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# CHINA DAILY

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## Xi, Kim announce China-DPRK Friendship Year

By CAO DESHENG  
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President Xi Jinping and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's top leader Kim Jong-un jointly announced 2024 as the China-DPRK Friendship Year on Monday, as the two countries celebrate the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, and Kim, who is general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea and president of the State Affairs of the DPRK, made the announcement while exchanging New Year greetings.

They also announced that a series of activities will be launched for the China-DPRK Friendship Year.

In his message to Kim, Xi said that China and the DPRK are friendly neighbors connected by mountains and rivers, and the traditional friendship between the two countries was forged by the older generation of leaders of the two parties and two countries, cemented in the revolutionary struggle, and continuously deepened in the course of socialist construction.

In recent years, Xi said the two sides have maintained close strategic communication, deepened practical cooperation, strengthened coordination and collaboration in multilateral international affairs and pushed forward the continuous development of bilateral ties.

The two countries have worked together to safeguard their com-

mon interests and uphold regional peace and stability, he added.

Noting that the CPC and the Chinese government have always viewed China-DPRK relations from a strategic and long-term perspective, Xi said that it is China's unwavering policy to maintain, consolidate and develop the long-standing friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries.

China is ready to work with the DPRK to take the 75th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations and the China-DPRK Friendship Year as an opportunity to carry forward the long-standing friendship, deepen strategic mutual trust, and enhance exchanges and cooperation, he said.

The countries should ensure

their ties will move forward with the times for greater development, in order to better benefit the two peoples, and continuously make new contributions to safeguarding regional peace and stability, Xi said.

In his message, Kim noted that socialist construction in the two countries has entered a new stage of progress amid complex changes in the international situation.

The unbreakable DPRK-China friendship, forged and consolidated in the struggle for socialism, will be fully displayed this year, he said.

Kim underlined the importance of further deepening the bonds of friendship and unity, and stepping up cooperation between the two sides to safeguard regional and global peace and stability.

## Importance of US-China ties in spotlight

Xi and Biden acknowledge role played by relationship in promoting prosperity for all

By ZHANG YUNBI  
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As the heads of state of China and the United States exchanged congratulatory letters on the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties on Monday, analysts said managing differences and expanding practical collaborations would be the top priority for both sides this year.

The New Year's wish the two nations will hope would come true is that the momentum in the improvement of ties remains unbroken to prevent any major setbacks in relations, they added.

In his letter, President Xi Jinping said the establishment of ties "was a major event in the history of bilateral and international relations".

Over the past 45 years, the China-US relationship has gone through ups and downs and moved forward on the whole, which has not only improved the well-being of the two peoples, but also promoted world peace, stability and prosperity, Xi wrote.

He pointed out that adhering to mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation is the right way for the two major countries to take to get along, and it surely should be the direction of China-US joint efforts in the new era.

In November, Xi and US President Joe Biden held summit talks in San Francisco and mapped out a clear path for the growth of relations.

The two sides should earnestly implement the important consensus and results reached in San Francisco and "take practical actions to advance the stable, healthy and sustained development of China-US relations", Xi wrote.

Xi pledged to further work with Biden to navigate and chart the ties, benefit both nations and their peoples, and advance the cause of peace and development in the world.

On his part, Biden said the relationship has facilitated prosperity and opportunities for the US, China and the world, and he is committed to managing this important relationship responsibly.

He added that he looks forward to continuing to advance the US-China relationship based on the progress made by the predecessors of the two leaders and through multiple meetings and discussions between the two heads of state.

Beijing and Washington issued their landmark joint communique on the establishment of diplomatic relations on Dec 16, 1978, which dictated and led to the founding of ties on Jan 1, 1979.

At the heart of the document is the one-China principle and the US stating that it "will maintain cultural, commercial, and other unofficial relations with the people of Taiwan".

In this document, both sides reaffirmed their wish to "reduce the danger of international military conflict" and their belief that "neither should seek hegemony".

Senior officials and scholars from both countries said such shared beliefs and commitments are "still relevant today" even after 45 years.

In 2024, China-US ties may be impacted and tested by multiple factors such as the Taiwan question and the US general elections, and Wash-

ington has to demonstrate its sincerity by taking more actions and to work with Beijing to fully roll out the San Francisco consensus, experts said.

Su Xiaohui, deputy director of the Department of American Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, said Xi's letter is a reminder for the US that mutual respect forms the foundation of ties, and that the two major economies should treat each other as equals.

"China hopes that the US will stop its provocative moves trying to cross China's line, match its actions with its commitments and show more sincerity in getting along with China," she said.

Biden's letter also reaffirmed Washington's position that the establishment of ties is the right decision, and not the wrong one as claimed by hawkish politicians back in the US, she noted.

The international community is also expecting stability in the relations as "the confrontation between the two major countries would definitely be a disaster for the world", she said.

Neil Bush, founder and chairman of the George H.W. Bush Foundation for US-China Relations, said that in comparison to 1975 — the year he went to China to visit his father in Beijing, "now it's a little harder for the American people to be comfortable exchanging with China because there are just irrational fears that have been raised in their minds about China".

"We need more exchanges. Those exchanges have been made more difficult, but hopefully the ice is melting and we will be able to have warmer relations over time," Bush told reporters on the sidelines of a forum in Hong Kong last month.

In the past year, dialogues and interactions between the two nations have been on the rise, as nearly 20 dialogue and exchange mechanisms between officials have been revived, and direct flights have grown from only 20 every week to 70, observers noted.

US Secretary of the Treasury Janet Yellen has said the US "does not seek to decouple from China", which "would be damaging to both our economies and would have negative global repercussions".

"Alongside seeking a healthy economic relationship, we've also pursued cooperation with China on global challenges," she said at the US-China Business Council's 50th anniversary dinner in Washington, DC, on Dec 14.

Experts warned that the resumption of China-US high-level dialogues in the past year does not necessarily mean that Washington will refrain from damaging China's interests.

