of many multinational corpo-

rations. The large turnout at this year's China Development Forum and the substantive nature of the discussions demonstrate how multinationals put China at the core of their global strategies. More and higher-quality collaboration between multinational corporations and China will create more benefits for the entire world.

The author is founder and chairman of Gao Feng Advisory Co, a strategy and management consulting firm with roots in China. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com
readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

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WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108
529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100
Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-923-2868

HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100
Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA | TORONTO

471 Yonge Street, 10th Floor
Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

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CHINA

Medical insurance enrollment stable

By WANG XIAOYU
wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Enrollment in China's basic medical insurance system has remained stable in recent years and rising premiums have contributed to improving the nation's healthcare services and lessening financial burdens on patients, the National Healthcare Security Administration said on Monday.

"The coverage rate of China's basic medical insurance program has stabilized above 95 percent and the quality of services covered by insurance keeps improving," it said.

The administration made the statement after official data pointed to a consistent decline in the number of people enrolled in its urban and rural residents' insurance program and sporadic reports circulating online of an exodus from the program in the countryside.

China's basic medical insurance consists of an urban and rural residents' program that mainly targets the unemployed, school-age children and rural residents, as well as a program for urban employees.

Data shows that the number of people participating in the urban and rural residents' program in 2022 dropped by around 25 million compared with 2021. The number for last year has not yet been released.

In response, the administration said that the declining number is largely due to an overhaul of insurance data that was launched in conjunction with the establishment of an online insurance information platform in 2022. "For two consecutive years, a total of 56 million cases that see repeated participation in insurance programs within the same province or across provinces have been eliminated," it said.

Meanwhile, from 2020 to 2023, about 5 million to 8 million subscribers to the urban and rural residents' program switched to the employees' program as they graduated from college or landed new jobs.

During a recent investigation carried out at villages in eight provincial-level regions, the administration

said that three villages saw a fall in insurance participants last year, while the remaining five saw a rise. The overall number of insurance subscribers across the eight villages rose by 151 from 2022 to 2023.

Contrary to an online rumor that a number of people withdrew from the insurance program in a village in Macheng, Hubei province, the administration said that 97.4 percent of residents had enrolled last year, with a few opting out for personal reasons.

Over the years, the annual premium for subscribers has risen to 380 yuan (\$53) per person, compared to 10 yuan for a rural cooperative medical insurance plan launched in 2003.

In response to questions over the sharp rise, the administration said the significant improvements in medical services and the great benefits brought to the public were worth far more than the premium increase.

The number of reimbursable medicines has grown from around 300 to 3,088 during the period, including a large number of drugs for cancer and rare diseases as well as novel medicines.

"For example, leukemia patients used to pay nearly 300,000 yuan annually for a drug known as Imatinib. Now, they only need to pay 6,000 yuan out of pocket each year thanks to reimbursements of the program," it said.

The administration added that advanced diagnosis and treatment tools including color ultrasound, CT scans and minimally invasive surgeries can all be reimbursed and the reimbursement ratio for inpatient expenses had risen from about 30 percent to 70 percent.

New policies that enable insurance participants to settle cross-provincial medical expenses and that alleviate financial pressure on patients suffering common and chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure and diabetes have also been rolled out.

The administration said that with the aging population and a decline in births leading to a fall in China's population, the number of program subscribers will likely trend slightly downward.

Heart help



A doctor screens a child for congenital heart disease at the General Hospital of the Third Division of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps in Tumushuke, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Sunday. The Red Cross Society of China initiated the congenital heart disease screening and assistance program to reach out to children across Xinjiang. Medical experts taking part come from hospitals in Shanghai, Beijing and the provinces of Henan and Shandong. The program, lasting until mid-April, is expected to cover 8,000 children. Those confirmed with the disease will be sent to the hospitals for surgical treatment. TAO RAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Supervision tightened on semi-prepared foods

Rules clarify definitions, standards of quality for multibillion yuan industry

By LI LEI
lilei@chinadaily.com.cn

Authorities have moved to tighten oversight of the rapidly expanding semi-prepared food industry, ironing out definitions of precooked dishes and rolling out rules on the use of additives in the sector to ensure food safety.

Restaurants are also being encouraged to identify dishes on their menus that include semi-prepared ingredients, a move that experts say will help customers make informed decisions.

The reforms, led by the State Administration for Market Regulation, which oversees product quality and consumer rights, were outlined in a circular issued on Thursday by six government agencies.

Share prices of companies involved in the semi-prepared food sector fell by an average of 2 percent on the A-share market on Monday because of the strengthened oversight.

Industry insiders said the rules were the first to clarify the definition of semi-prepared food and set out safety and quality standards for the multibillion yuan industry.

China has more than 70,000 companies making food items that have undergone some preparation but are not fully cooked or ready to eat, according to Xinhua News Agency.

Their output value topped 500 billion yuan (\$69.4 million) last year and is on track to surpass 1 trillion yuan in a few years, it said.

The new rules differentiate

between semi-prepared food — also known as prepackaged meals — and other food items, such as instant noodles, frozen dumplings and salads. They say semi-prepared food must be a dish that can be consumed after simple preparations such as heating or boiling.

Experts said makers of frozen foods such as dumplings and hamburgers will no longer be regarded as being semi-prepared food businesses, and will be unable to ignore regulations in their own sector or enjoy preferential policies tailor-made for semi-prepared food makers. They said the generalization of the concept of semi-prepared food had previously created regulatory difficulties.

Zhang Chunhui, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences' Institute of Food Science and Technology, told Xinhua the rules raised the threshold for manufacturers and separated semi-prepared food from other business models, such as those processing and packaging pre-cut uncooked vegetables and meat, or "central kitchens" that prepare and distribute food to satellite kitchens, restaurants, or cafeterias to reduce costs and ensure uniformity.

In a media release issued on Monday, an unnamed official with the State Administration for Market Regulation said ready-to-eat foods that do not require heating or cooking, as well as cold dishes such as vegetables or fruit salads that can be consumed directly, are not considered semi-prepared dishes.

The official said semi-prepared food is an emerging sector that has integrated agriculture, manufacturing and service industries and boasts a sprawling supply chain.

"It is significant in promoting the deep processing of agricultural products, transforming the food industry, consumer upgrading, entrepreneurship and employment," the official said.

The circular also addressed rising food safety concerns in the sector, where poor quality raw materials and banned food additives are harder to spot after being processed.

It said preservatives shall be prohibited in the making of semi-prepared food items, which shall be subject to strict storage conditions related to freezing, refrigeration and sterilization. The use of additives must be strictly controlled, along with the quality of other raw materials.

The increased focus on food safety followed media reports on March 15 — World Consumer Rights Day — that companies in Anhui province, a stronghold of semi-prepared food makers, had used cheaper meat from the necks of pigs to make a precooked dish that should have contained pork belly.

The companies involved have been shut down and their owners detained.

Semi-prepared food grew in popularity during COVID-19 pandemic, when white-collar employees worked from home and cooked for themselves.

The products were also embraced by restaurants, but some consumers felt deceived when they learned the dishes they paid for were not cooked from scratch.

AI guide dogs may offer aid to visually impaired

By QIN FENG in Xi'an
and ZHAO RUINAN

Robot guide dogs may soon become available to more of the 17 million visually impaired people in China thanks to researchers from Northwestern Polytechnical University, who achieved a breakthrough using an artificial intelligence language model.

They have developed an AI guide dog that can provide assistance in scenarios such as crossing streets, using elevators and navigating indoor spaces without having to be connected to the internet, according to the university.

It is a big step in exploring the application of embodied intelligence — an intelligent machine with a physical form that can interact with the environment in real-time using sensors to execute instructions or make decisions.

"Though in recent years there have been some electronic navigation aids, such as electronic navigation helmets, navigation canes, and electronic guide dogs, they cannot engage in conversations with people or fully understand human instructions," said Sun Zhe, an associate professor at the university's School of Artificial Intelligence, Optics and Electronics.

"They can only execute tasks according to pre-deployed programs. They are just cold machines. That's not enough."

The research makes it possible to provide better guidance services for visually impaired people, especially for emotional companionship, Sun said.

17+
million

Number of visually impaired people in China

"Visually impaired people face numerous challenges in daily life, including navigation difficulties and safety hazards," Sun said. "Smart guide dogs using the language model can offer them more convenient and safe navigation, effectively improving their quality of life."

Training a traditional guide dog can cost as much as 200,000 yuan (\$28,000), and there are fewer than 200 in China.

The research team began developing the smart guide dog based on the AI model at the end of last month. Its findings have been published in the Communications of the Chinese Computer Society.

The research was a collaborative effort between the university's School of Artificial Intelligence, Optics and Electronics and the China Telecom Artificial Intelligence Research Institute.

"The current results validate the feasibility of this approach, but there is still some way to go before it can be put into practical application," Sun said. "We will put more effort into it and make it available for those in need as soon as possible."

Contact the writers at
qinfeng@chinadaily.com.cn

Science festival



A robot interacts with children at the opening of the 42nd Beijing Student Science Festival at the Beijing Children's Palace on Sunday. Children at the festival suggested more than 10,000 solutions for problems encountered in daily life. LIU CHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Braking maneuver puts satellite in lunar orbit

By LIANG SHUANG
liangshuang@chinadaily.com.cn

China's Queqiao 2 relay satellite entered a lunar orbit after successfully braking near the moon, the nation's space administration announced on Monday.

The satellite carried out a braking operation at 12:46 am about 440 kilometers above the lunar surface, and entered a lunar orbit 19 minutes later, the China National Space Administration said in a statement.

It will further adjust its altitude and inclination to enter an elliptical orbit that revolves around the moon about every 24 hours, and will conduct communication tests with the Chang'e 4 lander on the lunar surface, as well as the soon-to-be-launched Chang'e 6 probe, the administration said.

It said the near-moon brake maneuver was the most vital orbit adjustment of the mission, as the satellite needed to lower its speed by just the right amount to be captured by lunar gravity and begin to orbit the moon.

It added that the connected Tiandu 1 and Tiandu 2 experimental satellites also conducted a near-moon brake maneuver and entered a lunar orbit. They will soon carry out a planned separation.

Launched on Wednesday by a Long March 8 carrier rocket from Wenchang, Hainan province, Queqiao 2 is set to become the second relay satellite above the moon. It is primarily tasked with relaying signals and data during the upcoming Chang'e 6 robotic mission, and will also serve the provisional Chang'e 7 and 8 missions in the long term.

Police warn against illegal 'spiritual cultivation'

By YANG ZEKUN
yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

Police have warned against illegal activities posing as "spiritual cultivation".

An officer from the Ministry of Public Security said that such activities often borrow concepts from psychology, success theory and modern technology to fabricate courses promoting false ideas such as communicating with gods, shaping souls and accumulating wealth through spiritual practices.

The organizations involved

employ methods like isolating participants, hypnosis, brainwashing, self-denial and indoctrination to exert mental control. They also recruit and exploit participants through methods like membership, franchising and pyramid schemes to accumulate significant wealth.

Some people in the organizations have committed crimes such as illegal detention, rape and molestation.

Police have investigated the crimes of 269 individuals linked to such activities and confiscated over 217 million yuan (\$30.1 million) in illegal gains since 2018, according to

China Police Daily, a publication under the administration of the Ministry of Public Security.

In recent years, public security organs have paid close attention to activities suspected of violating the law under the guise of "spiritual cultivation". Special police forces have been organized to crack down on organizations engaged in such activities, which may use labels like "soul healing", "unleashing potential" and "extraterrestrial civilization".

Since 2019, police in provinces such as Guangdong, Shaanxi, Jiangsu, Fujian, Yunnan and Shandong

have dealt with multiple organizations of this nature. Those in key positions have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from five to 17 years for crimes including illegal business operations, exploiting superstition to break the law, fraud and rape.

Such activities pose significant threats to public health and social stability, the officer said. Some individuals and organizations continue to disguise themselves, and police urge the public to recognize the true nature and dangers of such activities.

CHINA

NATIONAL VISION, LOCAL ACTION

Tongren mayor sees prosperous future for city

By ZHENG JINRAN
and YANG JUN in Guiyang

Tongren in Guizhou province, known as the "City of Matcha", plans to organize more international forums related to its famous Fanjing Mountain and sports events, and diversify its matcha products to attract overseas tourists, Mayor Mu Rongkun said.

"We will explore our potential in ecological resources, especially making good use of the fame of Fanjing Mountain to host international forums and events on ecology and biodiversity, to enhance international visibility," Mu said.

More sporting events like the Fanjing Mountain Marathon and road cycling races are expected to develop into international events, he said, adding that the marathon will be run on Sunday.

Fanjing Mountain, part of the Wuling Mountain range, was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2018 and is home to a conservation area, a nature reserve and a number of Buddhist temples. It has been considered a sacred site for centuries.

Based on the rich natural and cultural resources, the tourism sector has grown into a pillar industry in the city.

Tourist visits last year were up 9 percent on the figure in 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, with tourism spending up 14 percent.

"Overseas tourists are mainly from Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, and Hong Kong and Macao residents are also a major source," Mu said.

"We will accelerate the official opening of Tongren Fenghuang Airport as an aviation port, and increase international flights to explore overseas markets."

The airport was granted temporary permission to operate as an aviation port in November 2017, and started direct flights to Bangkok, Thailand, in August 2018, and flights to Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, in Vietnam, in 2019.

Tongren also plans to cooperate with major domestic tourism agencies and online celebrities from markets such as the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to promote the city's major attractions and expand its exposure, Mu said, adding it will improve tourism services and provide better guides for foreign tourists.

The city has also initiated measures to provide specialty products to lure foreign guests and contribute to Guizhou's ambition to become a world-class tourist destination, he said.

Netizens have dubbed Tongren the global super factory for matcha, with products such as matcha powder having been sold to over 40 foreign countries and regions. Sales last year exceeded 1,000 metric tons, Mu said.



Tourists visit Fanjing Mountain in Tongren, Guizhou province, on July 23. Fanjing Mountain was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2018. HU PANXUE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Tongren

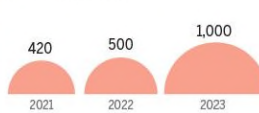
LOCATION



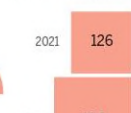
Source: Tongren city government

MATCHA NUMBERS

Sales volume
(unit: metric tons)



Output value
(unit: million yuan)



Export volume
(unit: metric tons)



GDP of Tongren (unit: billion yuan)



CHINA DAILY

"We will explore our potential in ecological resources, especially making good use of the fame of Fanjing Mountain to host international forums and events on ecology and biodiversity, to enhance international visibility."

Mu Rongkun, mayor of Tongren city of Guizhou province



city will also increase the industry's added value.

According to a white paper released by the China Center for Information Industry Development a year ago, China has become the world's largest producer of matcha and the largest consumer of matcha products.

It suggested that the matcha industry in China will continue to expand. By 2027, global matcha production is forecast to reach 12,000 tons, with China and Japan expected to remain the primary regions driving growth.

Contact the writers at
zhengjinran@chinadaily.com.cn



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Travelers change plans, seek refunds

Rising safety concerns after attack may hamper tourism to Russia

By CHENG SI
chengsi@chinadaily.com.cn

China's major airline companies and travel agencies have offered free refunds or rescheduling to travelers with trips booked for Russia, after a terrorist attack in the country's capital Moscow.

Experts said that Chinese travelers' rising safety concerns may hamper tourism to Russia in the near future.

On Friday night, several gunmen indiscriminately shot at people at the Crocus City Hall in suburban Moscow. They killed 137 people, including three children, Xinhua News Agency reported on Monday.

Prices of nonstop flight tickets from Moscow to major Chinese cities such as Beijing and Shanghai skyrocketed to over 10,000 yuan (\$1,400) for economy class and above 50,000 yuan for first class soon after the attack.

"I was super scared and I applied for refunds on flight tickets and hotels soon after I saw the news on Saturday morning," said Li Xiang, a 31-year-old from Beijing, who planned a six-day trip to Russia around the end of April.

"It's better to wait and see now, and I'm not sure I will reschedule a trip to the country in the future."

Some major domestic airlines and travel agencies have offered free refunds or rescheduling to customers who have safety concerns.

Policies vary between airlines, but most allow travelers who bought tickets before Saturday to get a refund or change flight tickets to Moscow free of charge within one month.

Travel agencies have also taken measures to relieve customers' anxiety.

"We've made a full refund to one of our customers so far, who expected to head to Russia on May 16," the Tuniu online travel service said. "Under our current policy, customers whose departure date is 30 days away from the date of



The negative effect of the terrorist attack may be relieved in the future if the current situation can be well controlled."

Yang Jinsong, director of the International Institute at the China Tourism Academy

applying for cancellation can get a full refund." It added that decisions on refunds will be made on a case-by-case basis.

Wei Changren, founder of btiit.com, a tourism-related financial news portal, said that more Chinese have traveled to Russia in the post-pandemic era, but the terrorist attack will affect their travel choices.