On Dec 22, Biden signed into law the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024, which authorizes the US secretary of defense to create a military training program for Taiwan.

Chinese Ambassador to the US Xie Feng recently urged the US side to "move with us in the same direction and follow up with more actions".

"Especially, it is important to prevent any flip-flopping, and avoid taking one step forward but then taking half or even two steps backward, lest it should cause new obstacles to bilateral relations," Xie said at a reception marking the 52nd anniversary of ping-pong diplomacy last month.

## Welcoming 2024



Clockwise from top left: A traditional Chinese lion dance is performed at the New Year celebration at Times Square in New York on Sunday. LEV RADIN / SIPA USA Tourists enjoy the first sunrise of the new year on the Great Wall in Beijing on Monday. LEI SHENG / PEOPLE'S DAILY People celebrate the New Year in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India. XINHUA A fireworks display lights up the London Eye in the early hours of Monday. U YING / XINHUA

## Country can take aircraft production to the next level

Last month, the Chinese mainland's domestically built C919 civilian passenger jet and its older, smaller cousin, the ARJ21, made their first visits to Hong Kong. The occasion included a demonstration flight over the city and Victoria Harbour, as well as both planes being available for viewing on the tarmac at Hong Kong International Airport.

It was a welcome sight, but why were they there? Perhaps it was because the airport was recently voted "Asia's Leading Airport 2023", after the same

### WORLD WATCH

By Quentin Parker

accolade was given in 2020 and 2021, as well as "China's Leading Airport 2023".

John Lee Ka-chiu, chief executive of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, lauded the visit and what it represented for Chinese commercial aviation. Both aircraft will not only feature heavily in the domestic market but

will also seek wider exposure and customers farther afield.

Hong Kong is a major transportation hub for passengers as well as freight, but the plane types used are themselves a key factor. It's a tough market, with established companies with deep pockets currently ruling the skies. It's not quite a duopoly, but it's close.

Indeed, the mid- to wide-body and long-distance passenger and freight jet markets are currently wholly dominated by the United States-based company Boeing and the European consortium Airbus.

Only minimal parts are played by COMAC (China), Bombardier (Canada) and Embraer (Brazil), rounded out by Irkut in Russia.

However, this is likely to change, at least for single-aisle aircraft with a range of up to 5,000 kilometers.

Of the smaller players, COMAC has the potential to compete in this zone. And not just against Bombardier, which now specializes in smaller jets for the private business market, and Embraer with its E series of jets, but also

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**Piecing peace together in Asia-Pacific**  
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### NATION'S SHIPBUILDERS CHART EXCITING NEW WATERS

Deliveries from Chinese constructors account for half the global total

By WANG YING in Shanghai  
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**In-depth**

China's first domestically built large cruise ship, *Adora Magic City*, embarked on its maiden voyage on Monday, when it left Shanghai for destinations in Northeast Asia.

The successful delivery and operation of the vessel saw China join countries such as Italy, France, Germany and Finland in designing and building their own cruise ships.

It also signified that China is the only country to have mastered the technology for building an aircraft carrier, a large liquefied natural gas carrier and a large cruise ship at the same time.

The nation's shipbuilding industry is now well positioned to develop its cruise industry chain to a level and scale to match such achievements, with experts predicting that China's cruise economy will grow to 500 billion yuan (\$71 billion) by 2035.

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# PAGE TWO



A theater on *Adora Magic City* provides entertainment. WAN QUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Visitors to the vessel get to know each other in the lounge area. TAO RAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Guests are attracted to a bar on the vessel. TAO RAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## From page 1

Xing Yue, general manager at Clarksons Research in China, wrote in a report: "Just five shipyards across the world have the experience of building large cruise ships. China State Shipbuilding Corp, or CSSC, and Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding Co's development of *Adora Magic City* ended the dominance of three European shipyards in building large cruise vessels."

Chen Gang, general manager of Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding Co, a unit of CSSC, said constructing a cruise ship is regarded as the "crown jewel" of the shipbuilding industry. Such a gigantic engineering project directly reflects a nation's comprehensive scientific and technological levels and manufacturing strengths, Chen added.

Since China's cruise ship project began in October 2013, some 2.3 million man-hours were devoted to design and 18 million man-hours to construction before *Adora Magic City* became operational.

The 323.6-meter-long, 37.2-meter-wide vessel houses 55,000 sets of equipment, 25 million components and parts, 4,750 kilometers of cables, 365 km of pipelines and 120 km of air pipes.

The ship, which has a gross tonnage of 135,500 tons, can accommodate a maximum of 5,246 travelers in its 2,125 guest cabins. Equipped with a 40,000-square-meter public living and entertainment area, the vessel is known as a "modern city on the sea."

Chen, who is also chief designer of the shipyard's large cruise ship project, said, "One of our designers, who has worked on air-conditioning systems for ships for most of his life, said that all such systems he has designed comprise less than half of a single cruise ship."

Niklas Peterstam, captain of *Adora Magic City*, has high expectations for the vessel. He and his crew of about 1,300 from 28 countries will welcome passengers aboard trips that offer a unique maritime experience.

"I think that after many years of growth and development, people in China will love this special kind of vacation. Families will admire this ship because it has so much to offer, especially for women and children," he said.

Boasting a trendy state-of-the-art shopping center that occupies about 2,000 square meters, *Adora Magic City* boasts the largest duty-free retail space in Chinese waters by partnering with China Duty Free Group.

Since joining the vessel on July 7, Peterstam said he had taken part in two sea trials in July and September, along with two trial voyages with passengers last month, before the vessel's maiden voyage.

## Thorough checks

Lin Guolong, director of Shanghai Maritime University's Logistics Research Center, said cruise ships usually undergo two sea trials before receiving certificates from major international classification bodies. The first trial focuses on technical indicators, while the second tests the vessel's safety, comfort and emergency response capabilities.

Zhang Yuzhuo, chairman of the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, said the delivery of *Adora Magic*

*City* marks a milestone in the nation's transformation to a shipbuilding power, and also a fresh start for China's goal of creating an industrial cruise ecosystem.