"The terrorist attack has cast a shadow over people who have travel plans to the country," he said. "People have concerns that the terrorist attack may not be the last one, so they will make more cautious choices regarding their travel destinations."

Yang Jinsong, director of the International Institute at the China Tourism Academy, said safety is the basic and most important element for tourism destinations.

"The negative effect of the terrorist attack may be relieved in the future if the current situation can be well controlled and no similar malicious attack happens in the next few months," he said.

"An attack or accident is unpredictable, so it's better to return to the Chinese mainland soon after an attack or seek help from the local embassy or consulate for rescue. We suggest travelers not visit destinations with individual safety risks, and they should closely follow travel warnings by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Culture and Tourism before making travel plans."

AI model offers support for traditional medicine

By YANG CHENG in Tianjin
yangcheng@chinadaily.com.cn

The testing of an artificial intelligence model dedicated to traditional Chinese medicine has been completed, with its developers now looking to countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative as their first overseas markets.

The Haihe Qibo model — named after the Haihe, the mother river of Tianjin, and Qibo, a legendary TCM doctor from ancient times — was unveiled in Tianjin on Saturday during an event hosted by information technology giant Huawei and Tianjin's Hebei district government.

"Setting itself apart from previous TCM big models, this model offers multi-language services and robust data, and boasts rapid AI compatibility," said Wang Xin, vice-dean of the School of Artificial Intelligence at Tianjin University.

The model was developed by Tianjin University, Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, the Tianjin Artificial Intelligence Computing Center and the startup company Graph Intelligence. It features 240 gigabytes of Chinese corpus, 1GB of TCM data, 45 national TCM textbooks, the medical collections of the Daizhige information database, 703 medical books in the *Complete Library in Four Sections* — one of the most comprehensive compilations of Chinese classical texts — 221 ancient TCM books from an open-source library and a

TCM examination database containing more than 5,000 entries.

Jia Yongzhe, CEO of Graph Intelligence, said he expects the model will initially be deployed in China and Southeast Asia, where TCM has deep roots.

"The model is expected to support community medical services in precise diagnosis, pharmaceutical companies and retail drug shops," he said.

Ma Ben, CEO of the Tianjin AI Computing Center, which was established last March in Hebei district, emphasized the model's computational capabilities.

"Within a year, the computational capacity has surged to 300 petaflops (1 petaflop equals 1 quadrillion floating-point operations per second), ranking at the forefront in China," he said.

Zhang Junhua, vice-president of Tianjin University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, said AI technology can help analyze the components and mechanisms of traditional Chinese medicine, improve the success rate of new drug development, and monitor and control parameters such as temperature and humidity during production to ensure consistent product quality.

"The integration of AI with TCM culture can elevate the quality and market competitiveness of traditional Chinese medicine products, and also promote the innovation and refinement of the traditional Chinese medicine knowledge system," he said.

30 Buddhist relics returned from Taiwan

By WANG KAIHAO
wangkaihao@chinadaily.com.cn

Thirty Buddhist cultural relics have been returned to the Chinese mainland from Taiwan thanks to the joint efforts of people on both sides of the Strait.

The relics were escorted to Beijing by a delegation of about 200 people from the United Association of Humanistic Buddhism, Chunghua.

Most of the relics were believed to have been stolen from Shanxi province before being taken overseas.

They were transferred to the National Cultural Heritage Administration on Monday, marking the largest return of lost relics to the mainland from Taiwan in recent years.

Thirteen of the returned pieces, including the heads of broken Buddhist images and painted sculptures of Buddha, were shown at a donation ceremony at the National Museum of China in Beijing on Monday.

Initiated by Hsing Yun, a late Buddhist master, and the Fo Guang Shan Monastery in Kaohsiung, the United Association of Humanistic Buddhism, Chunghua, was founded in 2015 and now includes over 400 temples and organizations across Taiwan.

Wu Chih-yang, co-president of the association, said the returned relics were collected by "warmhearted



Guests attending the donation ceremony view the Buddhist relics at the National Museum of China in Beijing on Monday. LI HE / XINHUA

people" from overseas and then gathered by the association.

"There is always a long story behind each lost item, but destiny rediscovers them, and the key is thus to bring them home," Wu said. "Donation of these items is not only an exchange of cultural heritage and Buddhist circles across the Strait. It's a higher level communication concerning our deep emotion."

The relics are generally considered to be from the Song (960-1279) to Ming (1368-1644) Dynasty.

Sammy Yang, vice-chancellor of

Taipei's Shih Hsin University and a member at the association, said a preliminary appraisal in Taiwan two years ago indicated a high degree of similarity in the artistic styles, materials and craftsmanship of some of the painted sculptures with others in Buddhist temples in Shanxi province.

Analysis of cutting marks on some head statues led to speculation that they may have been stolen about 30 years ago, considering some Buddhist statues were cut and stolen from a Shanxi temple in an

identical way in 1993. They were later found and returned from Taiwan in 1999.

But Yang said other relics in the group may have been stolen much longer ago.

In March 2016, Hsing Yun and his followers escorted the lost head of a 6th-century Buddhist statue to Beijing and donated it back to the mainland. That piece was stolen from a temple in Hebei province and later collected by a Taiwan entrepreneur who is a Fo Guang Shan Monastery pilgrim.

At the donation ceremony in 2016, also held at the National Museum of China, Hsing Yun promised to bring more lost items back.

He died about a year ago.

"Hsing Yun established an outstanding example for people to safeguard Chinese cultural relics," Sun Yeli, minister of culture and tourism, said at the museum on Monday. "Again, we see his unfulfilled wish get realized."

Sun said comprehensive studies of the relics will be soon launched. Related exhibitions will also be organized to allow people on both sides of the Strait to benefit from the fruits of the joint protection of cultural relics.

"Cultural communication has always played a crucial role in enhancing people-to-people connectivity across the Strait and strengthening our links," Sun said.

WORLD

Editor's note: As the People's Republic of China celebrates the 75th anniversary of its founding this year, China Daily asked prominent international figures to reflect on their relationship with the country and to talk of the direction in which they see it going.

CHINA LINK

Clearing Western misconceptions about China

UK business leader Jonathan Geldart seeks to portray a balanced perspective of the country through extensive experience

By CHEN YINGQUN
chenyingqun@chinadaily.com.cn

For many years, Jonathan Geldart has been saddened that the Western perspective of China and the Chinese is asymmetrical to the truth, while Western media, with a deep-rooted ignorance about the true China, continues to fuel misunderstanding and mistrust.

In response, Geldart seeks to provide a measured and even-handed perspective rooted in his prolonged engagement with China, hoping this would help Westerners gain an appreciation that their rather narrow view of China at a superficial level needs to be reviewed in light of the stories from the real lives of its citizens.

"My experiences of working in China and spending time with Chinese people taught me to question the old, accepted stereotypes," said Geldart, who wrote three books about China and is now director-general of the Institute of Directors, or IoD, a 120-year-old member community of business leaders and directors in the United Kingdom and beyond.

"There are good and not-so-good people in every country in every part of the world, but it does not mean that you should default to mistrust," Geldart first set foot in China in 2008 during a four-day business conference in Shanghai, where he ventured into local streets to explore the city between work intervals.

"It was my first encounter with Chinese people, and I found it exciting and energizing. The friendliness and openness of the locals I met were wonderful. I was hooked on China from that trip forward," he said.

Shortly thereafter, he had a chance to visit Beijing and was later invited to collaborate with the Chinese division of a global accounting firm, where he served as the marketing and brands director on the global board.

"I thought I would be in China only for a few weeks, but I stayed for almost 10 years," he said.

For nearly a decade, he resided in Beijing but traveled extensively, from Northeast China's Heilongjiang province to Gansu province in the northwest to Hainan province in the south. He explored the country's diverse landscapes, including mountains and ravines, waterways and lakes, secluded hamlets and lively metropolises.

He was awed by the rich cultural tapestry and historical landmarks, from the imperial splendor of the Forbidden City in Beijing to the serene statue of the bodhisattva Guan Yin at the southernmost point of Sanya, Hainan province, and the tranquil beauty of the Humble Administrator's Garden in Suzhou, Jiangsu province.

Although Geldart was never formally taught the Chinese language, he enrolled in classes both in the UK and in Beijing, fitting them in when he could between a busy schedule. Slowly he came to learn enough to get by and to start to appreciate the complexity and nuance of the language.

"I started to read books on China and then the Chinese Classics, including *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, *Dream of the Red Chamber* and *Water Margin* as well as *I Ching*, also known as *The Book of Changes*," he



Top: Jonathan Geldart (left) and Andrew Seaton, CEO of the China-Britain Business Council, sign a memorandum of understanding between the CBBC and the Institute of Directors in London. Above: Jonathan Geldart and two of his friends at the launch event of his book *Notes From a Beijing Coffeeshop* in 2015, and the covers of his two books. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

said. "I learned so much from those wonderful stories and wisdom."

Geldart said he experienced a very different China from the one that was being portrayed in the West and the Western media, and he came up with the idea of telling a more balanced story himself.

Based on his work as a businessman, he published *The Thoughts of Chairmen Now* in 2013, in which he shared wisdom from China's business leaders and entrepreneurs and a lot of insights for achieving sustained business success in China.

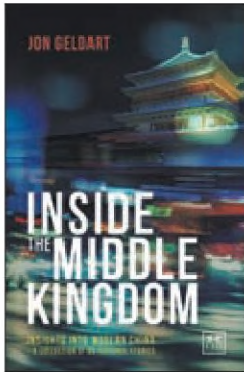
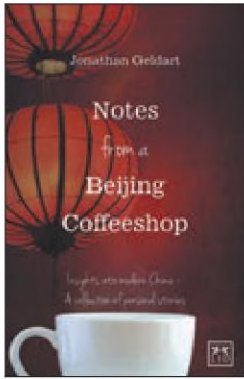
Thinking that there was a wider truth to be told about the people of China, apart from business, he then talked to more than 300 people in almost two years and published *Notes From a Beijing Coffeeshop* in 2015, which provides a series of fascinating observations of how people are really doing business and living

in today's fast-changing China. Its sequel *Inside the Middle Kingdom* was published in 2017.

"Every Chinese I approached was wonderfully open-hearted and gave their time and thoughts with great warmth and humility. There was a common power and energy from all those I interviewed: the overwhelming feeling was of positivity about the country," he said.

Geldart said writing the books allowed him to scratch much deeper into the way of life of many ordinary Chinese and taught him a lot more than he would ever have got through just reading books or flying in and out to "do business".

"My approach in engaging with anyone about China is simply to tell my story as I know it. I try to navigate a middle way between the stereotypes and my experience to provide a calm and balanced perspective."



Born: The United Kingdom
Education: 1976-80: Master's in Geography with Archaeology, University of St. Andrews



Jonathan Geldart

Director-general of the Institute of Directors

Career:

- 1988-90: Director, Morrice Partnership
- 1990-2006: Director, Mid Market Practice, PwC
- 2006-18: Global Board, Grant Thornton International
- 2019: Director-General, Institute of Directors

Books:

- *The Thoughts of Chairmen Now* (2013)
- *Notes From a Beijing Coffeeshop* (2015)
- *Inside the Middle Kingdom* (2017)

Hobbies: Hiking, mountaineering, mountain running

China can support the progress the world wishes to make on important matters, from climate change to artificial intelligence, the development of new medicines and scientific discoveries, he said.

"Politicians must undertake the policies that they believe are right for any individual country. However, working in a thoughtful and collaborative way at a business and personal level is essential for the good of all."

China has had an enormous influence on his work and life, Geldart said, and he remains connected to the country through his friendships and the development of IoD's governance courses in China.

The IoD works with tens of thousands of individual directors in the UK and around the world to support them to be the best directors they can be. Its approach is to teach global good practices in corporate governance and the operations of corporate boards.

It has two active China groups supporting inbound and outbound business interests in the IoD in the UK, and regularly welcomes Chinese business delegations to its flagship headquarters in the heart of London.

Enormous opportunities

"If there is a secret about doing business in China, it is respect," Geldart said. "Respect means taking the time to learn about China. Take the time to read about Chinese history and its culture as well as understand a little of the language. Cast aside received Western wisdom of what others tell you about China. Make up your own mind and be open to investing a bit of your time and of yourself to building the relationships you will need to benefit from the enormous opportunity for collaboration and business that working with China and the Chinese can offer."

The Chinese economy continues to grow and there remains enormous potential for business development in the country, he said.

"I receive more and more reports of businesses believing it is just too difficult to do business in China. Perceptions of difficulty mean the enthusiasm of Western boards to invest is diluted."

"The reality is quite different as China is trying to open investment opportunities and increase attractiveness across many industries and locations."

Geldart said he is very optimistic regarding the future of China-UK business development. Recently, the IoD has signed a memorandum of understanding with the China-Britain Business Council to deliver specialist courses in *The Role of the Director* and the *Board* which focuses on good governance, to British businesses in China during 2024. The courses are designed to support businesses to develop their leaders to understand Western board governance.

While living in Yorkshire, England, Geldart said he still regularly drinks Chinese tea and misses the variety of real, freshly prepared Chinese food. And he yearns to return to China some day. "I am still fascinated by Chinese culture and the rich and absorbing history of this often-misunderstood country," he said.

Expats need to break stereotypes and ignore misinformation

During my journalistic career of more than a decade, I have asked foreigners about their first impressions of China. Many of them expressed their surprise or admiration, saying the China and Chinese people they experienced differed greatly from the portrayal they had formed through media and other sources in their home countries.

Despite China being the world's second-largest economy, there still exists a widespread ignorance, various stereotypes and even misinformation about the country abroad.

This is partly because of the long-term depiction of Chinese culture and life in Western media, literary works and films. For example, some ordinary foreigners think all Chinese people know how to practice



martial arts, some have only heard of pandas in China, and some even believe China is still an extremely backward country and that its people still live a miserable life.

Meanwhile, some Western politicians and media, driven by ideological and political motivations, have continuously spread misinformation about China, tarnishing and even demonizing its image in the eyes of the international public.

For example, because of ideological differences, they would view China's rapid development over the past

few decades as posing a "threat" to the West. They have accused the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative of creating "debt traps" for developing countries. They have also persistently made unfounded accusations on issues related to Xinjiang, Xizang, Hong Kong and the Taiwan question, including falsely accusing China of committing "genocide" in the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region.

In fact, China's fast-growing economy has become a significant engine for global economic growth over the past few decades. Last year, it is estimated to have contributed more than 30 percent to the world's growth. China has developed a vast and diverse industrial system, promoting the global allocation of production factors, enhancing productivity levels in

many countries and offering a huge market for all countries.

As for the BRI, in the past 11 years, Belt and Road cooperation has generated nearly \$1 trillion of investment, resulted in more than 3,000 cooperation projects and lifted nearly 40 million people out of poverty.

And in Xinjiang, claims of "genocide" are utterly unfounded. Over the past 60 years, the Uyghur population has grown from 2.2 million to about 12 million, and their average lifespan has increased from 30 to 75 years.

Fortunately, many expats have had their preconceived notions about China changed after visiting this country. Some have started to enjoy the convenience of modern life and the dividends brought about by China's economic development; some ponder the development logic

and secrets behind the country's remarkable achievements; others relish the culture and cuisine and enjoy making friends with locals. Additionally, many of them have started to share their observations and thoughts through writing books, creating short videos and other means, aiming to break down the stereotypes about China and portray a true picture of the country to an international audience.

Recently, China has further increased its openness to the global community, welcoming more foreign visitors. The country has signed mutual visa exemption agreements with 157 countries, covering different types of passports. It has reached agreements or arrangements with 44 countries to streamline visa procedures, and achieved comprehensive mutual visa exemption with 23 countries, including Thailand, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates.

Seeing is believing. It is hoped that more foreigners will take the opportunity to visit China, engage with the local people and immerse themselves in the scenery, culture and everyday life of the country.

No country is without its flaws; every country has its strengths and areas that need improvement. Those who do not know China well should set aside arrogance and prejudice, ignore false information and stereotypes and avoid making hasty conclusions before truly experiencing China firsthand.

If individuals could personally experience and perceive China with an open and inclusive attitude, they would find the real China is very different from what some Western media and politicians have described. This would allow them to form a more objective and comprehensive understanding of China, which is beneficial for both China and the individuals themselves.

WORLD

Gaza cease-fire resolution passes at UN

UN Security Council adopts resolution with 14 of 15 in favor while the US abstains

By MINLU ZHANG
at the United Nations
minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

The United Nations Security Council on Monday adopted a resolution demanding an immediate cease-fire in Gaza for the holy month of Ramadan, marking the first such directive since the current Israeli-Palestinian conflict began on Oct 7.

The resolution, put forward by the 10 nonpermanent members of the Security Council, was approved with 14 out of 15 votes.

The United States, which had vetoed three previous cease-fire drafts, abstained from the vote, allowing the resolution to pass.

The resolution demands "an immediate cease-fire" for Ramadan respected by all parties, "leading to a permanent sustainable cease-fire". It also demands an immediate and unconditional release of hostages and emphasizes "the urgent need to expand the flow" of aid into Gaza.

Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the UN, said that for the lives already lost in Gaza, "the council resolution today comes too late". More than 32,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza and nearly 75,000 Palestinians injured since Oct 7, according to the Ministry of Health in Gaza.

"For the millions of people in Gaza who remain mired in an unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe, this resolution, if fully and effectively implemented, could still bring long-awaited hope," Zhang added.

"We call on the parties concerned to fulfill their obligations under the United Nations Charter and to take due action as required by



Members of the United Nations Security Council vote on a Gaza resolution at UN Headquarters in New York City on Monday. The resolution, which calls for an immediate cease-fire during the month of Ramadan, was passed with 14 out of 15 votes. The United States abstained, permitting its approval. MINLU ZHANG / CHINA DAILY

the resolution. We expect the state with significant influence to play a positive role on the party concerned, including by using all necessary and effective means at their disposal to support the implementation of the resolution," he said.

Noting that China, Russia and Algeria voted against the draft resolution proposed by the US on Friday, he explained the differences between the two drafts.

"The current draft is unequivocal and correct in its direction, demanding an immediate cease-fire, while the previous one has been evasive and ambiguous. The current draft demands an unconditional cease-fire, while the previous one has set pre-conditions for a cease-fire," said Zhang.

"The current draft reflects the general expectations of the international community and enjoys the collective support of the Arab states, while the previous one has been jointly rejected by the Arab states," he said, pointing to the "no" vote from Algeria on Friday, which said it represented the entire Arab world.

"The differences between the two drafts boil down to nothing but whether there should be an immediate and unconditional cease-fire and whether the collective punishment of the people in Gaza should be allowed to continue," he said.

Zhang said that after repeated vetoes of council actions, "the United States finally decided to stop obstructing the council's demand for an immediate cease-fire".

Zhang also emphasized that a cease-fire during the month of Ramadan is "only the first step that must serve as a basis leading to a permanent sustainable cease-fire and the early return of the people of Gaza who are forced to flee their homes".

He called to lift "the blockade of Gaza and the man-made barriers to access of humanitarian supplies" and Israel "must fully cooperate to open Rafah and other land crossings", adding that China "categorically reject Israel's recent vicious campaign of attacks against" the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and the UN system as a whole.

Following Monday's vote, UN Secretary-General António Guterres said on X.com that the

long-awaited resolution must be implemented, emphasizing that the council's failure to do so "would be unforgivable".

Resolutions passed by the Security Council are legally binding on all UN member states, and the order must be carried out.

US Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield said certain key edits "were ignored" in the resolution, including their request to condemn Hamas. She explained this as the reason for the US' abstention. "And we did not agree with everything in this resolution," she added.

Following the US decision to abstain, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday canceled a scheduled delegation trip to the US.

Florida law restricting Chinese in academia challenged

By MAY ZHOU in Houston
mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com

Two students and a professor filed a federal lawsuit Monday against Florida law SB 846, which prohibits the state's public colleges and universities from partnering with entities in seven "countries of concern", as well as offering academic employment to international students domiciled in those countries.

The seven "countries of concern" are China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Syria and Venezuela. The law took effect in July 2023.

Court documents show that the plaintiffs are represented by lawyers from the ACLU Foundation of Florida, the Chinese American Legal Defense Alliance, and Perkins Coie LLP.

The listed plaintiffs include Manny Diaz, commissioner of the Florida Department of Education, as well as chancellors and members of the State University System of Florida Board of Governors.

The lawsuit, filed in US District Court in Miami, seeks a judgment that SB 846 be declared unlawful because it violates the US Constitution and federal doctrines. The suit also seeks an injunction to stop the enforcement of SB 846.

The legal challenge said that "SB 846 will most heavily impact Chinese nonimmigrants given that they comprise the vast majority of international students and professors eligible for actual or prospective academic employment in Florida public universities and colleges".

It has been reported that 40 percent of the University of Florida's international graduate student body came from China, and they are deemed "best graduate students" by some professors in the US.

Plaintiff Zhipeng Yin came to the US in 2021 and studied in New York for about 2 1/2 years before accepting a Florida International University (FIU) offer to enroll in its computer science doctoral program with a graduate teaching assistantship that was set to begin in December 2023.

The offer led Yin to sign a 13-month lease with monthly rent of \$2,600, as well as incurring a moving expense of more than \$15,000.

However, FIU informed Yin in January that his teaching-assistantship offer and tuition waiver were deferred due to the new SB 846 process. He is paying the full tuition fee.

Similarly, under SB 846, plaintiff Zhen Guo lost his teaching-assistant position, which included an annual stipend of \$27,510, a tuition waiver, and access to the FIU-sponsored graduate assistant health insurance program, which was set to start in December last year. He's also paying full tuition.

SB 846 would cost both plaintiffs about \$40,000 each per academic year, the lawsuit said. Besides financial losses, the plaintiffs also are deprived of opportunities to build a network of peers and mentors and limit exposure to innovative research, scholarly discourse and publication opportunities.

The extra financial burden is also interrupting Yin's plan of academic training. He is considering moving from Florida, but he would face a penalty from his rental lease as well as moving expenses.

The third plaintiff, Zhengfei Guan, is a well published, award-winning, tenured associate professor at the University of Florida. Guan is a permanent resident of the United States. He has received more than \$3 million in research grants and has collaborated on grants totaling over \$30 million.

The lawsuit said that SB 846 has injured Guan because it has severely affected his ability to recruit and hire the best postdoctoral candidates.

The lawsuit also seeks judgment that both Yin and Guo should be considered domiciled in Florida because they are not physically residing in China but Florida.

Another Florida law that restricts Chinese from buying real property also has been challenged in court.

The 11th US Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in February that the land law SB 264 is likely superseded by federal law and blocked its enforcement. The argument for this case is scheduled in April.

Chinese band rocks on North America debut

By MINGMEI LI in New York
and LI YINGQING in Kunming

From the rehearsal room of an urban village in Kunming, Yunnan province, to live house tours across multiple cities in North America, the rock band Mayuan Poet has spent 16 years on the journey.

As they tour from the "live music capital of the world" Austin, Texas, to Los Angeles and San Francisco, and the "home of grunge music" Seattle, to the East Coast cities of New York and Boston, the band made its debut tour series in the US, attracting thousands.

"Feeling a bit more nervous, with a touch more anticipation," the 38-year-old lead singer of the band, stage name "Ku Guo", told China Daily. He said he enjoyed the stage and the interactions with his overseas audiences. "This is the birthplace of rock and indie music; it feels like bringing our original music back to the roots."

He wandered around the cities when he wasn't on stage. New York appeared just like the one he had seen in movies, with its towering skyscrapers, but this time it was real, he said.

He also found himself sitting by Lake Washington, gazing at its tranquil waters, immersed in nature's embrace. By chance, he stumbled upon his favorite band, Coldplay, whose music had profoundly influenced his own creative journey, on vinyl in a corner store in Los Angeles.

"The Western environment and Western rock music have provided a framework for Chinese rock music, offering us a valuable learning opportunity," he said.

The style of his band's music was influenced by grunge music, also known as the Seattle sound.

"As we develop our own style of rock music in China, especially in terms of lyricism and emotional expression, that's different from traditional Western rock," he continued. "Moreover, China's poetic culture is exceptionally beautiful, and we integrate poetry into our songwriting."

As one of the first Chinese rock bands to perform in the US, reminiscing about their performances over the past 14 years, with tickets selling for only ¥30 (\$4.4) then, Ku Guo feels an increased sense of responsibility.

"Actually, my English isn't very good, but I still resonate with Western rock

music, and that's the power of music."

The first stop of the tour was in Austin, or SXSW, an annual conglomeration of parallel film, interactive media, and music festivals launched in 1987.

The band was invited by Cheizak Li, the founder of the Friends from the East musical festival, who has been actively involved in the Chinese and international music industry for more than 20 years. He joined many Chinese musicians to go to SXSW to launch "China Night" performances starting in 2018, when another Chinese band, FAZI, made its debut in the US.

This year, as part of Friends from the East, Mayuan Poet and FAZI were invited to the SXSW festival to perform Chinese rock music.

"Actually, music is a particularly good bridge for eliminating different perceptions among people from different countries," he added.

Having participated in the music variety show last year, Mayuan Poet has also gained the love of many music fans at home and abroad.

"I accompanied my friends to watch the performance. It was the first time I saw Mayuan Poet live. I was infected by their passionate performance and I really like their music," said Sylvia Miles, who attended the band's performance in San Francisco.

Li Wen from Canada said: "I have always liked Mayuan Poet. This time, I drove to Boston from Canada and wanted to listen to their music live."

Chinese independent musicians have begun to dip their toes into the international market. Bands like Miserable Faith, Omnipotent Youth Society, and Wu Tiao Ren started overseas tours as early as 2023 after being invited to the inaugural Friends from the East festival and tours, promoting Chinese rock music overseas.

"Music is a window, and overseas musicians will also discover that the fans in China are similar to those elsewhere; they are also interested in their music regardless of language barriers," Cheizak Li said.

"Music drives communication between people. You cry, you laugh, and when you are in a live atmosphere at a music festival, this kind of emotion is universal for everyone."

Contact the writers at mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com.



On the float of the United Irish Cultural Center at the San Francisco St. Patrick's Day Parade on March 16, members of Chinese and Irish communities, along with local dignitaries, sit on railroad ties while wearing bamboo hats reminiscent of the Chinese railroad workers, to commemorate their ancestors' contributions to the building of the Transcontinental Railroad more than 150 years ago. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chinese, Irish team up to honor labors of 1800s railroad workers

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
lizhu@chinadailyusa.com

More than 150 years ago, the story of Chinese and Irish laborers who toiled in backbreaking conditions to build America's first Transcontinental Railroad remained largely untold, and their sacrifices were often overlooked.

In a remarkable display of unity, the Chinese and Irish communities in San Francisco are joining forces to ensure those forgotten heroes are finally recognized.

"The Chinese workers and the Irish workers were never recognized," Leo Cassidy, board member of the United Irish Cultural Center, or UICC, in San Francisco, told China Daily. "They've never been commended for all their work and how they suffered."

The desire to rectify the past fueled a recent collaboration between the two ethnic groups that stole the show at the San Francisco St. Patrick's Day Parade on March 16.

The UICC's float, designed as an old train, displayed spikes, wooden ties, metal rails and banners proclaiming "Chinese and Irish Railroad Workers" on either side.

On the float, members of both communities, along with local

dignitaries, sat on railroad ties, wearing bamboo hats reminiscent of the Chinese railroad workers.

"The theme is unity, showing that both communities still work together," explained Cassidy, who played a key role in creating the float. Next year, the float will participate in the Chinese New Year parade in Chinatown.

In Cassidy's eyes, the stories of the railroad workers were "phenomenal and inspiring". While building the railroad in 1869, Chinese and Irish workers set a record by laying 10 miles (16 kilometers) of the track by hand in a single day, an "amazing achievement", as he put it.

"We want to tell the real stories of what actually happened, and some of the real stories are not pretty. But you can't just erase history. You got to tell the truth," said Cassidy.

The Transcontinental Railroad was the largest engineering project of the time and crucial for developing the American West and connecting the United States across the continent.

Building the railroad was a monumental task, laden with perilous conditions. Between 1865 and 1869, thousands of Chinese immigrants became the backbone of the Central Pacific Railroad's workforce,

comprising 90 percent of much of the construction.

Dangerous conditions

The Central Pacific Railroad, the western section of the Transcontinental Railroad, required tunneling through the imposing Sierra Nevada, which meant the laborers worked in dangerous conditions, such as carving out tunnels through the solid granite mountains at high altitudes and constructing trestles across deep canyons, according to the Chinese Railroad Workers in North America Project at Stanford University.

While their feat was considered miraculous, the cost was immense. The Central Pacific kept no records of worker deaths, but estimates range from hundreds to thousands, with the vast majority of the fatalities being Chinese.

Despite their sacrifice, these workers were shunned from the railroad's completion ceremony in 1869, and their contribution was erased from the narrative.

The Chinese community has been at the forefront of advocating for recognition, with California in 2017 designating May 10 as Chinese Railroad Workers Memorial Day.

THE HANDS OF TIME



Left: Cats are popular subjects in traditional Su embroidery works.



Center and right: Two embroidery works, depicting a landscape and a traditional garden, showcase the craftsmanship of Zou Yingzi, a master known for her unique stitching style. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Editor's note: Traditional arts and crafts are supreme samples of Chinese cultural heritage. China Daily is running this series to show how master artisans are using dedication and innovation to inject new life into these age-old heritages. In this installment, we follow the thread of history from ancient Suzhou to discover how skilled embroiderers are helping their craft evolve to fit modern Chinese lifestyles.

Following the patterns of history



A thread that binds generations of Suzhou craftswomen continues to weave ever beautiful designs. Deng Zhangyu reports.

Only when I take the needle out and touch the silk thread, I feel fully comfortable," says Zou Yingzi, an inheritor of Su embroidery, an ancient craft that originates from the garden city of Suzhou in Jiangsu province.

The day before the interview, the 53-year-old worked more than 10 hours, until late into the night, on a large piece of Su embroidery. A piece measuring around half a meter can take her months to complete. From Zou's mother to her grandmothers, all the women in her family are good at needlework, particularly Su embroidery, which features intricate stitches and the creative use of silk threads dyed in various colors.

She remembers that just a few days after her mother had surgery, the woman in her 70s jumped out of her bed and sat in front of her embroidery frame, telling others not to disturb her to encourage her to rest.

"We thought she was working, but she regarded embroidery as her way of relaxing. That's what Su embroidery means to us. The needle is our paint brush, while silk threads are the paint. We can express our ideas and emotions on fabric and, in doing so, find peace in mind," says Zou.

Su embroidery has a history of more than 2,000 years. A piece of fabric with exquisite silk embroidery unearthed from a tomb in the area showed that the craft dates back to the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). Since ancient times, needlework had been a must-learn skill for women, who had to make clothes for their families. It was a tradition that mothers should make wedding clothes with exquisite embroidery for their daughters.

Zou recalls that, when she was little, her grandmother was busy every day, making wedding clothes and quilts for granddaughters. At the age of 6, she started to help her mother to make Su embroidery items, all of which were sold to support the family. "I had a dream to become a painter. Now, the needle helps me to realize that dream," says Zou.

Her studio in Suzhou is full of her work. Flowers, cats, butterflies, figures of Buddhist deities and scenes from nature become vivid and real on silk fabric. Viewers can even make out a single strand of a cat's fur. A single silk thread can be split into 16 or more strands, which in most cases are too thin to be seen. The studio provides magnifying glasses for visitors to better appreciate the details of Zou's work.

"Su embroidery has enchanted me for decades. I can work for days without sleep to make a fine piece," says Zou.

Courting royalty

Su embroidery is known for its rich colors, intricate embroidery techniques, elegant designs and clean stitches. All these characteristics, which distinguish it from other embroidery styles in China, have been long closely connected with the natural environment and lifestyle of Suzhou, a city that has a long history of silk production and textile craftsmanship, making it a natural hub for the development of embroidery techniques, according to Zheng Lihong,



A flock of birds come alive in the skilled hands of Pu Xianghong, 59, a master of Su embroidery known for her flower-and-bird works. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

Behind the beauty of Su embroidery are lots of intricate processes. The charm of the art is its highly flexible and innovative use of stitching techniques."

Fu Xianghong, embroiderer

an art professor of Soochow University.

Suzhou also boasts elegant gardens and Kunqu Opera. It has been an economic and cultural center in ancient China for a millennium. Many noblemen and well-educated people settled down in the city. Women from these rich and noble families had a good taste for art. The style of their needlework was influenced by the aesthetic tastes of the city's nobles.

"To some extent, Su embroidery is close to paintings. Many artists offered their ink paintings and calligraphy for embroiderers to re-create," says Zheng.

Zheng adds that centuries ago, the number of female painters in and around Suzhou reached more than 200. The rich cultural and artistic environment gave Su embroidery a high level of aesthetic expression.

The embroidery in Suzhou reached its golden age during the Song Dynasty (960-1279), incorporating elements of the literati paintings that were popular at the time. The craft became a favorite in the court of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and was used in the tailoring of robes and decorations coveted by Chinese royalty. It was during this period that the name "Su embroidery" was first coined.

It is an art-form created by women who live in a city that boasts an artistic lifestyle," says Zheng.

In 1954, the Suzhou Silk Embroidery



A wedding garment made by Fu Xianghong for her grandchild. It was a tradition that mothers should make wedding clothes with exquisite embroidery for their daughters. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

Research Institute was established, and many innovations in silk embroidery techniques soon followed. Products made using Su embroidery were among the most popular handicrafts exported overseas.

Embroiderer Zou remembers that, in the 1980s and '90s, she and her mother made lots of Su embroidery items to be sold overseas — Japan, South Korea and Europe — to earn money. But her father encouraged her

to stitch for the sake of art. At the age of 19, Zou learned how to paint, and spent months learning other embroidery techniques from an established embroiderer.

Now, she is able to proficiently apply various stitching techniques to different parts of her creations. Techniques to stitch a cat's eyeball, its hair and its tail are different. "Su embroidery has very flexible stitching techniques. It varies based on the picture

we make," says Zou, whose works are now widely collected by museums in China.

A human touch

Unlike Zou, whose works are more like art pieces, embroiderer Pu Xianghong's products are often made for everyday use.

Sitting in her studio in Suzhou, where large-size embroidery pieces of flowers, birds and animals hang on walls, the 59-year-old says that, for her, Su embroidery is a kind of art that decorates life. Exquisite silk cellphone bags, fan bags, clothes with Su embroidery patterns, accessories, floor screens, and even furniture, are among her range of products.

She has an exhibition hall to showcase the wedding clothes made for her daughter and grandchildren. The garments, with their exquisite and elaborate needlework, took her several years to finish and have won her lots of praise.

"For me, clothes are just one kind of medium to showcase Su embroidery, the only interest and passion in my life," says Pu.

Like other embroiderers, Pu learned the technique from her family. The needle was her favorite childhood toy.

"Almost all the women then could do needlework. It was common for families to raise silkworms and work in family-run embroidery workshops. Many women earned more money than their husbands," says Pu.



Zou Yingzi, 53, has been dedicated to the inheritance of Su embroidery for decades. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

She proudly shows a large-size embroidery of flowers made by her mother, and another exquisite piece, featuring plum trees and flowers, made by her aunt, both of whom made their respective works while in their 70s.

"My mother and my aunt are just two of thousands of ordinary embroiderers in Suzhou. They kept practicing Su embroidery until the end of their lives. The craft is ingrained in our blood," says Pu.

The usual subjects of Su embroidery include landscapes, calligraphy, flowers, birds and insects, cats, and Buddhist deities. Pu, born in a village in a mountainous area, where flowers can be seen all year round, is good at creating flower-themed works.

To produce vivid flowers, Pu goes outside to observe her subject closely, but most of her time is spent at her studio, where she can sit down and stitch for hours, sometimes getting so engrossed she forgets to eat and sleep.

To re-create the colors of the flowers, she must stitch the key parts of her pictures during the day, because natural light is important for creating Su embroidery due to the abundant colors. For a single color, like blue, Pu has to dye dozens of shades of blue. Different parts of a flower also need threads of various thickness.

"Behind the beauty of Su embroidery are lots of intricate processes. The charm of the art is its highly flexible and innovative use of stitching techniques," says Pu.

Thanks to the development of the craft, the number of Su embroidery techniques has risen from about 10 initially, to dozens today.

Pu says her work cannot be replaced by machines or AI, because of creativity and innovation it requires. The charm of Su embroidery is the trace of a human touch.

As time goes on, Pu's passion for the craft only increases, and it is now more of an artistic expression rather than just a way to earn money. However, a long time spent scrutinizing fine details has affected her eyesight, and made her slower compared to her peak production as a younger woman.

She has a team of about 20 women, who are all experienced embroiderers. Her daughter is also following in her footsteps.

"For me, Su embroidery is not art confined to museums. I prefer to connect it with our everyday lives and make it more suitable for our modern lifestyle," Pu says, pointing to her daughter nearby who wears a silk bag, a coat and a necklace all adorned with Su embroidery patterns.

Contact the writer at dengzhangyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Stitching together a family legacy

By DENG ZHANGYU

Walking into the Suzhou Art Museum in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, the eyes of visitors are immediately drawn to an artwork hanging high on the wall that depicts the collision of gold nuclei, giving the surface impression of a contemporary art piece.

However, upon closer examination, viewers will see that the luster of its shimmering lines belies the ancient craft of Su embroidery, which originated in the city more than 2,000 years ago. "Viewers mistake it for an oil painting at first sight. We hope to imbue the traditional craft with contemporary expressions," says Zhang Fan, 48, one of the creators of the piece.

Next to the artwork are two Su embroidery works replicating abstract photos taken by US photographer Michael Yamashita. All of these works are produced by Zhang and his mother, Zhang Meifang, 78, a master embroiderer who created the collision piece in collaboration with established physicist Tsung-dao Lee.

In 2005, the Zhangs established an embroidery innovative center, applying the ancient stitching techniques of silk thread to modern art forms, including oil paintings, murals, sculpted reliefs and photos.

Known for its intricate techniques, elegant style and vibrant colors, Su embroidery usually focuses on birds and flowers, cats, landscapes and figures. Most embroiderers in the area have concentrated on these subjects for centuries, making it popular among both the nobility and the general populace for its exquisite needlework.

To give the traditional craft a modern look, Zhang Fan and his mother spent decades on innovating the threads they used, as well as the themes. They worked with prominent artists, such as Wu Guanzhong, a Chinese modern art pioneer, and Chang Shana, an artist and renowned scholar on the studies of frescoes in Dunhuang, Gansu province, as well as foreign photographers.

The charm of Su embroidery for Zhang Fan lies in its rich and vibrantly colored silk threads, which give a luster to the patterns stitched on the fabric.

"It's an art of light. The flowers can change color when you step them from different angles. They look as if they are dancing on the breeze," says Zhang Fan.

To achieve such a magic effect, they use threads of various thickness and of different shades of a single color. For certain applications, they even create their own special silk threads.

In a 10-meters-high mural depicting a group of Buddhist deities, Zhang Fan and his mother used more than 20 stitching techniques, as well as countless colors of various shades. It took them six years to finish.

Zhang Fan says that his mother is always on a path seeking innovation and creativity. She was a deputy director of the Suzhou Silk Embroidery Research Institute, where lots of modern Su embroidery masters were trained and worked.

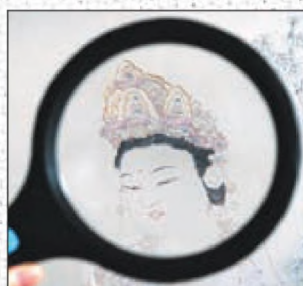
Last century, embroiderers from the institute learned the realism style from the West and blended it into their works, enabling them to produce photo-realistic work.

Zhang Meifang led the team charged with developing new techniques for Su embroidery. After she retired, with the help of her son, she focused her efforts on developing the additional craft. The final mission is to integrate it with people's prevailing artistic tastes. They have worked with artists across the globe and their pieces are collected by museums and art institutions both at home and abroad.

While the Zhang family tries to



An embroidery work depicting the collision of gold nuclei is a big draw for visitors at the Suzhou Art Museum. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY



From top: Details of a Buddha embroidery work at Zou Yingzi's studio can only be seen clearly with a magnifying glass; a traditional pattern made by Zhang Fan's team; Zou collaborates with her son, Guo Zizhou, in the creation of an embroidery work. PHOTOS BY GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Online
Watch the
video by
scanning
the code.

explore a modern artistic expression of the centuries-old craft, the younger generation, like Guo Zizhou, 27, is using a popular method to introduce young people to Su embroidery.

Born into a family where all the women are good at Su embroidery, in 2019, Guo opened a themed coffee shop in Suzhou. The latte art comes from patterns frequently used in Su embroidery, such as birds, flowers and trees.

Guo displays many of his mother's embroidery works at the coffee shop and, sometimes, they will hold classes in Su embroidery and invite customers to try the stitching techniques.

Guo is now learning Su embroidery from his mother, Zou Yingzi, whose works are collected by renowned institutions, including the British Museum. Traditionally, Su embroidery is learned by women and passed down among the female members of a family. Guo is one of the few male exceptions.

"My friends all think what I do is chic and cool," says Guo in front of an embroidery stand, moving his needle fluidly through a piece of landscape embroidery.

Guo learned interior design in Britain and earned his master's degree in art in the United States. Only after he returned to China did he decide to inherit the Su embroidery craft from his mother.

Since childhood, the needle has been a common item in his life. Every day he saw his grandmother, his mom and his friends engrossed in Su embroidery.

"When I was a little boy, the needle was an item that could hurt my fingers. Now it has become a tool for me to continue the artistic mission of my family. I find that incredible," says Guo.

In the past few years, Guo has participated in his mother's team to produce large-scale Su embroidery works, two of which were collected by the China National Archives of Publications and Culture.

Each piece stands more than 3 meters high and is 1 meter long, featuring *feitian* (flying deities) and a traditional building that houses Buddhist sutras, derived from murals at the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang.

Guo helped his mother to finish the two art pieces, which took more than 100 embroiderers several months to produce.

"Without his help, I couldn't have finished the two large pieces. I'm proud of my son. He often gives me fresh and interesting ideas to create innovative Su embroidery works," says Zou.

The son adds that his ideas often collide with his mother's.

In Zou's 24 Solar Terms series, Guo often provides ideas on how to present the theme in a contemporary way. For instance, in the work *Guyu* (Grain Rain), Guo designed a giant grain while his mother planned to stitch the grains to scale.

Finally Zou took her son's design, and believes that the piece turned out "amazing".

"I hope the craft can become more integrated into people's daily lives, rather than just being displayed as a decoration or art piece," Guo says.



A group portrait of Buddhist deities, several meters in length, is based on a mural and made by Zhang Fan's team, using more than 20 stitching techniques of Su embroidery. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Dune film maestro recalls China influence

After gap of more than three decades, highly successful director returns and talks of 'dream' to work in country, **Xu Fan** reports.

When Denis Villeneuve, the French-Canadian director best known for his epic sci-fi franchise *Dune*, visited Beijing earlier this month, he reminisced about his first trip to the country in 1990. Villeneuve, then 22, spent around a month in Chengdu, Southwest China's Sichuan province, producing a small documentary. This experience offered him an immersive journey into Chinese culture, including tasting local delicacies such as spicy hotpot.

"I said to myself, 'I need to come back as soon as possible', and that was 34 years ago, which is very sad," the director recalls with a touch of nostalgia during a conversation with Guo Fan, director of *The Wandering Earth*, China's highest-grossing sci-fi franchise.

Villeneuve reveals that he has spoken with his wife, Tanya Lapointe — the producer of the *Dune* movies — about making a movie in China, which he believes is a means for him to realize the wish he made decades ago.

"I'm trying to make this happen. I don't know if it can be Part Three (of *Dune*), but if I could have the chance to spend time and work here (in China), it would really be a dream come true," he adds.

Having studied film at the University of Quebec in Montreal, Villeneuve also shares that one of his biggest cinematic revelations during his college years came from iconic Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai. Wong's 1990s movies, ranging from *Happy Together* to *Fallen Angels* and *Chungking Express*, had a massive influence on Villeneuve aesthetically.

Chinese culture's impact on Villeneuve can also be seen in his earlier directorial efforts like the 2016 sci-fi movie *Arrival*, in which the writing of the alien language — reminiscent of ink paintings — is inspired by Asian calligraphy and relatable Chinese elements.

Additionally, in the first *Dune* movie, actor Chang Chen, portraying Dr Wellington Yueh, a physician employed by the aristocratic Atreides family, speaks Chinese while secretly giving a warning to the protagonist, the young master of the family.

Chinese fans are responding with enthusiasm. *Dune: Part Two* has earned more than 310 million yuan (\$43 million) at the box office since its opening across Chinese mainland theaters on March 8, making it one of the highest-grossing blockbusters in recent weeks.

Adapted from the eponymous novel by American author Frank Herbert, published in 1965, the new movie picks up from where it leaves off in the first *Dune* movie, which is also based on the same novel. Set in the far future when interstellar travel becomes a regular practice, Paul Atreides, the protagonist and sole heir of his aristocratic family, is torn between his desire for vengeance for the murder of his father, and the prospect that, with his surging reputation, leading an army against the emperor and his accomplices might result in a catastrophic war claiming many lives.

Both top-notch filmmakers in the genre of science fiction, Villeneuve and Guo exchanged their insights about the respective challenges of adapting best-selling novels into cinematic masterpieces.

For Guo, whose *The Wandering*



From top: A scene from *Dune: Part Two* features a fight between Paul Atreides, portrayed by Timothée Chalamet (right), and his enemy Harkonnen prince, Feyd-Rautha, played by Austin Butler; Denis Villeneuve, the director of the *Dune* franchise, poses with director Guo Fan; Villeneuve and his wife, Tanya Lapointe, visit the Forbidden City, and Lapointe tries on a souvenir hairpin; Villeneuve shares insights with filmmaker Chen Sicheng; a scene from the movie shows the imposing fictional sandworms.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Earth movies are based on the works of Asia's first Hugo Award-winning novelist Liu Cixin, the typical feature length of two or three hours possibly limits his ability to include all the high-profile scenes in his movies.

"When a novel is described in great detail, the more fans it attracts, the more difficult it becomes for filmmakers to adapt it, because you feel that every such aspect may be precious to the readers, and then you're reluctant to let anything go," Guo explains.

Villeneuve offers a fresh perspective, stating that he feels compelled to be a "traitor" in order to dismantle the original structure while striving to remain faithful to the novel's essence.

The Quebec-born director, whose famous sci-fi films also include *Blade Runner 2049*, shares that his passion for tales envisioning futuristic worlds stems from the freedom they provide in artistic creation, while addressing serious and challenging subjects.

"This is something that, if I were setting the story (of *Dune: Part Two*) in a contemporary world, could be offensive. I would have to choose real cultures carefully, and it might offend some people. However, by setting the story in a futuristic world, I am completely free to discuss what I want to talk about," he adds.

During the director's intense three-day tour in Beijing, he also visited the Forbidden City, meeting fans and holding a talk with director Chen Sicheng, known for the Detective Chinatown trilogy, which grossed 8.74 billion yuan.

Chen demonstrated his admiration by revealing that he has watched almost all of Villeneuve's movies, saying he is curious about what is most difficult for Villeneuve, given his high status in the film industry. Being one of the screenwriters of the two *Dune* movies, Villeneuve replied that the most challenging phase is still writing the script, especially considering the intense creation procedure for *Part Two*.

With its spectacular and otherworldly views bringing to life the fictional desert planet Arrakis, the new movie has proven highly popular among Chinese fans, garnering 8.3 points out of 10 on China's major review aggregator Douban.

The film's sandworms — depicted as colossal and formidable creatures capable of reaching lengths of up to 400 meters on Arrakis — have become one of the most heatedly debated topics, with some Chinese netizens jokingly describing Paul summoning the creature beneath the sand as akin to "hailing an Uber."

Director Guo also recalls that he had such an impression when watching the latest *Dune* movie, describing sandworms as resembling a high-speed train when they are summoned using a hammer-like device that generates rhythmic vibrations to attract their attention.

Perhaps appealing to local fans, Villeneuve revealed he plans to depict how characters riding the sandworms dismount from these colossal "vehicles" in the next installment of the trilogy.

He has also written a post in both English and Chinese on Douban, enthusiastically explaining to Chinese audiences that "if Part One was the appetizer, then *Dune: Part Two* is the main course", and expressing his eagerness to hear their thoughts.

Contact the writer at
xufan@chinadaily.com.cn

Olympic glory, World Cup fame, or another Yao Ming?

In the modern era, China often tops the gold medal table during the Summer Olympics by the time the closing ceremony has tooted its last toot and lowered the curtain on the quadrennial sporting spectacle. Whether one measures success by the number of yellow metal medals earned, or overall medals, the world's second-most populous country certainly holds its own in Olympic contests, particularly the Summer Games.

The Olympics began in ancient Greece as a way for various city states to show their stuff and com-



A. Thomas Pasek
Second Thoughts

pete in hard-fought games that didn't involve actual warfare. But the Summer Olympics as we know them today officially kicked off in 1896, in, where else, their ancestral home of Athens. The Winter Games took another 28 years to

get going, back in 1924 in France.

The People's Republic of China, founded in 1949, was a relative late-comer to the athletic extravaganza, not having competed at the Olympics until 1952, at the Summer Games in Finland. Therefore, it's understandable that the country has had some catching up to do. Combined medals by country — gold, silver and bronze — for both hot and cold-weather versions of the contests are, for the top five: the US (2,959), Russia, including USSR (2,012), Germany, including East and West (1,821), Great Britain (950) and China (713).

But despite being No 5 on the all-time list, over the past couple decades, China has been on a tear, a veritable gold-buying frenzy, with its yellow metal takeaways often topping the charts. If things continue apace, China will soon be barreling its way up the all-time rankings and knocking at the Olympic superpowers' doors.

Lack public funding or research grants to conduct a scientific survey into what would be the greatest national honor for modern Chinese sports fans — topping the overall medals charts at either the Summer or Winter Games, seeing a few more Yao Mings dominate the NBA (or the CBA), or, seemingly the Holy Grail for most of the younger locals I asked in Beijing, taking home the solid gold FIFA World Cup trophy?

The responses I received on which would represent the greatest glory for the country varied greatly, with older folks often being content to lead the medals table, whereas younger sports fans often said a soccer World Cup championship would best float their boat.

Also, responses were highly subjective, with one particular trend worthy of note: diving and table tennis championships are still coveted, but running the table on a sport traditionally not dominated by China is considered by many to be even more valuable. FIBA basketball honors, FIVB volleyball glory, tennis grand slams and even golf major wins were all touted about. Naturally, responses were heavily affected by the favorite spectator, or participatory sport, of those being queried.