Wang Hong, president and professor of management at the China Europe International Business School, said, "The inaugural voyage of the China-built vessel represents not only a great breakthrough for the nation's high-end manufacturing techniques, but also for Chinese people's pursuit of and demand for a better life."

"The entire management operation for *Adora Magic City* incorporates everything people need onboard, including eating, drinking, entertainment and sightseeing, making the vessel a gigantic amusement park and mobile resort. Such a platform will surely become a new growth engine for consumption and the Chinese economy as a whole."

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in recent years, Clarksons, the world's biggest shipping services provider, remains optimistic about the long-term outlook for the cruise market. It predicts that in 2028, the sector will welcome more than 40 million passengers, up from 31 million last year.

"In our passenger forecast, the development of China's consumer cruise market is particularly important," a report from Clarksons said.

The interior decoration of large cruise ships is extremely complex, and involves obtaining and assembling a large amount of supplies at a huge cost, the report added.

People's Daily reported that by the end of 2019, China had become the world's second-largest cruise market, with the direct economic contribution of international cruise companies to the nation reaching 14 billion yuan that year, out of an overall economic contribution of 35.8 billion yuan.

Chen, from Shanghai Waigaoqiao Shipbuilding Co, said continuous development of the

domestic cruise economy is forecast to propel the nation's cruise industry to a scale of 500 billion yuan.

"It took the European cruise manufacturing industry more than 40 years to form industrial alliances. Even if the equipment and technology can be mastered by the Chinese shipbuilding industry in a relatively short period of time, it will still take quite a long time to develop management modes and supporting industries," Chen said.

Construction of China's second domestically built cruise ship started in August 2022. With the experience gained from building *Adora Magic City*, it is hoped that construction man-hours can be reduced by 20 percent, with construction costs cut and efficiency enhanced, Chen added.

Chinese shipbuilders made history last year. With deliveries accounting for half the global total, the nation's shipbuilding industry grew in terms of quantity and quality, boding well for the goal of transitioning from a large shipbuilding base to a maritime production center, industry experts said.

Steve Gordon, global head of Clarksons Research, said that for the first time, China is projected to have contributed half of the world's total shipbuilding production last year by delivering 17.4 million compensated gross tonnage, or CGT, marking a significant consolidation of the nation's significance to the global shipbuilding industry. CGT is an indicator of the amount of work needed to build a particular ship.

Gordon said that despite major disruptions in recent years, shipping remains vital to the global economy by moving 85 percent of all trade worldwide, adding that it is estimated that the shipping industry transport-

ed 12.3 billion tons of global trade last year, a year-on-year growth of 2.2 percent.

## Significant results

Xing Wenhua, chairman of the Shanghai Society of Naval Architects and Marine Engineers, said, "The Chinese shipbuilding industry maintained its strong development momentum by outperforming in the three major shipbuilding indicators — contracting, orders, and deliveries — seeing growth across the board and a leading market share."

In recent years, the industry has achieved significant results in its accelerated structural adjustment, transformation and upgrading, Xing said.

The nation's new shipbuilding breakthroughs cover large cruise ships, vessels powered by LNG, methanol and ammonia, high-end marine engineering equipment, ultra-large container ships, pure car and truck carriers, high-end marine fishery equipment, and marine research vessels, Xing added.

Lin Guolong, director of Shanghai Maritime University's Logistics Research Center, said, "These achievements in high-end ships have been made not only in terms of technologies and craftsmanship, but also in winning market recognition." Lin was referring to major Chinese shipbuilders' accomplishments regarding vessels universally recognized as the most difficult to build due to the advanced techniques that are required.

Since delivering *Dapeng Sun*, the nation's first home-built LNG carrier in April 2008, Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding (Group) Co, a CSSC subsidiary, has developed five generations of LNG carriers.

Securing 37 new orders in 2022, the com-

pany, which is based in Shanghai, said at the start of last year that it aimed to double its LNG vessel construction capacity and accelerate research and development throughout the year.

In September, it announced that its self-designed-and-developed LNG carrier, which occupies 271,000 cubic meters and is the world's largest, had received approval in principle certificates from four major classification bodies.

Construction of the vessel showed that Chinese shipbuilders' research and development, design, and manufacturing capabilities were entering a new phase, the company said.

Last year, Jiangnan Shipyard (Group) Co, also a unit of CSSC, completed work on upgrading and technique innovation, as well as accelerating management and production processes.

The company, headquartered in Shanghai, met its manufacturing target for the year more than one month ahead of schedule.

Among the medium- to high-end vessels it delivered, the company's dual fuel VLGC, or very large gas carrier, which can transport up to 93,000 cu m of liquefied gas, is the world's largest of its kind with a competitive edge. The vessel has met the latest emissions regulations and requirements.

Hu Keyi, the company's corporate technology chief, said the delivery of VLGCs has further consolidated its leading position in global VLGC research, development and construction.

"In the past, domestic shipbuilders always seemed to accept the superiority of foreign engineering, manufacturing and managerial prowess, but Jiangnan refused to do so," Hu said.

Lin said, "The benefits of cost efficiency, a complete industrial and supply chain, and constant breakthroughs in key techniques and technologies have seen China come very close to becoming a shipbuilding power."

Data from Clarksons show that in the first 10 months of last year, 1,547 new ship orders amounting to 89.12 million deadweight tonnes were placed globally, with nearly 58 percent of them going to Chinese shipyards.

A total of 4,359 ships comprising 122.58 million CGT are currently on global order books, with Chinese shipyards securing orders for 2,539 vessels comprising 59.34 million CGT.

Lin said China is still at the initial stage of becoming a recognized worldwide shipbuilding power.

To weather the challenges ahead, the nation's shipyards need to be more competitive in their research and development, designs and techniques. They should also pay special attention to nurturing talent, enhancing management and efficiency, and adapting flexibly to market needs in terms of design, production and technique, Lin said.

# Vessels: Cruise market powering ahead



A variety of services are available on *Adora Magic City*. PHOTOS BY JI HAKIN AND TAO RAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## Tremors in Indonesia

Patients receive treatment on Monday at a medical tent set up outside Surmudang Regional General Hospital after its roof and walls were damaged by a magnitude 4.8 earthquake in West Java Province, Indonesia. A series of shallow quakes hit West Java on Sunday, with the biggest at magnitude 4.8, damaging buildings and prompting residents to flee their homes. However, no casualties were reported, local authorities said.

TIMUR MATAHARI / AFP



## Nation likely to maintain steady growth in 2024

Experts say consumption will remain primary driver of economy

By ZHOU LANXU and OUYANG SHIJIA

China's economy is set to maintain robust and steady growth in 2024 as domestic demand further recovers, driven by ramped-up macroeconomic policy support and the deepening of industrial upgrading, senior experts said.

Consumption will remain a primary growth driver this year, while the investment outlook is expected to improve, countering potential lingering pressures on exports, they said.

Wang Yiming, vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, said consumer spending is poised to further expand this year, building on the post-COVID rebound in 2023. In the first three quarters of last year, consumption accounted for 83.2 percent of the nation's economic growth.

Supporting the continued recovery in consumer spending would be the acceleration of new forms of consumption, including in the digital economy, green

industries, healthcare and smart homes, said Wang, who is also a member of the Monetary Policy Committee of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank.

Traditional consumption areas such as vehicles and electronics are also expected to see a resurgence as a stabilizing economy boosts people's incomes and expectations, he said, adding that policy initiatives would also promote the recovery.

"I believe there is scope for intensifying fiscal policy support," Wang said, adding that the central government may moderately increase debt levels and implement structural tax cuts as its leverage ratio remains relatively low compared with other major economies.

The efforts to promote a modern industrial system would help form a virtuous cycle between consumption and investment, while the country's increasingly diverse export markets and emerging export advantages in new energy sectors will help offset lukewarm global demand, said Zhang Xiaoli, executive vice-chairman of

the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

The tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference, which was held in December, highlighted expanding domestic demand as a focus in 2024, calling for efforts to intensify macroeconomic policy adjustments, tap consumption potential and expand effective investment.

China's economy staged a rebound last year as activity normalized from disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it expanded by 5.2 percent in the first three quarters, yet supply has recovered faster than demand, making insufficient demand a weak link of the economy.

Mostly dragged by the decline in new market orders, the country's official purchasing managers index for the manufacturing sector fell to 49 in December from 49.4 in November, indicating that factory activity has contracted for the third consecutive month, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Sunday.

Lan Zongmin, a researcher at the

Development Research Center of the State Council, said the Chinese economy is likely to see a more balanced recovery between supply and demand this year as policy-makers attach more emphasis to bolstering demand, with the deepening of industrial upgrading to further anchor investment growth.

Infrastructure investment in the areas of technological advances and carbon reduction will likely speed up, and manufacturers' equipment upgrade and growing capacity in emerging industries would bolster investment in the sector, Lan said, adding that investment activity in the real estate sector is projected to stabilize.

China's retail sales, a gauge of consumption, have rebounded since August and rose by 10.1 percent year-on-year in November, while investment lagged behind as total fixed-asset investment expanded by 2.9 percent year-on-year in the first 11 months of 2023 due to a slump in real estate development, according to the NBS.

With more macroeconomic policy support likely, China's A-share market rallied at the end of 2023, led by the new energy and electronics sectors, with the benchmark Shanghai Composite Index up by three consecutive days to 2,974.93 points as of Friday's close, the last trading session of 2023.

Liu Zizheng contributed to this story.

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## Shanghai launches new portal for expat services

By LIN SHUJUAN in Shanghai  
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The Shanghai Municipal People's Government launched on Monday the beta version of a new portal for expat services.

The portal, named International Services Shanghai and operated by China Daily, serves as a one-stop platform for foreigners looking for information related to work, travel or study in Shanghai. It has its own Facebook, X (formerly known as Twitter) and WeChat accounts.

The new website answers the call for efforts to effectively remove obstacles for foreigners who wish to come to China for business, education and tourism, which was made during the annual Central Economic Work Conference held in Beijing on Dec 11 and 12.

The portal has been integrated



with the city's e-governance platform, Government Online-Offline Shanghai, to offer foreigners quick access. It will later be made available in eight other languages — Japanese, Korean, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and Arabic.

Online and offline activities, such as policy introduction sessions, business consultations, themed salons, cultural experiences, and learning and training

events, will be organized to better serve and engage with the expat community.

Many expats who participated in the beta testing of the portal have lauded its launch.

Michael Wong, managing partner of Talent Service, Asia Pacific, EY, said the portal will allow people interested in coming to Shanghai to make better-informed decisions. Montalegre Carvajal Edwin Roberto from Costa Rica, a student at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, said the information provided on the website regarding the setting up of businesses has allowed him to thoroughly understand the details of the process. He is planning to open a performance company after graduation.

Clarisse le Guernic, a French national who works in the tourism industry in Shanghai, said the portal will allow her to better answer

queries from her customers about the city.

Shanghai-based marketing consultant Natacha Extier, who is also from France, said the website is useful even for long-term residents like her, as it contains a wealth of useful information on doing business in the city.

During the "Invest in China Year" summit in November, Shanghai Mayor Gong Zheng said that the city is a charming one, which is full of hope and unlimited opportunities, and it is a land for entrepreneurs to pursue their dreams.

"We will continue to create a first-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized, provide accurate, convenient and innovative high-quality services, and work hand in hand with everybody to build an open and prosperous future," Gong said.

## Aviation: Engine development a key move

From page 1

against aircraft like the Boeing 737 and Airbus A220 and A320.

The ARJ21 and its variants could pitch such a case at the smaller end, and it was pushed out to the international market only in 2022, though it began domestic operations on the Chinese mainland in 2016. External success will likely depend not just on price but also fuel efficiency, technical support and service needs, maintenance costs, reliability and durability.