There was generally a bit more excitement about another NBA star like Yao Ming emerging out of China than another female tennis star and two-time Grand Slam winner Li Na making her mark on the global stage. However, both names are household across China and have brought great glory to the country's athletic bragging rights.

In short, those saying a soccer World Cup championship elicited the biggest flickers in respondents' eyes, but if you would indulge me in a bit of self-surveying — and in-your-face subjectivity — if I were a local, I would currently be most excited about the lengthy list of up-and-coming Chinese female tennis players. Because my love for the game is never out of bounds, even though "love" means "nada" in tennis.

Contact the writer at
andrew@chinadaily.com.cn

COMMENT

Editorials

Yellen's visit expected to yield more productive outcomes for bilateral ties

Among major US government officials, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is known for the often pragmatic and relatively positive tone she strikes in terms of how to manage Sino-US relations. She has reiterated that the United States is not seeking to decouple from China and called for a "constructive" and "healthy" economic relationship between the two countries. "The world is big enough for both of our countries to thrive," she said.

Her reasonable voice, which comes in sharp contrast to the barbed comments of the anti-China hawks in Washington is most needed nowadays when the latter keep threatening to push bilateral relations onto a collision course. This anti-China rhetoric is becoming increasingly strident in Washington as the US presidential election campaign heats up, which bodes ill if not tempered given the difficult situation that bilateral relationship already finds itself in.

Thus it is welcome news that Yellen, according to US media, will travel to China next month as part of efforts to "responsibly manage" bilateral ties. The face-to-face meetings she is scheduled to hold with Chinese officials should certainly help the two sides increase trust and stabilize their relationship by airing their differences and seeking to resolve them on some pertinent issues.

It will be Yellen's second trip to Beijing within a year. Her visit in July was among a series of visits by high-ranking US officials to China, including those of Secretary of State Antony Blinken in June and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo in August, that sought to put a brake on the free fall in the two countries' relations. Yellen's last visit achieved positive results, as it resulted in the formation of new economic and financial working groups designed for "frank and substantive discussions" on contentious issues.

Thus hopes are high that Yellen's upcoming visit will yield more productive outcomes that can help give a boost to ties by removing some of the hurdles hindering the development of healthy, stable and sustainable bilateral relations. This is crucial given the heightened tensions between the two countries recently as a result of US moves.

The House of Representatives, for example, passed a bill early this month that could ban the popular video-sharing app TikTok in the US using national security as a pretext. The US government is also reportedly considering blacklisting a number of Chinese semiconductor companies linked to the Chinese telecommunications enterprise Huawei.

Such suppressive actions belie Washington's claim that it does not seek conflict with China, and run counter to the agreement reached by the two countries' top leaders that they would work to manage the Sino-US relationship responsibly. All this requires a productive channel of communication to be established between the two sides, which is what is expected from Yellen's visit.

Given her experience of working with China and the trust she has gained from her Chinese counterparts, Yellen is well-suited to play the bridging role. She has said that the Joe Biden administration's economic strategy is centered on investing in US infrastructure, clean energy and technology manufacturing, "not suppressing or containing any other economy". And she has made it clear that China's economic growth "need not be incompatible with US economic leadership". It would be good for all if such thinking could become an integral part of the US' policies toward China.

Her visit, of course, will not solve all the problems facing Sino-US relations. But surely it can help steady the two sides' relations on a more stable course. After all, China and the US stand to gain from cooperation, and lose from confrontation.

Testament to appeal of China's economy

Testifying to the Chinese economy's lasting appeal, a number of foreign leaders and representatives of international organizations and the global business community have been visiting China to seek to further expand economic and trade cooperation.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte and Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation Geoffrey van Leeuwen are the latest to add their names to the guestbook, visiting from Tuesday to Wednesday.

China's open and welcoming attitude toward foreign investment and business, the downward pressure on the Dutch economy, and China's economic complementarity with the Netherlands all serve to justify the high hopes the Dutch business community pins on Rutte's visit helping expand access to the Chinese market, especially in the financial, high-tech and service sectors that Beijing has vowed to further open up.

That the Rutte government is seeking "opportunities for economic cooperation" with China, seemingly in defiance of Washington, is because of the practical needs to promote a sustainable recovery of the Dutch economy and straighten out the Netherlands' relations with its second-largest trading partner outside the European Union.

The big fluctuations in Sino-Dutch trade over the past two years — bilateral trade surged 12 percent year-on-year in 2022 hitting \$130.2 billion and plummeted 9.8 percent to \$117 billion in 2023 — indicates how the tech war the United States is waging against China has affected the common interests of China and the Netherlands, with the latter's exports of advanced chipmaking equipment bearing the brunt of the US' restrictive measures. It is thus hoped that Rutte's visit can help the Dutch companies find ways to break the deadlock for a win-win result.

Both the Dutch government and enterprises will know that doing the US' bidding is tantamount to sacrificing Dutch interests for the narrow ends of a handful of China-bashing US politicians. The Republic of Korea government and some major ROK chipmaking companies, as well as their counterparts in France, Australia, New Zealand and Germany have all proved that it is completely possible to strike a balance between the two. Dealing with China does not actually harm their US relations.

Three days prior to the start of Rutte's visit, Bavaria's Minister-President Markus Soeder, who is also leader of the Christian Social Union in Bavaria, an economic powerhouse of Germany, embarked on what he called "a very, very important trip" to China up to Thursday for the similar objective of strengthening economic ties and dialogue.

The German government and enterprises have also long realized that "de-risking" is by no means a panacea for the ills of the German economy, but a ruse Washington is using to drag the EU onto its anti-China bandwagon. The US peddles its "value diplomacy", but refuses to help its allies to find markets to consume their products and services that it dictates that they should not sell to China.

Apart from its strong manufacturing base, superlarge market and global connections, China's pursuit of innovation-driven growth, high-quality development and sustainability has made it a major player in the digital economy, artificial intelligence, green technology, new energy and information technology on the world stage.

The openness of China and the robustness of its economy, and its commitment to economic globalization, free trade, multilateral governance and fair competition only make the country more attractive to businesses in an increasingly volatile world where people have been fed up with the US' beggar-thy-neighbor preaching about unilateralism, protectionism and hegemony.

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

China Daily
15 HuiXin Donglie Chaoyang District,
Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0)10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0)10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailysusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254 (0) 20 242 8589 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Practical referential experience in growth without harming environment

In his speech delivered to the China Development Forum in Beijing on Sunday, World Bank President Ajay Banga said China's remarkable development over the past decades proves anything is possible.

"In 1978, 770 million people in China lived on the razor's edge of extreme poverty. Nearly every single person — 98 percent — in the rural countryside were below the poverty line," he said. "But, the same year, China launched a determined strategy to embrace difficult reforms that fundamentally changed its development trajectory."

What Banga said of China's development is to the point. Thanks to the reform and opening-up process, China has grown from a poor and backward country to becoming the world's second-largest economy and built a moderately prosperous society in all respects. It succeeded in eradicating absolute poverty by the end of 2020, lifting about 800 million people out of poverty in all, and enlarging its middle-income group to over 400 million people.

Despite the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, China was the first major country to realize economic recovery in 2020, achieving a 2.3 percent GDP growth, compared with negative economic growth in many other major economies. In the face of a volatile international environment and domestic difficulties, China's GDP exceeded 126 trillion yuan (\$17.49 trillion) in 2023, an increase of 5.2 percent year-on-year, significantly faster than 2.5 percent of the United States, 0.5 percent of the eurozone and 1.9 percent of Japan.

It is estimated that for every one percentage point decline in world economic growth, 100 million people will fall into poverty. But as Banga said, China's economic growth was so significant it was responsible for cutting the global poverty rate from 44 percent to 9 percent by creating a lot of jobs. "This proves that job creation is the surest path to poverty eradication and prosperity."

After decades of high-speed economic development, China has also paid a costly price for the environment, but it has profoundly realized this and is going all out to change it by promoting economic transformation and upgrading to achieve high-quality development. It has vowed to peak its carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060, the highest reduction in carbon intensity globally and the shortest time in global history to transition from carbon emissions peak to carbon neutrality. Such efforts by China have paid off. Now, blue skies are more common in China, just as Banga said. "This result — like China's economic rise — was the product of hard work."

China's experience in protecting the environment while maintaining sound economic development is becoming a model that is being imitated by other developing countries.

— WU YIXUE, CHINA DAILY

Logic simplified, but original question forgotten

Season 1 of *The 3 Body Problem*, eight episodes of which were released on Netflix on Tuesday, has caused quite a stir on social media.

On Chinese professional film-rating website Douban.com, the show, which cost \$160 million to produce, received a rating of 6.7 out of 10, far below the Tencent version which has a rating of 8.7. Many viewers are complaining that the Netflix version "changed too much from the original story". Some attribute this to some of the leading characters in the Netflix version being nationalities other than Chinese.

But that fails to explain why the Netflix series got a score of 7.6 from professional reviewers on Rotten Tomatoes and just 6.9 from audiences. Even though non-Chinese actors are playing the parts of the leading characters, the drama is still not drawing Western audiences.

Maybe, the problem lies in the producers' lack of deep understanding of the original story's logic. At a time when mankind is still not sure whether extraterrestrial life exists, *The Three-Body Problem* novel written by Chinese writer Liu Cixin depicts a universe governed by its own moral rules.

In that universe, all physical laws are the same, but the moral laws governing different civilizations in that universe are much different from those governing mankind.

It's on this premise that mankind tries to contact other civilizations, which ultimately leads to itself and the neighboring three-body civilization being destroyed.

In the novels it's hard to tell which side is good and which side evil. In some sense, Liu's novel is more like a question raised to the whole universe. But the Netflix TV series has given it a good versus evil twist. In trying to simplify the logic of the original story, the Netflix TV series has lost the original question asked.

However, there is still hope. Liu's original story was a trilogy. Let's hope the next two parts on Netflix will be better.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

More than just the Western way to realize democracy

Different countries have different traditions and systems, so there are different ways and means to realize democratic values. Only by increasing the representation of emerging countries and economies in global institutions can the global governance system become more fair and democratic.

These are the core messages from the Third International Forum on Democracy: The Shared Human Values that concluded in Beijing on March 20.

At the event, more than 200 guests from around the world held in-depth discussions on topics such as the "modernization of democracy and governance", "artificial intelligence and the future of democracy", and "democracy and global governance in a multipolar world". Their consensus can be summarized as follows: The purpose of democracy should always be to protect and enhance the well-being of all mankind. The right of people of all countries to choose their own development paths should be respected, while raising the banner of democracy to create divisions, spread prejudice, and undermine peace must be opposed.

In the eyes of some people in the West, democracy is their "patent", and all countries should emulate it and regard it as a model.

However, take the so-called beacon of democracy, the United States, as an example. The US has seen endless democratic chaos in recent years. Internally, the rights of ethnic minorities are suppressed, democratic elections are hijacked by capital and the selfish interests of politicians, and the Capitol Hill riots shocked the world. Externally, it uses the name of democracy to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries and provoke bloc confrontation. This kind of fake democracy and true hegemony have only brought conflicts and wars to the world, dividing it into a "civilized" club and the rest.

Democracy has never been and should not be a value unique to and defined by the West, and Western democracy cannot be exported to or imposed on other parts of the world. Electoral democracy in some Western countries has already been reduced to a game jointly played by politicians and capital.

At the forum in Beijing, many speakers expressed their recognition and appreciation for China's people-centered whole-process people's democracy, believing that this represents another democratic model, one that upholds the fundamental interests of the people and meets the people's needs for development.

Democracy is no one's patent; democracy should not be weaponized. Improving global governance requires the formulation of more democratic rules. These voices from the forum on democracy in Beijing demonstrate people's real expectations of democracy.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

COMMENT

Ong Tee Keat

In a multipolar world democracy is diverse

Democracy has been cherished worldwide for centuries. The practice of this sacrosanct shared human value varies in form and essence from country to country, depending on their respective culture, norms and history which help shape the mode of governance.

In this respect, the different levels of modernization and development, the stages of nation building and the history of nationhood across the developing and least-developed world stand out as the key parameters having a bearing on their diverse polity. This has consistently been the "blind spot" which the developed Western democracies have arrogantly turned a blind eye to. Perhaps from their perspective, the former colonies are nothing more than supplicants, making them easy targets for coercive imposition of Western-style democracy through "regime change", resource plundering and/or cultural subjugation.

On the other hand, China's narrative in support of diversity of democratic practice takes into consideration the nexus between the attainment of people's aspirations and the level of social development capable of supporting it. This is particularly pertinent in the case of the Global South where the relatively young nations, the former colonies of Western powers, have to prioritize the basic subsistence needs of the people vis-à-vis the ballot box that signifies the practice of Western electoral democracy.

Western-style democracy has been holding sway in much of the world for over seven decades since the end of World War II. Electoral democracy is widely touted as the West's creation and has ever since been made the "one-size-fits-all" benchmark for democracy worldwide, while the reality remains that it's no more than a fallacy from the Western perspective.

The coercive transplanting of electoral democracy, either through military intervention or brutal "regime change", as has been done by Washington in many developing countries, has only added to the list of failed states and ensuing humanitarian disasters. People's well-being and aspirations in the target states have never been the concerns of the US' agenda. The so-called people-elected governments installed in the "vassal states" are nothing more than mere pawns in the hands of the powerful foreign puppeteers.

As the global dynamics are now becoming increasingly multipolar, respect for diversity in democracy is a growing trend to reckon with.

While the US takes pride in its brand of electoral democracy, and make it a "common value" in rallying its allies against China, the pathetic scenes of drug abuse, the visual squalor posed by tens of thousands of homeless and destitute people, and the rampant looting of shops in the name of "zero dollar shopping" in some US cities have, however, presented to the world how dysfunctional the US-style democracy is.

Be that as it may, the bipartisan legislators on Capitol Hill seem unperturbed by this. Instead, they are still hell-bent on

legislating laws targeting other countries deemed a potential threat to the US primacy. In this context, obviously Washington's interest in weaponizing the "long arm jurisdiction" to interfere in the domestic governance of other countries takes precedence over the livelihood of its own people, notably the destitute strata.

The concluding lines of the former US president Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, "government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not cherish from the Earth", has long been cited as the essence of the US-style democracy. But never would he have anticipated that democracy could ever be weaponized against geopolitical challengers or potential adversaries in the global power play.

The contemporary crusaders of Western democracy have long claimed monopoly on the interpretation of democracy. Non-Western values and cultural norms which are alien to them, particularly

those inherited from the ancient civilizations are simply labelled as anathema to democracy.

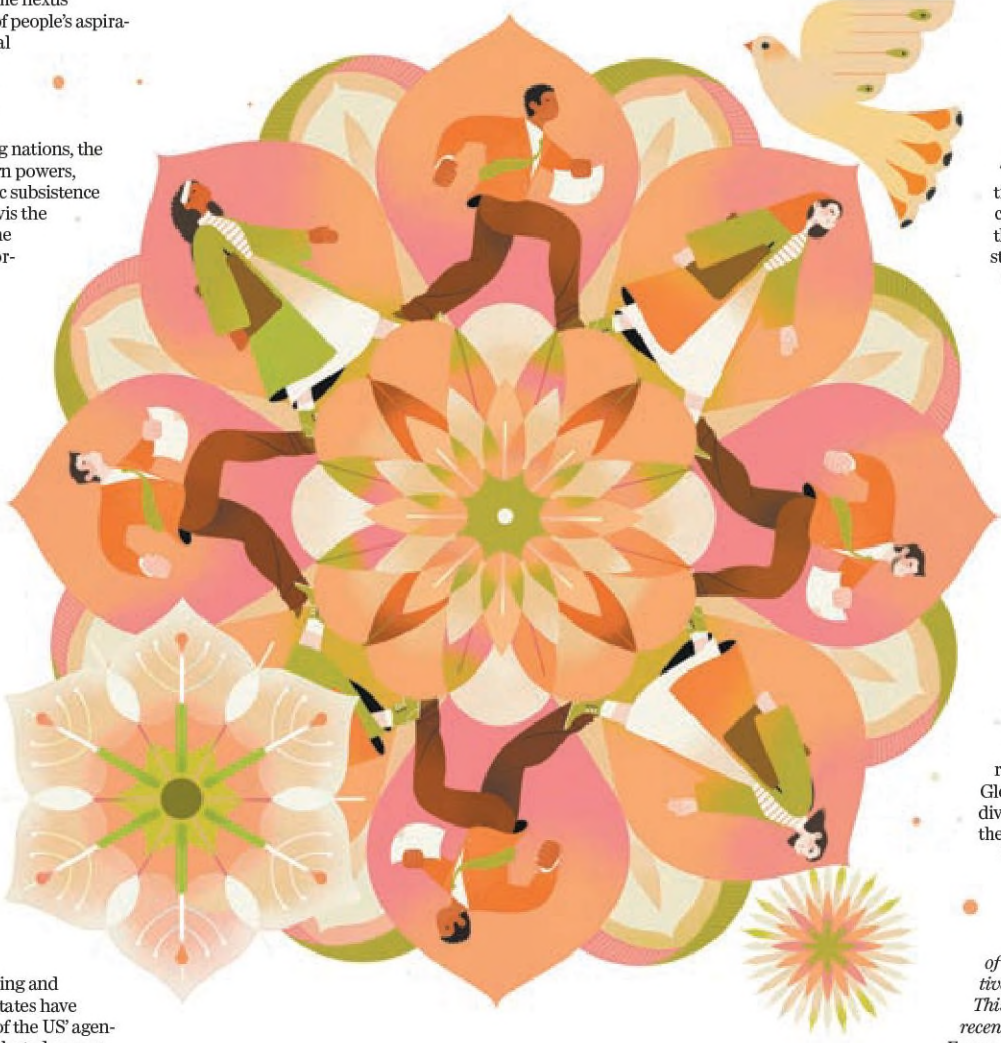
In this context, the value of "benevolence in state governance" as was propounded by Mencius (372-289 BC) during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) speaks volumes of the relevance of people-centric governance in ancient China. This is manifested in Mencius' adage: "The subject predominates the state and the monarch" in the hierarchical significance of the "benevolent governance".