A decent, existing domestic customer base among more than a dozen Chinese commercial passenger companies and a track record of thousands of trouble-free

flights underpin the operation and model confidence in the future.

Indeed, China, Europe and North America are the world's top three passenger travel markets. It is predicted that China alone will account for about 20 percent of the global airplane demand by 2042. Chinese commercial passenger companies are expected to order more than 8,500 new jets by then. Most orders will be for plane types with single aisles, such as the ARJ21 and larger C919. Expansion to Southeast Asia is a plausible target, with the Indonesian company TransNusa being the first serious international operator of the ARJ21 aircraft, so things look to be picking up.

Furthermore, besides having domestically produced commercial jetliner capacity with the ARJ21, the newer C919 is the new kid on the block. It can accommodate 160 to 190 passengers with a range of 4,000 to 5,500 km, so it can cover the whole of China. As such, this is now realistic domestic competition for Boeing and Airbus, at least in this range and passenger number. China has also developed its own high-performance jet engine through Aero Engine Corp of China in Shanghai, removing dependence on Western-supplied engines. This is a crucial development.

China can innovate and perform at the highest aviation technology

levels, as it has already demonstrated in the space sector. The industry desperately needs this for future aviation viability in a net-zero carbon future.

Hydrogen-electric aircraft, for example, may still be several decades away, especially for anything other than short-haul destinations. In the medium term, many companies seek sustainable aviation fuels from renewable materials to improve their green credentials. But perhaps China can achieve breakthroughs that make large hydrogen-electric planes viable.

The author is a professor on the faculty of science at the University of Hong Kong and the director of its Laboratory for Space Research. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## FRIENDS AFAR

## Woman from US feels 'homesick' for China

**Editor's note:** China Daily Global Edition offers the series Friends Afar to tell the stories of people-to-people exchanges between China and other countries. Through the vivid narration of the people in the stories, our readers can get a better understanding of a country that is boosting openness.

By YIFAN XU in Washington, DC  
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Kayla Raden, who is in her mid-30s, now works as a payroll administrator for a company in North Carolina after deciding several months ago to take a break from years of teaching. But memories of her experiences in China are never far away, and her love for the country remains strong.

"All of my colleagues are Chinese, so I get to speak Chinese all day and eat Chinese food more than twice a week," Raden said while describing her current daily life to China Daily.

Learning Chinese is something Kayla does every day. "I log in to all my different apps. First thing in the morning, I practice Chinese."

When talking about China, including when she taught in the country from 2016 to 2017, her trip in 2018 organized by the Confucius Institute, and her online education involving Chinese students, a smile lights up Raden's face.

"I really do hope to return when it is possible," she said.

Raden first went to China in 2016, but her interest in the country can be traced to her childhood.

Because her birthday is on Dec 24, which is Christmas Eve, her parents would want to take her out to celebrate her birthday. But the only restaurants open on that day were Chinese restaurants, according to Raden. "And my parents would always take me shopping and buy me little gifts from the little stores in Chinatown. So I always associate this deep happiness with eating Chinese food and going to Chinatown."

Furthermore, her best friend when growing up was Chinese American, so she always wanted to know more about China.

When Raden went to Epcot Theme Park at Walt Disney World Resort in Florida while in high school, she spent the whole time in the China Garden there, thinking about visiting the country someday.

The opportunity would come a few years later.

After Raden graduated from college and started her career, she saw a job opening for a chemistry teacher in Shanghai. Raden applied for the job and got it. She went to China to teach at an international high school in Fengxian district of Shanghai from 2016 to 2017.

"I just fell in love with the culture," said Raden. That's also when she began to learn Chinese.

"I had made some friends who are native Chinese speakers, so they would always help me and sometimes only speak to me in Chinese, which was frustrating, but definitely like a crash course," she said.

After returning to the US after one year of teaching, Raden felt "very homesick" for China, she said, so she began studying at a Confucius Institute in New York and made fast progress.

She then began to work for the Confucius Institute, now known as the Center for Language Cooperation and Education. Raden said it was "an incredible experience. It was like all my dreams coming true. All I did was engage with the community and encourage Chinese-language learning."

In 2018, Raden received the People-

to-People Award from the Confucius Institute US Center and joined the 2018 Confucius Institute alumni trip to China.

During that trip, Raden went to a Peking Opera art school in Sichuan province. "They took us to their rehearsal room, and they gave us more information about their costumes and how they practice and the historical significance," Raden said.

She volunteered to try on a costume and was taught by a girl how to move her hands with the sleeves. "I enjoyed it so much because they kind of exposed me to things that I don't think I would have found on my own," Raden said.

They also went to see pandas during that trip. "That was the highlight. That was what everyone was completely excited about," she said.

While Raden kept learning Chinese and thinking about returning to China to continue her teaching career, the COVID-19 outbreak occurred.

In 2020 and 2021, she taught students in Suzhou online. She needed to wake up at 4 am because of the time difference, but she felt lucky to teach the students because "they were so motivated".

When talking about her interactions with Chinese students in Suzhou, Raden still feels motivated and touched.

"I remember they sent me a Christmas card, a handwritten Christmas card. They mailed it, and I was just so touched by that gesture," she said. "Just because during COVID it was very isolating, and I felt kind of alone. And then I got this little card in the mail, and I was like, how sweet?"

Raden also remembered the girl who helped her savor Peking Opera and the boy who helped her order bubble tea when she went to China for the first time and spoke no Chinese. She said the Chinese people always offered to help when she looked lost.

During her time in China, Raden loved walking around West Lake in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, enjoying teahouses in Suzhou, and visiting the Great Wall in Beijing. But the Chinese people impressed her the most.

"When I think of China, I think of the people. Because you can go to the most beautiful places in the world, but if you don't feel a sense of warmth when you go there, you're not going to have a connection to the place," Raden said.

She said people in the United States and China have many things in common.