These pearls of wisdom now find resonance in China's whole-process people's democracy. Its philosophy may remain incomprehensible to the West, which is more obsessed with electioneering, populism and gerrymandering. Nonetheless, it's the relevance of people's participation and the end results of the governance that matter most in the practice of democracy.

As the global dynamics are now becoming increasingly multipolar, respect for

diversity in democracy is a growing trend to reckon with. So long as global governance remains strait-jacketed by the Cold War mentality, the face-off between Western democracy and what the West perceives as "authoritarian" will continue to obscure the concerns and aspirations of the Global South. Nation states will then be left with only a binary choice — either to be seated at the table or to be on the menu, as was remarked by the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken. This hegemonic parlance is obviously at odds with the general tenor of the priorities of the Global South, if not the entire non-West. This is no longer a myth, much less a so-called Chinese spin as is commonly alleged by the "spin doctors" of the West. It's the new reality that Washington and its allies have to learn to live with. The rising concerns of the Global South may appear diverse, but never would they want to play to the hands of big powers' rivalry at the expense of their own interests.

The author is president of the Belt and Road Initiative Caucus for Asia Pacific. This is his speech at the recent third International Forum on Democracy: The Shared Human Values in Beijing. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Xu Wenhong

Terrorism attack in Moscow a test of the world's conscience

The terrorist attack on concertgoers in Moscow on Friday night killed at least 137 people and injured over a hundred. It was one of the most deadly terrorist attacks in Russia's modern history. The number of casualties has surpassed that of the terrorist attack on a Moscow theater in 2002, and is second only to the Beslan hostage incident in 2004.

With its military conflict with Ukraine still ongoing, it is now a very difficult moment for Russia. Dmitry Peskov, Russian President Vladimir Putin's spokesman, said that Russia is already in "a state of war".

The terrorist attack occurred just after Putin was re-elected. The terrorists came to Moscow to slaughter a large number of civilians, and Putin has pledged that no matter who was behind the atrocity, they will be identified, severely punished and bear the price. The attack was intended to undermine Russia's domestic politics and stability.

Details are still emerging, but according to the currently known information, it took only 18 minutes from the first alarm to the moment the terrorists escaped by car. The terrorists behaved very professionally throughout the attack, throwing grenades and incendiary bombs at the same time as shooting, and changed clothes immediately after they got out of the concert hall. The people at the concert venue had no time to react.

Terrorist attacks against civilians should be the common enemy of all civilized governments.

Although the Islamic State group has announced responsibility for the attack, there are still many questions about who perpetrated it. There are questionable differences between this attack and those of ISIS in the past. Usually, ISIS extremists are indoctrinated suicide attackers. Suicide bombs are a must and the terrorist group publicly admits to its actions on the internet in order that its hatred be understood by the world. They are also not worried about revealing their identities and ready to give up their lives to fulfill their sacred missions. But these four non-Russians were reportedly willing to be killers for less than 500,000 rubles (less than \$5,000), had no intention to commit suicide and they fled desperately, trying to save their lives, when found. One of the four didn't even have a bank card when he was arrested, saying he threw it on the road. So, the more the West believes that the ISIS did it, the less Russia believes it.

On top of that, both the Moscow theater incident in 2002 and the Beslan incident in 2004 had political demands for Russian troops to withdraw from Chechnya. But

this terrorist attack has not been accompanied by any political appeal. It appears that its aim was simply to maximize the number of casualties. There are reasons to believe that the "real terrorists" are not the four people directly involved in the deadly shooting, but others. "Hiring murderers" is the characteristic of this terrorist attack, indicating that the "real terrorists" do not want to show who they are. Who the real terrorists are needs further investigation by the Russian side. Over time, the truth will probably eventually surface. Also, may be, even Russia can confirm it with proof, but the west will deny it. It will end long time without results.

The most important thing now for Russia is to strengthen its defenses to prevent the people behind this bloody crime from committing new crimes. Terrorists will become bold only in front of those groups that are unarmed and cannot defend themselves.

This terrorist attack has had a direct impact on Putin, who has just announced his re-election. Wearing black clothes and a black tie, Putin delivered a television speech to the Russian people and declared March 24 as a national day of mourning and promised to hold all those responsible accountable and to identify the forces behind them. Every terrorist attack will prompt changes in the international situation, and this one is no exception. Russia may use this attack to

launch its own "war on terror".

No matter where it happens, indiscriminate attacks on ordinary people in public should be one of the bottom lines of mankind, and any who cross it must be severely punished. A double standard in counter-terrorism or attaching political purposes to counter-terrorism will only backfire and allow terrorism to thrive. Unfortunately in the past, there has been a prevailing double standard among certain Western politicians and media outlets when it comes to Russia or China. Terrorist attacks against civilians should be the common enemy of all civilized governments. Only by uniting the people of all countries in the world can terrorists not find a place to hide.

Earlier this month, the US embassy in Moscow issued warnings about a possible terrorist attack. That should remind us that in the US anti-terrorist actions after the 9/11 incident, Russia was one of the first countries to respond to the US' calls and provide assistance. Whether all nations across the world can unite to fight against terrorism in future will be a test for politicians from all over the world, a test of the conscience of people from all over the world, also a test of whether there is still hope for a peaceful and stable life in this world.

The author is a researcher on Russian Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

The author is former deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily. kangbing@chnadaily.com.cn

Need to ensure youths grow up to be dedicated, healthy persons

According to a recent survey conducted by China Youth Daily, about 53.3 percent of the young respondents said their language and communication abilities have declined over the past few years. Given that the surveyors interviewed only 1,333 young adults and did not provide much information on the respondents' background, the survey, as one of many of its kind, should not have been taken seriously. But the result led to hot discussions by both the mainstream and social media in China largely because it echoed the public's feelings.

Reporters of some newspapers have been interviewing experts to find the reasons for the unwelcoming phenomenon. Some youngsters are arguing the survey results fail to reflect the fact, while some are blaming China's examination-oriented education system, which deprives students of the time for after-school reading, for the decline in young adults' language skills. Others have blamed smartphones for the sorry state of affairs.

I tend to agree somewhat with the criticism. I won't hesitate to point out the bad effects of smartphones. I have written a number of columns, expressing concern over youngsters spending less time reading non-school books to lighten their academic burden. Once when I saw 99 percent of the commuters in a crowded subway car — I was perhaps the only exception — glued to their smartphones, I murmured to myself: "A whole generation will be ruined by the devil device."

The problem is online information is usually fragmented, not authoritative or well-edited, in some cases not edited at all.

Our educators have taken a series of measures, including giving students less homework and requiring students to hand in their phones immediately after entering campus, so they can read more books and improve (or develop) their language skills, assuming that the use of smartphones by young adults was a main reason for the decline in their language skills.

To change the so-called examination-oriented educational system is impossible, especially because not all those taking the college entrance exam each year are accepted for the four-year undergraduate courses. We know the system is not perfect but have to acknowledge that nothing is more perfect.

Since we cannot reverse the trends, we should try to co-exist with them. I suggest that unhappy souls like me adopt a wait-and-see attitude toward the declining language skills of young adults even if smartphones are to primarily blame for it. By wait and see, I don't mean doing nothing but wait.

After the students' academic burden was reduced following years of efforts, the rate of myopia among school children declined and their physical fitness improved, said a recent survey. But we don't need a survey to believe that students today are spending more time reading books after school.

Reading less? No, say many youngsters. They argue that, in fact, they are reading more, though not books printed on paper but on the screens of the electronic devices. As for communication ability, they argue they just feel more at home when communicating with friends using "internet language" and emojis which elder generations may not understand. I believe they are not lying.

The problem is online information is usually fragmented, not authoritative or well-edited, in some cases not edited at all. This means much or a big percentage of what they are reading on social media platforms might be rumors, unhealthy contents, false information and poorly written pieces. What we can do is to require the internet tycoons and app platforms to invest more on improving their contents and conduct stricter monitoring by deleting rumors and all the unhealthy stuff and editing out poorly-written pieces.

Science and technology can change life. At a time when we are promoting artificial intelligence and seeing robots taking care of us as nurses, we know we may have to be more tolerant to youngsters and their changing reading habits. What we can do at the moment is to ensure whatever the young adults read on their screens can help them truly grow up.

GLOBAL VIEWS

FEI ZHAOQI

Domestic demand needs to be expanded

By encouraging innovation and optimizing the income structure, private investment can be better guided to ensure high-quality growth

According to the Central Economic Work Conference in 2023, China's economy has shown signs of recovery, progress has been achieved in high-quality development, and important advancement has been made in the building of a modern industrial system.

However, some difficulties and challenges must be tackled to achieve further economic recovery. Those include a lack of effective demand, overcapacity in some industries, weak social expectations, hidden risks, bottlenecks in the domestic economic flow, and the increasingly complex, severe and uncertain external environment.

Among them, the crucial issue constraining economic growth is the insufficiency of effective demand, which is the result of several structural challenges. In China, the disposable income of residents takes up a relatively small share of national income, which leads to low consumer spending. Overcapacity in some industries restricts investment growth in manufacturing. Private investment struggles with manufacturing slowdown and infrastructure investment bottlenecks.

Even so, there are good reasons to be optimistic about the huge potential of realizing economic growth by boosting domestic demand: Residents' consumption structure is yet to be upgraded. Urbanization needs to be further increased and improved. High savings rate serves as the foundation for effective investment. High-level financial opening-up can guide foreign capital to provide support for domestic capital. A potential second wave of demographic dividends is expected to pick up the baton from the first one to drive sustainable economic growth.

To further expand domestic demand and stimulate growth potential, the macroeconomic strategy can be optimized in the following three aspects:

First, by expanding fiscal deficits and reforming the money supply mechanism, regulation can be optimized to facilitate domestic economic flow.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

As China builds the new dual-circulation development paradigm, declines in external demand can be compensated by domestic demand. This entails a change in China's production model, which should shift from industrial goods for exports to products and services for the domestic market.

Fiscal and monetary policy should be adjusted and reformed accordingly. As an important policy to facilitate the domestic economic flow, the domestic fiscal deficit can be increased to gradually replace net exports. Government bonds should be used as an alternative to funds outstanding for foreign exchange. New channels for issuing currency should be established.

According to the balance of payments theory, under the condition of zero external surplus, the government's fiscal deficit equals the private sector's surplus, which means that only when the government experiences a deficit, can the domestic private sector achieve a net surplus. In practice, the leverage ratio of China's central government is far lower than that of other

major economies, providing sufficient policy space for government deficit financing.

The central bank should also reform the mechanism for issuing basic currency, in order to promote the substitution of sovereign credit (government bonds) for foreign exchange reserves as the main reserve asset.

With damaged balance sheets from sectors including residents, enterprises and local governments, expanding the balance sheet of the central government to offset the contraction of the private sector's is an effective and feasible counter-cyclical adjustment.

Second, sustainable growth in residents' consumption can be promoted by transferring part of the income to residents.

First of all, the disposable income of residents, including urban and rural residents as well as individual business owners, should be effectively raised. This can be done by gradually increasing residents' share in the initial distribution of national income through raising wages or taking

other measures. Thereafter, the residents' regular transfer income, including pensions, social relief funds, medical reimbursement and other non-taxable income should also be increased.

The government should alleviate the debt burden on residents by lifting income and reducing debt. It is advised to explore the feasibility of optimized personal income tax, spending vouchers and negative personal income tax, which provides tax subsidies for low-income groups.

Greater efforts should be made in social insurance, transfer payment and structural tax reductions to lift income for low-income groups and increase consumption willingness in the short term.

Moreover, the government should accelerate the improvement of the local housing support system to reduce residents' housing costs.

Third, private investment can be stabilized by stabilizing expectations, reducing costs and promoting innovation.

Rule of law in economic governance

should be advanced to establish stable market expectations. Private enterprises should enjoy equal treatment as State-owned ones, both in terms of legislation and law enforcement, with their property rights protected, channels for raising requests improved, and their rights and interests safeguarded, so as to create a stable and favorable investment environment. To maintain and promote fair market competition, both explicit and implicit barriers in approval and licensing, market access, bidding and resource acquisition should be removed.

Moreover, operating costs for private enterprises should be reduced through tax and fee reduction and by supporting them to improve profitability. Following the principle of stabilizing the macro tax burden, the needs of assisting businesses, ensuring fiscal sustainability and optimizing the tax structure should be coordinated, and policies such as tax reduction, fee reduction, tax refund and tax deferral should be further implemented and improved. Apart from balancing credit support and financing costs for private and State-owned enterprises, the government should further improve policy guarantee to support companies.

By encouraging innovation and optimizing the income structure, private investment can be better guided to ensure high-quality and sustainable growth. This can be achieved by focusing on national strategic priorities such as next-generation information technology, high-end equipment manufacturing, new materials and biomedicine. In addition, more support should be given to private investment in green development, the service-oriented manufacturing and productive service industries.

The author is director and research fellow at the Monetary Theory and Monetary Policy Research Office at the Institute of Finance and Banking at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and a senior research fellow at the National Institution for Finance & Development. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

ZHANG HUI

Hard and soft connections

China should continue to develop cross-border economic corridors, advance the institutional development of the BRI and improve the all-around support systems

Over the past decade, China's economic growth pattern has changed profoundly, from pursuing sheer quantity to balancing quantity and quality. From 2012 to 2023, its GDP more than doubled with an average annual growth of over 6 percent. Despite the complexity and volatility in the global economic environment, China's economy has been growing steadily and has become one of the main drivers of global growth.

As China seeks steady and progressive growth, it is important to understand that a series of challenges may surface due to changes in the domestic and international environment, prominent contradictions in the economic structure and the specific requirements at a new development stage.

The 2023 Central Economic Work Conference proposed to expand high-level opening-up and consolidate foreign trade and investment. To deliver on this goal, building cross-border economic corridors and the Belt and Road Initiative cooperation mechanism can provide new momentum, with the new development pattern serving as the guiding framework and all-around support system to ensure high-quality development of opening-up.

First, continue to develop cross-border economic corridors to build new value chains and supply chains.

Escalating competition between China and the United States has led to increase in trade protectionism and separatism. Against this backdrop, cross-border economic corridors should contribute to the new development pattern of dual circulation, which emphasizes on synergy between domestic and overseas markets.

These corridors are, first and foremost, the key links to promote the integration of domestic and global value chains and extend the regional value chains along the way. This will facilitate China's foreign investment attraction as well as Chinese

enterprises' overseas development.

Building and improving regional value chains parallel to the global value chain is also important. As the global value chain reshuffles, the dual circulation model with China as the hub will help leverage the strengths of China and partner countries along the corridors, broaden and deepen production capacity cooperation, and strengthen the integration of value chains and supply chains.

Establishing a regional collaborative innovation community to promote the two-way integration of the innovation ecosystems in China and partner countries is also advised. This will not only enhance the resilience of China's economic circulation and high-level opening-up, but also lay the foundation for new technology progress to drive the value chains and supply chains along the corridors.

Developing cross-border economic corridors should be guided by the concept of a "community with a shared future" and supported by high-standard market systems. The key focus is to improve industry coordination and layout along cross-border transportation channels. By introducing rules and systems to facilitate trade and investment and free trade zone agreements, trade rules can be integrated, policies of countries along the corridors coordinated, and market and resource reallocation promoted, so as to drive the integration and innovation of regional value chains, which is crucial for promoting the virtuous cycle for an open economy.

Second, advance the institutional development of the BRI and promote the "soft connectivity" of rules and standards.

On the one hand, the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation should be a key platform to develop national institutions that will guide high-level opening-up. This should include an optimized pattern of jointly building the Belt and Road, which will promote institutionalized cooperation and provide more growth impetus for partner countries.

Top-level management institutions

should also be optimized to clarify the positioning and goals of the BRF, determine the priorities of capacity cooperation based on the convergence of interests of all parties, and guide the geographical layout of Belt and Road projects.

On the other hand, high-quality cooperation mechanisms for jointly building the Belt and Road should be promoted based on the network of free trade. Free trade agreements reflect the willingness of countries to promote free trade cooperation. It is highly feasible to promote the initiative through bilateral or multilateral institutional agreements.

Agreements such as the Lancang-Mekong cooperation and the Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor, along with related projects, can be incorporated into the cooperation framework of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area Agreement, to facilitate regional trade.

Third, improve the all-around support systems to ensure the sustainable development of high-level opening-up.

For China's domestic support systems, it is necessary to further improve the regional and country-specific risk assessment, investment and financing systems and debt sustainability guarantee.

This includes a series of tasks. First, a cross-sector risk assessment system should be established to enable an alert mechanism for investment security and regular release of important information for specific regions and countries, so as to help enterprises enhance their risk awareness and capabilities.

Second, more direct financing approaches should be explored, including establishing and improving a diversified, sustainable, and inclusive "going global" investment and financing system, building a cross-border financial service network, to facilitate multi-channel financing.

Third, the debt sustainability guarantee mechanism should be improved. Based on the World Bank's debt sustainability analysis framework, third-party financial institutions and international organizations can



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be invited to conduct debt sustainability assessments on relevant projects, which can be managed according to their debt risk ratings.

In terms of the intergovernmental cooperation support mechanisms, dispute resolution systems are essential for Chinese enterprises to "go global". Therefore, a sound consultation and communication mechanism should be established to improve bilateral and multilateral responses, explore targeted dispute settlement mechanisms, and improve efficiency.

International dispute settlement mechanisms offer good examples. Multilateral organizations can be introduced to establish a dispute coordination department, which will resolve commercial disputes based on the principles of fairness and justice, and equally protect the rights and interests of all parties.

Finally, enhance the capabilities for sys-

temic risk prevention and control. China and host countries should strengthen communication and coordination, enhance the awareness of a security community, improve security measures and strengthen the security of trade and investment projects and personnel.

In addition, enterprises need to be guided to fulfill their responsibilities toward risk prevention and control, including enhancing risk awareness and capabilities, regulating overseas business operations, establishing risk prevention and control measures, so as to ensure early detection, early warning and early prevention.

The author is a professor and associate dean of Department of Economics at Peking University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

BUSINESS

China Development Forum



Siemens products on display during an expo in Shanghai. FANG ZHE / XINHUA

New quality productive forces boost MNCs

By ZHONG NAN and WANG KEJU

China's focus on advancing its high-end manufacturing sector and fostering new quality productive forces will generate fresh growth points for multinational corporations, making the global economy and supply chains even greener and diversified, said top executives of foreign industrial and technology conglomerates.

At the China Development Forum, which was held in Beijing from Sunday to Monday, they noted that in the context of a rapidly changing global economy, green and strategic emerging industries are poised to strengthen new quality productive forces and drive innovation. These industries are seen as key indicators of the direction of the latest technological revolution and industrial transformation.

New quality productive forces refers to advanced productivity freed from traditional economic growth modes and productivity development paths. It features high-tech, high efficiency and high quality, and is in line with the new development philosophy.

Highlighting that the concept of new quality productive forces remains fully aligned with his group's growth strategy, Roland Busch, president and CEO of Siemens AG, said the German company will complete an expansion project of its digital factory in

Chengdu, Sichuan province, by the end of the year.

"Investors are always on the lookout for markets that are at the forefront of innovation and where progress is rapid. China is one such market," said Busch, adding that businesses in China are rapidly adopting new technologies to maintain their competitive edge in various markets, often surpassing the pace of their counterparts elsewhere. This makes the country a highly dynamic market.

Similar views were shared by Kim Fausing, president and CEO of Danish technology and engineering conglomerate Danfoss Group.

"To capture the business opportunities in China's green transition, we have been continuously investing in the country, especially in smart manufacturing and innovation," Fausing said.

In addition to building an IGBT (insulated-gate bipolar transistor) semiconductor power module plant in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, with an investment of 100 million euros (\$108 million), Danfoss will launch construction of the second phase of its largest manufacturing and innovation base in Haiyan, Zhejiang province, in April. Upon completion, this expansion will bolster Danfoss operations not only in China but also on a global scale.

"The new Haiyan campus will be one of the largest production sites in Danfoss global history," said Fausing.

"As China takes more steps to fulfill its commitment to further open up, attract foreign investment and reinforce confidence, we look forward to closer cooperation with our local partners to accelerate the formation of new quality productive forces, as well as deepen our involvement in the country."

To broaden market access for foreign investment, China will remove restrictions on foreign participation in the manufacturing sector and continue to increase openness in sectors such as telecommunications and healthcare, according to an action plan released by the General Office of the State Council, China's Cabinet, last week.

Emphasizing that China's ongoing green transformation has created business opportunities for foreign companies operating in the country, Miguel Lopez, board chairman and CEO of Thyssenkrupp AG, said the German firm will expand its expertise in eco-friendly, high-end manufacturing sectors, including wind power, vehicles, green hydrogen, chemicals, cement and steel in the country in the coming years.

Foreign direct investment in China's high-tech manufacturing sector jumped 10.1 percent year-on-year to 28.27 billion yuan (\$3.92 billion) in the first two months, said the Ministry of Commerce.

Contact the writers at zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

BHP CEO applauds opening-up efforts

By ZHENG XIN
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China, which is showing leadership in several areas, is very important in the global transition to a clean energy future, and BHP is looking forward to continued growth as the country advances plans for high-quality development and the energy transition, the top executive of the global mining giant said at the China Development Forum on Sunday.

"China's willingness to open up wider to the world and the world's willingness to work with China are integral to achieving the future we all seek," said BHP CEO Mike Henry.

Chinese investment in emerging clean energy sectors, up 24 percent year-on-year to \$676 billion in 2023 alone, is currently among the top drivers of economic growth in the country, according to Henry.

The country's economic pivot to the "new three" — of solar panels, electric vehicles and lithium-ion batteries — has also presented several economic opportunities, a mark of how important technology is to

green development, he said.

Henry said while there are many pathways to domestic decarbonization, China is clear on its own specific path.

"Given the remarkable economic growth that China has unlocked in recent decades, the country's blast furnace steel facilities are much, much younger. Steel is still being added to the economy on a net basis, meaning the ratio of scrap available to demand is much lower than in Europe," he said.

Many Chinese blast furnace mills are state-of-the-art already — far less energy intensive and carbon intensive than other blast furnaces on the market with less scrap availability.

Even so, Chinese steelmakers are still showing deep commitment to reducing their carbon intensity, pursuing opportunities like hydrogen injection, as well as applying a technology like carbon capture, utilization and storage to abate higher amounts of greenhouse gas emissions, he said.

As the world will need more mining assets, such as copper and iron

ore, than in the past, it is necessary to deliver them in a sustainable and efficient manner, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

Mining companies have been stepping up investment and local cooperation in China for more green opportunities in recent years, which will in turn further boost the carbon reduction progress from the raw material side and through to the production process, Luo said.

According to Henry, demand for metals and minerals required to meet the needs of a growing and wealthier population has been accelerated by the energy transition, resulting in the need for more mining, even assuming a lot more recycling.

Companies that have the financial, technical, and operational capability to meet this increased demand in ever more sustainable ways will be the winners of the future, he said.

BHP said it is committed to further supporting Chinese steelmakers through multiple partnerships.

cent in the past three years, according to the bank.

Gaming market revenue growth up 15%

China's gaming market generated 24.88 billion yuan (\$3.5 billion) in revenue last month, up 15.12 percent year-on-year, data from an industry report showed. This was

2.17 percent higher than that in January, according to the report released by research agency CNG. Actual sales revenue of the domestic mobile gaming market reached 18.26 billion yuan, surging 17.88 percent compared with the same period last year, according to the report.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Market liberalization big pull for investors

Biz-friendly climate, fewer curbs, expanded access in spotlight at event

By WANG KEJU
and ZHONG NAN

China's continuous efforts to tap into the country's domestic demand, open its doors even wider and foster an enabling business climate will provide greater trade and investment opportunities for enterprises around the globe, senior officials and global CEOs said on Monday.

China's market liberalization efforts are gaining momentum as the country continues to slash restrictions and expand access for foreign investment, said Guo Tingting, vice-minister of commerce, at the two-day China Development Forum, which kicked off in Beijing on Sunday.

"China will fully guarantee equal and nondiscriminatory treatment for foreign companies so that more foreign companies can invest in China with confidence and peace of mind," Guo said.

Concrete steps are being taken to completely lift market access restrictions for foreign investors in the manufacturing sector, while expanding openness in sectors like telecommunications and healthcare, Guo said. He mentioned the recent introduction of the negative list for cross-border trade in services as an example, a move set to significantly enhance the openness of the country's service sector.

With an annual per capita dis-

posable income approaching 40,000 yuan (\$5,556), China has nurtured a middle-income group of over 400 million people, the largest and fastest-growing such cohort in the world. This group presents a significant demographic opportunity for businesses seeking exponential growth, Guo said.

"China is a huge, extraordinarily sophisticated market of opportunity where we innovate locally in China for China and the rest of the world," said Antoine de Saint-Affrique, CEO of food and beverage company Danone.

"We have huge confidence that not only growth will continue in China, but also that China will contribute to the growth of the world. If China doesn't grow, the world wouldn't either."

China's potential for further growth extends beyond consumer spending. The country is actively engaged in new urbanization initiatives, promoting advanced manufacturing, and driving green and low-carbon transformations. These efforts are set to unlock enormous demand in various sectors, Vice-Minister Guo said.

Furthermore, the country is actively constructing a higher-level open economic system, focusing on institutional openness while vigorously promoting its participation in the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-

Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, Guo said.

In particular, China has been taking big strides toward fostering a world-class, market-oriented business climate governed by a sound legal framework, with concrete steps to resolving concerns facing foreign businesses like cross-border data flows, equal participation in government procurement, and facilitating the work and life of foreign employees in China, Guo said.

A week ago, the General Office of the State Council, China's Cabinet, issued the most recent action plan to steadily promote high-standard opening-up and make greater efforts to attract and utilize foreign investment.

China's commitment to promoting openness and improving its business environment is significantly enhancing its appeal to businesses, prompting them to actively invest in the country, said Ola Kallenius, chairman of Mercedes-Benz Group AG.

In a fiercely competitive arena like China, successfully maintaining competitiveness often translates to success in other global markets as well, Kallenius said. Mercedes-Benz, he said, recognizes the immense potential and opportunities the Chinese market presents, and hence has substantially increased its research and development investments in China in recent times.

Contact the writers at wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

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国际爱护动物基金会

CWCY

WWF

AD

Between heaven and earth,
together with other sentient beings, I live.

—Zhuangzi, philosopher, late fourth century BC

天地与我并生，而万物与我为一

——《庄子·齐物论》

华北豹

North China leopard

BUSINESS

Rio Tinto to further tap opportunities in nation's green transition

By ZHENG XIN
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

Rio Tinto, the world's largest iron ore producer, has had more tie-ups and joint ventures with Chinese partners last year than ever before in its history, its top executive said, amid further opening-up and industrial reform that have provided massive business opportunities for multinational corporations in the country.

"China is hugely important for Rio Tinto as this is the place where we have our biggest customers, our biggest shareholder and almost 60 percent of our revenue," said Jakob Stausholm, CEO of Rio Tinto, on the sidelines of the China Development Forum on Sunday in Beijing.

"The rapid development of solar and wind power, grid extension and electric vehicles in the country, of which China has been taking the world lead, gives more demand for products that Rio Tinto provides, not least copper, aluminum and battery materials. The green transition is a whole new business opportunity for us," he said.

China is hugely important for Rio Tinto as this is the place where we have our biggest customers, our biggest shareholder and almost 60 percent of our revenue."

Jakob Stausholm, CEO of Rio Tinto

Stausholm said the supply chain for China's green transition is a whole new business opportunity for multinational corporations like Rio Tinto.

"We saw last year that there was increasing demand from the steel mills for our iron ore and more recently strong demand in areas like copper, which are good indicators for an economy that is growing," he said.

An analyst said the current green transition of China's steel industry will require international mining companies like Rio Tinto to supply more high-quality ore, presenting them with huge opportunities.

"With the introduction of new quality productive forces and the trend of decarbonization, the steel industry will gradually shift from high-growth to high-quality development," said Zhao Xiangbin, chief strategist at Beijing Gold and Forex Fortune Investment Management.

"This will provide Rio Tinto with greater growth opportunities. Additionally, China's increasing global presence in fields such as new energy vehicles and renewable energy will require more high-quality imports of copper, aluminum, and other products."

To meet the growing demand

for mineral products in China, Rio Tinto has vowed to step up investment and partnerships with Chinese partners in the future.

The company has finalized construction of the Oyu Tolgoi mine in Mongolia. It will eventually be the world's fourth-largest copper mine and the copper concentrate currently all goes into China.

Rio Tinto received approval last year from the Australian and Chinese governments for joint development between Shanghai-based China Baowu Steel Group Corp and itself on the Western Range project in Western Australia, an iron ore mine.

According to Stausholm, the accelerating development of new quality productive forces in China is expected to bring greater opportunities for multinational corporations like Rio Tinto.

The upgrade and transformation of the Chinese industry is leading to massive demand for products as well as business opportunities for Rio Tinto, he said.

"The policy framework, focusing on higher quality growth and higher added value, is providing opportunities for further opening-up. It will help reform the existing businesses, including the steel industry, by decarbonizing," he said.

As the world's largest steel producer, China has a huge demand for iron ore, the raw material for steelmaking, which is also one of the major industries producing carbon emissions.

Rio Tinto is looking to explore potential collaborations and partnerships with Chinese partners to enhance its business in the mining and resources sector, he said.

"Rio Tinto has been trying to buy more materials and services in China, as we are selling a lot into China and we really think that we can get a lot of value from here," he said.

"We are expanding our procurement into China and we are putting a lot of effort into finding exactly the right suppliers and developing the long-term partnership. We have much more procurement presence in China than we used to have, simply because it benefits the company."

According to Stausholm, Rio Tinto has been investing heavily in R&D projects related to reducing carbon emissions of current steel-making processes as well as technologies for steelmaking in the future.

It signed an agreement with State-owned Baowu, the world's top steelmaker, last year to explore a range of industry-leading projects in China and Australia that will help decarbonize the steel value chain.

This is in addition to cooperation with Tsinghua University over the past decade on a joint research center to deliver leading research findings and policy proposals in sustainable development.

The potential of steel decarbonization in China presents massive opportunities for global mining companies like Rio Tinto, and the company is committed to broadening cooperation with China beyond trade to exploration, joint ventures, and research and development for low-carbon solutions along the steel value chain, Stausholm added.



Customers are seen at a Standard Chartered bank branch in Shanghai. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

StanChart bullish on China's growth outlook

Lending giant sees opening-up, pro-biz measures as key to unleashing potential

By LIU ZHIHUA
liuzhihua@chinadaily.com.cn

Standard Chartered PLC is very sanguine on China's economic outlook over the medium to long term, while some downsides such as the sluggish property market are short-term and "normal" phenomena amid the country's ongoing economic transformation and upgrades, said Bill Winters, CEO of the financial major.

Winters said that China's financial opening-up creates valuable business opportunities and development dividends for the bank.

"We agree that the growth rate for China this year will be around 5 percent, and the economic data in the early part of the year is reassuring in that regard," he said, adding there are some negatives including subdued property investment and sales, but "electronics, the electric vehicle supply chain and everything in green tech are growing extremely fast".

His remarks came amid the country's efforts to stabilize economic growth through measures including expanding effective investment and fostering new quality productive forces, which led to better-than-expected January-February economic data.

The country's industrial output grew 7 percent year-on-year during the period, following a 6.8 percent rise in December. Fixed-asset investment increased 4.2 percent year-on-year during the same period, compared with 3 percent annual growth for 2023.

"We would expect that things that



Bill Winters

are growing at a negative rate would stabilize, and the new economy sectors, or the new quality productive forces, will continue to accelerate. So we're very optimistic about the Chinese economic outlook in the medium to long term," Winters said in Beijing before the two-day China Development Forum which wrapped up on Monday.

"The short-term pressures are real but will pass. Consumer confidence is beginning to come back. We're seeing that export volumes are beginning to recover. We see that the equity market is beginning to improve, too," he added.

Jerry Zhang, China cluster CEO (China and Japan) at Standard Chartered, said that the latest version of a regularly released development index on small and mid-sized enterprises by the bank bounced to a 10-month high of 51.6 in March, as activity gained momentum after the holidays. The subindices for key performance and expectations of SMEs rebounded sharply in March, while their access to bank credit became easier.

"This year we believe will be a year of strengthening recovery (for the Chinese economy). There will be challenges, but also many opportunities. We have good reasons to be optimistic," Zhang said.

Winters said Standard Chartered will increasingly focus on new economy sectors to further tap potential

in China. The executive also said that the lender is benefiting from China's continued opening-up.

"Everything we've seen is very supportive to the opening-up agenda, but in a thoughtful and careful way," he said, adding the bank is able to "work extremely well with both the Chinese government and Chinese clients as the opening-up agenda is pursued".