"I talk about my experiences in China and how my students in China like the same stuff that my students here like. They like the same movies, they like the same music," Raden said. "We all have the same aspirations and dreams. We want to take care of our families. We want to be safe, we want to be happy. And even though we maybe have different life philosophies, at the end of the day, we want the same things."

Raden said that studying Chinese has transformed how she thinks, solves problems and views the world. "I think that studying Chinese has made me a more empathetic person," she said.

"If more Americans studied Chinese and maybe learned more about Chinese culture, there'd be a lot less misunderstanding," she said.

Raden has a dream of running a tourism company offering educational tours that take students from the US to China, because the impression of such trips is lasting. "You remember those for life."



Kayla Raden interacts with students from Chengdu Tanghu Foreign Languages School in Sichuan province during her trip to China in December 2018. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## CHINA

**D**ongxing, a county-level border city in South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, is located on the banks of the Beilun River. On the other side of the river in Vietnam lies Mong Cai, with the two cities linked by a bridge.

As a border city, Dongxing not only serves as a link between China and Vietnam, but also to other parts of Southeast Asia.

A crucial component of Dongxing's economy is the booming parcel delivery sector, which provides a boost for the development of e-commerce and foreign trade in the area.

Every day at 8 am, Dongxing "wakes" when the border bridge opens. Crowds of people from both sides of the bridge travel back and forth carrying large bags loaded with specialty products and are eager to do business.

Vietnamese products favored by consumers in China include slippers, coffee, *ao dai* — a traditional Vietnamese dress — bamboo products, conical hats and herbal ointments.

Some products are sold to tourists, but the majority are purchased by medium and small-sized trading companies, and then sent to customers across China via the expanding parcel delivery network.

On the other side, products made in China, such as clothes and small electronic appliances, are popular with Vietnamese consumers. Small commodities are sent to Dongxing from all over China via the parcel delivery network, and then moved across the bridge before ending up in the hands of Vietnamese customers.

On the main streets of Dongxing, especially the area close to the border gate and bridge, are many parcel delivery companies that operate delivery services in China as well as international logistics operations across the border.

During the day, hordes of couriers can be seen riding electric bikes throughout the city.

On Nov 7 last year, at a Dongxing distribution center of YTO Express, one of China's major parcel delivery companies, workers were busy sorting parcels ahead of the "Double 11" online shopping festival. A large number of parcels destined for Vietnam were placed in big bags in a corner of the center to be handled collectively.

It takes about three days for a parcel to reach Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, from Dongxing, said Liang Yinghua, head of YTO Express in Dongxing and also vice head of the Parcel Delivery Association in Fangchenggang.

Thanks to China's well-developed parcel delivery network, it is easy to transport parcels from around the country to Dongxing in a short period of time. For example, it takes about three days for a parcel from the small-commerce manufacturing hub of Yiwu in eastern China's Zhejiang province to reach Dongxing. This adds up to six days for a parcel to be transported from Yiwu to Hanoi, Liang said.

#### Profitable partners

A great number of parcels sent to Dongxing from across China are destined for Vietnamese recipients, Liang said. To take advantage of this business opportunity, many Vietnamese e-commerce businesses with Chinese partners have set up offices in Dongxing to receive the China-made products, he explained.

Vietnamese customers order the products from local e-commerce platforms such as TikTok and Shopee. The products are then sent to the



A woman sells a seashell work of art via a livestream in Dongxing, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Nov 11 last year. ZHANG YU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



CHINA DAILY

An e-commerce center was established in 2022 to boost the industry and foreign trade.

According to He Shiwu, deputy head of the Dongxing E-commerce Association, the center aims to gather together medium and large e-commerce and product-supply enterprises that operate in the city. The items they handle include wood products, wickerwork, and imported food items such as nuts and fruit.

There are now more than 20 companies at the center that sell over 200 types of goods, including food items, mahogany crafts and rattan products. The center dispatches about 500,000 parcels every month and has monthly sales revenue of about 9 million yuan (\$1.26 million), Xu said.

During the "Double 11" festival in 2022, the volume of parcel deliveries generated by e-commerce stores located in the center was 10 to 15 percent higher than off-peak periods. "The e-commerce center and parcel delivery companies have a strategic partnership where we mutually benefit and support each other," he said.

Parcel delivery companies have also stepped up cooperation with the e-commerce center to ensure smooth operations.

"To cater for the increase in the number of orders during 'Double 11', e-commerce companies were able to contact express delivery companies to increase the frequency of shipments," he said.

Before the festival's peak, express delivery companies prepared enough warehouse space for goods and ensured they had enough packing material, Xu said. Arrangements for vehicle availability and personnel were also made more flexible to ensure efficient delivery services during the busy period.

Xiaotujie Trading, one of the e-commerce stores located at the center, mainly works with YTO Express and YTO Express to send products imported from Vietnam across China.

During last year's "Double 11", the company increased its stock by 50 percent based on the sales performance in 2022, said Peng Weidong, head of the company.

"We stocked our products and completed packaging at a warehouse in the center in advance," he said, adding that once the customer places an order, a well-packaged product will be quickly sent out.

At dusk, the city begins to slow down. There is no more hustle and bustle on the border bridge and stores begin to close. Couriers' electronic bikes, with parcel delivery companies' names painted on them, are parked along the street.

But the next morning when the sun rises, the border bridge opens again at 8 am, and the city springs back to life.

Contact the writer at [luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn)

## Rewards of e-commerce flow across border bridge

China and Vietnam utilize advanced parcel delivery sector to boost trade, push further into region. **Luo Wangshu** reports.



Left: A view of the e-commerce center on Nov 7, which was established in 2022 to facilitate e-commerce companies in Dongxing. ZHANG YU / CHINA NEWS SERVICE Right: Parcels loaded on a small truck at a delivery station in Dongxing. LUO WANGSHU / CHINA DAILY



e-commerce stores in Dongxing via the parcel delivery network, and are subsequently transported to Vietnam through the cross-border logistics system, Liang said.

"Most parcels arriving at Dongxing from other parts of China are mainly destined for Vietnamese customers," he said.