Over the years, Standard Chartered has well positioned itself for China's opening-up, including making substantial investments in cross-border payments, Winters said.

Its fully developed interest rate and currency risk management and trading team in China can facilitate clients' cross-border payments and cross-border investment flows, and it also has a strong presence in China's important trading partners.

"Our role is to help facilitate the flow of goods and capital back and forth between China and other markets," he said.

Speaking about foreign investor sentiment in China, he said: "Some foreign companies in other industries have had fantastic success in China and we see substantial ongoing interest in investing in China, both to tap into the very strong technical capabilities here, the highly educated labor force and the Chinese consumers."

Meanwhile, it is a fact that factors including disruptions to supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic have caused some investors to pursue diversification in supply chains. Yet such diversification doesn't mean leaving China, he said, adding some companies leave because the Chinese market is an extremely competitive one.

Homemade mold 3D printers gain popularity overseas

YINCHUAN — With the arrival of spring producing busier days, a spacious workshop at Kocel Intelligent Machinery Ltd has workers conducting final adjustments and assembly of mold 3D printers for upcoming delivery to overseas clients.

Located in Yinchuan, Northwest China's Ningxia Hui autonomous region, Kocel is gaining increasing recognition abroad for its self-developed mold 3D printers, which have maintained a global market share of around 60 percent for four consecutive years.

"The printers ordered by our Italian clients arrived before this year's Spring Festival and we took our technical service team to their location for installation and debugging of the new machines during the Spring Festival holiday. Then, we traveled to Austria to upgrade both software and hardware for our existing clients, while we also discussed some new projects," said Bai Ming, vice-general manager of Kocel.

The situation was quite different for Kocel over a decade ago. Back then, the company invested heavily in importing 3D printing equipment from overseas to improve a challenging work environment and low productivity in the traditional casting industry. However, high operational costs hindered widespread use of such equipment, while technical issues had to be resolved by foreign experts.

Facing such challenges, the company decided in 2015 to embark on the localization and industrialization of mold 3D printing technology. After overcoming hurdles related to printing materials, processes, software, equipment and key technologies, Kocel successfully developed the first large-scale, high-efficiency industrial mold 3D printers in China.

"This successful development marked the domestic initiation of the industrial application of such printing," said Zhou Zhijun, R&D director of Kocel, who also noted that the company has since developed more than such printer models.

In the company's smart factory, traditional challenges such as the need for cranes, molds, physical effort and temperature controls have been solved effectively. Workers need to simply touch a button on a control screen for the production box of a 3D printer to automatically print the product based on the model designed in the computer.

"Previously, it took over a month for a new casting to evolve from blueprint stage to finished product. However, mold 3D printing technology is able to cut this process to a week, while also significantly improving the quality and precision of items produced," said Zhou.

The transformation in the casting workshop is a tangible reflection of the new quality productive forces driving the transformation and upgrade of the traditional foundry industry. A total of seven intelligent foundries based on 3D printing technology have been established nationwide, which are able to achieve full digitalization of the casting production process and a production efficiency more than three times that of traditional foundries of the same scale.

"Our goal is to further reduce costs, improve efficiency and make mold 3D printing equipment more accessible and affordable for more foundry enterprises. The R&D team will also continue exploring innovation in new areas such as ceramics, metals, graphites and other printable materials," said Zhou.

XINHUA



Rio Tinto's booth is seen during the sixth China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Shipbuilders riding crest of global orders

China's complete manufacturing clusters, sustained investment and resource allocation boost industry

By ZHONG NAN
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

Multiple teams tasked with simultaneously constructing 14 ships, each with different functions, are busy at work at the docks owned by Jiangsu Yangzi Xinfu Shipbuilding Co Ltd, a shipyard based in Taizhou, East China's Jiangsu province.

The company receives large shipments of various commodities and industrial equipment daily, including marine steel, fasteners, electronic components and aluminum alloy.

However, most of the oil and chemical tankers, dual fuel-powered container ships and ore carriers built in the shipyards will not be delivered to domestic shipping and energy companies.

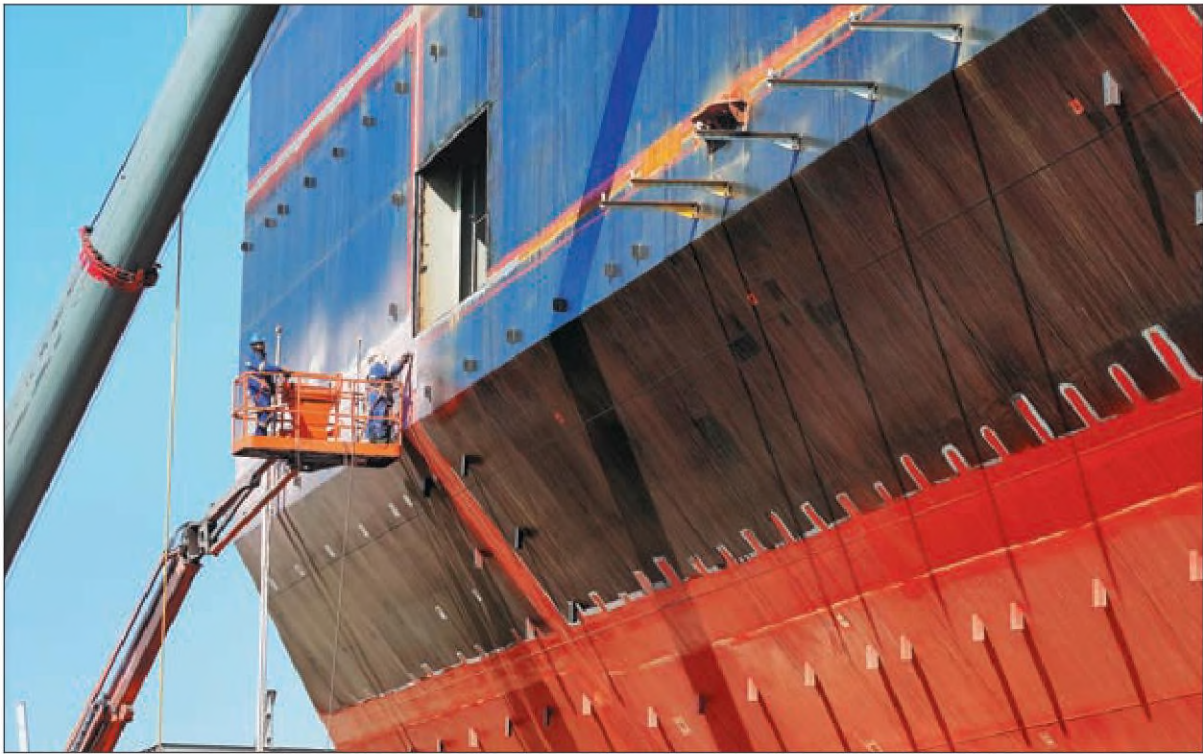
Instead, they will go to shipowners in Norway, Greece, Denmark and Singapore, who have placed orders with the shipyard's parent company — Yangzijiang Shipbuilding Group, a Jiangjiang, Jiangsu province-based firm — over the past two years.

"About 77 percent of our orders are LNG (liquefied natural gas)-powered container ships, dual fuel-powered vessels and diesel-electric propulsion ships, with orders on hand already scheduled through 2027 and the latest delivery extending into 2028," said Liu Yijun, assistant president of Jiangsu Yangzi Xinfu Shipbuilding.

At the company's training center, workers are receiving training in welding and bonding operations, preparing them technically for the construction of two 175,000-cubic-meter LNG carriers. These advanced vessels are top-tier assets in the global shipbuilding industry, historically dominated by South Korean shipbuilders, and often referred to as the pinnacles of excellence.

Highlighting that Chinese shipbuilders have continuously overcome technical challenges and secured international orders, Liu said only five companies in China are capable of building LNG carriers, and his firm is the only privately owned shipbuilding company among these.

Thanks to China's complete manufacturing clusters, strong upstream and downstream industries, as well as continued investment and resource allocation in the shipbuilding sector, the country's shipbuilding output reached 42.32 million deadweight tons in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 11.8 per-



Workers from Yantai CIMC Raffles Ocean Technology Group maintain a ship in Yantai, Shandong province, in February.
TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

cent, data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology showed. The output accounted for 50.2 percent of the global total.

With improved global competitiveness, Chinese shipyards saw new orders surge 56.4 percent year-on-year to 71.2 million dwt last year, accounting for 66.6 percent of the global total.

Li Yanqing, secretary-general of the Beijing-based China Association of the National Shipbuilding Industry, or CANSI, said the country achieved a leading position in the global shipbuilding market by securing new orders for 14 out of 18 major ship types in 2023.

This not only solidified China's leading position in key segments, capturing more than 70 percent of the worldwide total for new bulk carrier and oil tanker orders, but also showcased the country's expertise in niche markets, as new orders for car carriers exceeded 80 percent of the global share.

Anticipating a significant surge in profitability for China's shipbuilding industry in 2024, Li said that with market prices in 2023 having risen by over 10 percent compared to the previous year, and reaching as high as 15 percent in many instances, there is strong reason to believe that the industry is poised to touch unprecedented levels of financial success in the years ahead.

With the second large cruise ship being built locally at China State Shipbuilding Corp's Shanghai Wai-

gaoqiao Shipbuilding Co Ltd in Shanghai, and a large number of vessels being assembled in the Yangtze and Pearl River Delta regions, the next two years will be a peak period for Chinese shipbuilding firms, marked by the delivery of various vessels, notably high-tech ones such as large LNG carriers and mega container ships, said Zeng Ji, a professor of shipbuilding at Shanghai Maritime University.

In addition to holding orders to build 13 LNG carriers for different shipowners, including eight ordered by China Merchants Energy Shipping Co Ltd, Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Co Ltd said earlier this year that it had sealed a number of new ship deals, with the total order value amounting to around 15 billion yuan (\$2.08 billion). Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Co Ltd is a subsidiary of State-owned CSSC, and is based in Dalian, Northeast China's Liaoning province.

The proportion of these high-tech, high value-added projects in the backlog of orders has significantly increased. It will have a fairly positive impact on the overall profitability of the shipyard, forming a new growth point, said Fu Wei, deputy director at the marketing department of Dalian Shipbuilding Industry Co Ltd.

CANSI has forecast that the global shipbuilding completion volume will remain at a historically high level of 100 million dwt in 2024, with new orders expected to be between



A view of a shipbuilder's construction site in Rongcheng, Shandong province, on March 16. LI XINJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

80 million and 100 million dwt and the volume of orders on hand remaining above 200 million dwt. China's shipbuilding completion volume is expected to be around 45 million dwt, with new orders of around 55 million dwt this year, and orders on hand above 130 million dwt, according to CANSI.

Confronting headwinds

The United Steelworkers, an industrial union with 1.2 million members in North America, led a coalition of labor organizations to file a Section 301 petition in mid-March, urging the United States

Trade Representative to start an investigation into China's commercial shipbuilding industry. The petition alleges that China's practices in this sector are "unreasonable and discriminatory", ultimately leading to their significant influence in the global shipbuilding market.

Following submission, the US government has 45 days to decide on whether to initiate an investigation in response.

Speaking at a news conference earlier this month, He Yadong, spokesman for China's Ministry of Commerce, dismissed the accusations leveled by certain US organiza-

tions against China as "entirely baseless", and stressed that China will closely follow how it proceeds, and take necessary measures to ensure its businesses' legitimate rights.

The commerce ministry official emphasized that numerous reports have highlighted that the decline of the US shipbuilding industry primarily stems from excessive protectionism. Conversely, the growth of the Chinese shipbuilding sector has been driven by advancements in technology, emphasizing high-end, intelligent and environmentally sustainable growth.

Cao Lin, a senior analyst at Beijing-based Chinese Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, said even if shipowners do not place orders with Chinese shipyards, it is unlikely they would turn to US shipyards.

"This is because the US has been unable to effectively address a number of constraints in its shipbuilding industry for a considerable length of time, such as the development and testing of designs, the related supply chain, industrial workers and efficiency and profitability," said Cao. "From this perspective, the US shipbuilding industry is significantly behind even its European counterparts."

China's shipbuilding industry is increasingly embracing self-sufficiency, especially within its industrial and supply networks. This shift toward domestic production has significantly reduced both the time and cost associated with various projects, said Pan Helin, a researcher at Zhejiang University's International Business School in Haining, East China's Zhejiang province.

In the competitive market, the ability to deliver ships more quickly often results in more orders from shipowners, said Pan, adding that by sourcing materials locally, Chinese shipyards have not only fostered the expansion of their own industrial ecosystem, but have also seen an uptick in profitability. This strategy will continue to yield benefits for both shipyards and their international clients.

Boosted by these factors, shipyards in Jiangsu province exported 65.53 billion yuan worth of ships of various types in 2023. These included heavy-duty dredgers, wind turbine installation vessels and car carriers, marking a year-on-year increase of 37.1 percent and ranking first in export scale nationwide, statistics from Nanjing Customs showed.

According to a report released by Liaoning province-based Dalian Maritime University, the shipbuilding industry is characterized by its complexity, extensive supply chain and strong industrial connections, encompassing more than 50 diverse industries such as steel, nonferrous metals, machinery and electronics.

Dekra Group mulls further expansion in nation

By ZHONG NAN

Germany's Dekra Group plans to invest in a number of Chinese cities, such as Shanghai and Guangzhou, Guangdong province, to build bigger industrial parks and laboratories this year to sustain business growth, a senior executive said.

This decision has been driven by China's surging export opportunities in sectors such as electric vehicles, household appliances, renewable energy and artificial intelligence-related products, coupled with the country's efforts to attract multinational corporations to its trade in services industries.

In addition to intensifying investment in Shanghai and Guangzhou, the Stuttgart-based testing, inspection and certification (TIC) group with nearly 50,000 employees worldwide, will also expand existing facilities or build new laboratories in Suzhou, Jiangsu province and Hefei, Anhui province, this year.

"We foresee new growth drivers emerging in various sectors, particularly in technology and innovation, driven by continued reforms and opening-up policies," said Kilian Aviles, senior vice-president for



Kilian Aviles

Dekra APAC and managing director of Dekra China.

Led by the development of new quality productive forces and Chinese manufacturers' ongoing efforts to

broaden their sales networks globally, Aviles said China's ongoing commitment to advancing technologies such as artificial intelligence, 5G infrastructure, autonomous driving and renewable energy offers exciting opportunities.

Many countries enforce distinct regulations and standards for imports, making certification a critical step for access to numerous overseas markets. For Chinese exporters, securing certification from a well-regarded international TIC organization can offer substantial benefits in navigating these requirements.

According to this year's Government Work Report, China will strive to modernize its industrial system and accelerate the development of new quality productive forces.

The country will undertake technological transformations and upgrade its manufacturing sector,

create advanced manufacturing clusters, and establish national demonstration zones for new industrialization. These efforts are aimed at transforming traditional industries into high-end, intelligent and environmentally friendly ones, according to the report.

Aviles noted that China's focus on sustainable development and environmental preservation is poised to spur demand for green technologies and services ensuring adherence to environmental standards.

"This trend aligns well with Dekra's strategic focus areas, including future vehicles and mobility, information and cybersecurity, sustainability, artificial intelligence and advanced analytics, and remote services, presenting significant investment opportunities," he added.

This stance is supported by recent data from the Beijing-based China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. China exported 822,000 automobiles in all, including electric vehicles, during the January-February period, up 30.5 percent year-on-year.

Established in 1925, Dekra has to date built a market presence in more than 60 countries and regions across the world. The company has

forecast sales revenue to surpass 4 billion euros (\$4.33 billion) in 2023. Supported by 2,000 employees, the German company currently runs testing facilities, laboratories and offices in 20 cities on the Chinese mainland, including Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

Highlighting the immense potential in China's ongoing efforts to enhance its attractiveness to foreign investment, particularly through regulatory reforms, infrastructure development and market access facilitation, Aviles stressed that Dekra remains confident in the country's ability to maintain its position as a premier destination for foreign investment.

Apart from providing TIC services to Chinese exporters, Dekra offers technical support and advisory services to help them improve their product design, manufacturing processes, and sustainability practices. This can lead to better product quality, efficiency and environmental performance, further boosting their competitiveness abroad.

Chu Xiangyin, a professor of supply chain management at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said



An engineer from Dekra China adjusts an antenna for a smart device test in an electromagnetic compatibility chamber in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in February 2023. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

engaging with foreign TIC groups can help Chinese companies mitigate risks associated with noncompliance, such as product recalls, legal challenges or damage to brand reputation.

In the meantime, he said that the significant market demand and growth opportunities within China in areas such as new energy, digital transformation, intelligent manufacturing and e-commerce, along with the country's extensive industrial support and integration capa-

bilities, are prompting an increasing number of multinational companies to enhance their investments in trade in services-related businesses and expedite their research and development activities within the country.

In contrast to goods trade, trade in services refers to the sale and delivery of intangible services such as transportation, finance, tourism, technical and professional services, construction, advertising, computing and accounting.