"Apart from the products acquired by local residents in Dongxing to meet their daily needs, a variety of light-industry products, such as clothing, shoes, leather bags, and small household appliances, are sent to Vietnam.

"These goods can be further transported across the border through logistics companies, courier services, or taken back by border residents," he said, adding that many parcel delivery companies in Dongxing are not

qualified to do cross-border delivery.

Likewise, Vietnamese products are sent to Dongxing and distributed to customers around China. "About 80 percent of parcels leaving Dongxing for other parts of China are Southeast Asian specialties, while the remaining 20 percent are agricultural products from Dongxing," Liang said.

The parcel delivery industry in Dongxing has increased twelvefold over the past decade, said Xu Weizhong, deputy head of the Fangchenggang Post Bureau, which oversees the industry in the city.

"Dongxing is a city that focuses on foreign trade, taking advantage of its geographical location. It mainly deals with imports and exports with Southeast Asia. Dongxing is like a gateway to facilitate trade (between China and

Vietnam)," Xu said, adding that the parcel delivery network is a bridge to link foreign trade with the e-commerce system.

The parcel delivery sector has seen rapid growth over the past decade, according to the Post Bureau which regulates the industry. In 2012, the city handled 385,900 parcels, of which 77,100 were from e-commerce business. In 2019, the number was 7.85 million parcels, with 6.45 million from e-commerce.

From 2020 the number dropped due to the COVID-19 outbreak. In 2022, the city handled 5.35 million parcels and 4.73 million were e-commerce packages.

From January to September last year, Dongxing handled 5.84 million parcels, with 5.13 million of them e-commerce parcels.

#### Deep integration

The area's parcel delivery business is now deeply integrated with the e-commerce industry.

Xu Xiaobo, head of Yunda Express in Dongxing, began selling Vietnamese products to Chinese customers via an e-commerce platform in 2008. His goods include Vietnamese coffee, dried fruit and rattan products.

"It was not convenient to send products to China back then, so I thought why not start a parcel delivery business in Dongxing," he said. Xu, who began his parcel delivery business in 2009, said, "the cost (of sending e-commerce parcels) is lower and the efficiency has been increased".

While his main business is now parcel deliveries, he has continued doing e-commerce.

#### REPORTER'S LOG

## Dongxing transits to a brighter future via emerging industry



Luo Wangshu

I traveled to three border cities last year, but Dongxing in southern China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region is by far the busiest one. During the day, people from Vietnam and China swarm back and forth across the border bridge linking Dongxing and Vietnam's Mong Cai, carrying suitcases, big bags and large cartons.

Local officials told me that border residents are eligible to buy tax-free goods totaling less than 8,000 yuan (\$1,121) every day. So many local residents take tax-free specialties to the other side to sell to tourists and small business operators.

This form of trade dates back decades, but now more products from both sides are being transported by

trucks and then sent to all parts of both countries via an ever-growing parcel delivery network.

It's no surprise then, that the parcel delivery business has become one of the city's major emerging industries.

According to the local post bureau, the regulator of the parcel delivery business, the city handled 385,900 parcels in 2012. Last year from January to September, it handled 5.84 million parcels as the bounceback from the COVID-19 pandemic continued.

Data also shows the positive impact the industry has had on employment in the city. In 2017, a total of 340 people worked in postal services, including parcel deliveries, in Dongxing. The number was 418 in 2022.

In a small city like Dongxing, with a population of about 220,000, those 400-plus jobs help support a large number of families.

Sun Jijun's is one of them.

Sun, who is the head of Yunda Express' distribution center in Dongxing, said couriers' incomes are among the best in the city.

"Couriers can get as much as 6,000 (\$844) to 8,000 yuan a month since there are many businesses doing foreign trade in Dongxing that are dependent on e-commerce. Many parcels are delivered for foreign trade companies," he said.

Couriers do not need to work overtime to earn a good salary because multiple parcels are often delivered to the same address. Some couriers also work as agents to help e-commerce companies collect and store their parcels, he added.

As a result of the better wages and conditions, couriers in Dongxing seem more relaxed and easygoing. In the three days I spent in the city, it was rare to see couriers trying to save time by speeding or riding on footpaths, which are common sights in Beijing.

I also did not witness a glut of couriers on the streets at night, which is also a normal occurrence in Beijing.

Courier Chen Jinyong has been working at YTO Express in Dongxing for seven years. He said his monthly income is about 5,000 yuan and his work usually ends at 5 pm, or occasionally at 7 pm during busy times.

Before becoming a courier, Chen worked as a cashier at a local hospital and earned 2,000 yuan a month.

He is quite pleased with his job and salary in the parcel delivery sector. Chen said his workplace is convenient to get to, and he is not too busy so he can spend time with his family.

Sun, head of the distribution center of Yunda, is also quite content with his life. He said the job not only assures his family financial security, but also gives him spare time to spend with his son.

As a local with a bachelor's degree, Sun said he has done most of the

"typical" jobs a border resident does.

The 38-year-old majored in Vietnamese at college and spent two years studying in Vietnam under a university exchange program. After graduation, he worked in a textile factory in Vietnam making jeans.

He later returned to Dongxing and worked at a foreign trade business in Mong Cai.

Sun later entered the parcel delivery business and has worked in many positions at the company since 2013, including as a courier and a sorter. He has bought an apartment in the city not far from his parents' home. The emerging parcel delivery business has offered him a stable, pleasant and sometimes challenging job for more than 10 years, he said.

On the streets of Dongxing, it's noticeable that many buildings hang advertising and brand names in two languages — Chinese and Vietnamese.

People from both countries mix easily on the street, doing business and chatting. I cannot tell who is Chinese and who is Vietnamese as the local dialect is as difficult for me to understand as the Vietnamese language.

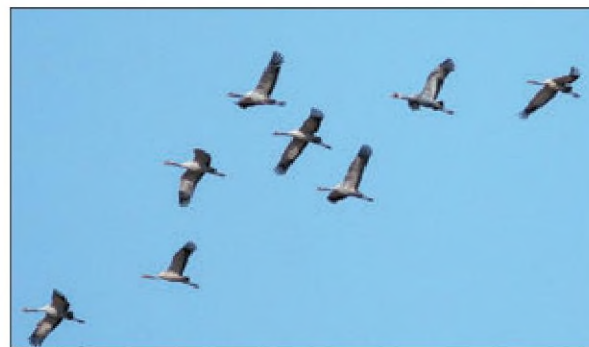
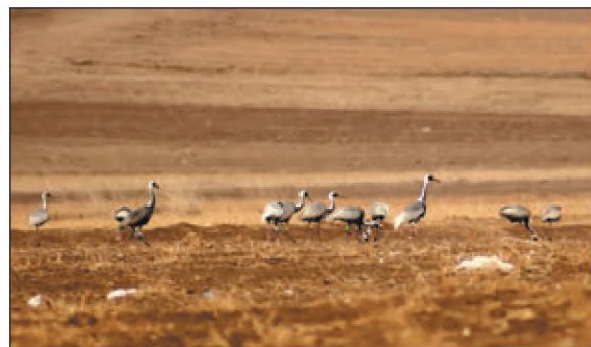
When I returned to Beijing, I browsed the images I had taken in Dongxing.

In one picture of the border bridge, a man is tying up large cartons with a big smile on his face. The background of the photo is full of people going about their own business.

To me, the photo is very moving. It's full of hardworking people, no matter whether they are from China or Vietnam. These people are the lead characters in the city's story and showcase the vitality and friendship between the two countries.

In December, a high-speed railway linking Dongxing with other parts of China opened. It will of course facilitate people's movement. More importantly, parcels containing Vietnamese specialties might be loaded on trains and taken all over China, further strengthening links.

## CHINA



From left: Jia Yifei (center) fixes a small satellite tracking device on a white-naped crane together with two Mongolian experts in Mongolia in July. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A flock of white-naped cranes, including one with a satellite device, roost at the Shandian River Basin in Duolun, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, in 2014. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A single white-naped crane (second from right) joins a flock of common cranes flying over the Miyun Reservoir area in November 2013. CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY

## Researchers track rare water bird's movements

Habitat loss has reduced number of white-naped cranes using some Chinese staging sites during annual migration

By CHEN LIANG  
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After a three-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Jia Yifei was finally able to return to the Khurkh and Khuiten reserve in Mongolia last year to continue his research on the white-naped crane.

Together with two of his students, a partner from the International Crane Foundation and Mongolian researchers and rangers, the Beijing Forestry University ornithologist spent two weeks in the reserve from July 20, catching about 30 white-naped cranes and fitting small satellite tracking devices on 15 of them.

"We had to choose healthy individuals that met conditions for installation," the 40-year-old said. "The field work, on the grasslands dotted with patches of wetland, was challenging, including staying in tents for more than 10 days without access to showers, enduring scorching sun and relentless mosquito bites. But we were happy to resume our work, which began in 2013."

Jia said the team had focused its research on the large bird, which has a gray-and-white-striped neck and a red face patch, because of its rapid population decline.

### A vulnerable bird

The white-naped crane, whose scientific name is *Antigone vipio*, is a species under the first-level State protection in China. With a global population of less than 7,000, it is also the fourth rarest crane species in the world, Jia said, with its numbers exceeding only the whooping crane, Siberian crane and red-crowned crane. As a result, it has been listed as a vulnerable species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List.

White-naped cranes breed in high-latitude areas in China, Mongolia and Russia. In autumn, they migrate south to their wintering grounds. Some winter in China's Yangtze River Basin, mainly around Poyang Lake, while others migrate to Kagoshima in Japan.

Due to the different wintering locations, scientists have classified the bird into two

distinct populations, Jia said, with those wintering in China known as the Chinese or western population.

"Poyang Lake serves as the primary wintering site for the Chinese population, as almost all birds of the population spend their winters there," Jia said.

Around the year 2000, there were about 4,000 white-naped cranes wintering around Poyang Lake. But from 2009 to 2011, an annual survey conducted by conservationists recorded less than 1,000 white-naped cranes there.

"It became clear that we had not paid enough attention to the living conditions of the bird," Jia said.

People tended to focus their conservation work on better-known species such as the red-crowned crane and the Siberian crane, Jia said. Few people had heard of the white-naped crane and fewer realized that its population had decreased so dramatically.

As a result, Jia decided to focus his research on the bird.

To address the issue, Beijing Forestry University, in collaboration with the International Crane Foundation, an organization dedicated to conserving cranes and the ecosystems, watersheds and flyways on which they depend, and the Wildlife Science and Conservation Center in Mongolia, began using satellite tracking to trace the migration routes of the crane's western population.

Jia and his team first visited Mongolia's Khurkh and Khuiten reserve in 2013, fitting satellite tracking devices on six white-naped cranes.

"In the beginning, our tracking devices used GPS systems," Jia said. "Now we use the Beidou Satellite Navigation System."

Before last year, they had fitted tracking devices to about 60 cranes, which has helped them monitor the birds' whereabouts in real-time and "understand the environment and habitats where they live."

### Habitat loss

"This, in turn, enables us to conduct research on their food resources and assess their general survival situations," Jia said.

They discovered that the Bohai Bay area

"We were happy to resume our work (putting small satellite tracking devices on white-naped cranes), which began in 2013."

Jia Yifei, Beijing Forestry University ornithologist



was a major staging site for the cranes, where they would roost and feed for "at least one week and sometimes, as long as one month" during their migration from their breeding grounds to the wintering grounds. "Now, however, it has changed to the Shandian River Basin in Duolun, Inner Mongolia autonomous region," Jia said.

To discover the reason for the change, they analyzed the crane's historical habitats in the Bohai Bay area and identified a significant issue — habitat loss.

They examined various habitats such as grasslands, marshes, open water and farmlands to determine if they had been converted into other forms or developed for

human use, such as urban areas or highways. Based on historical records and their observations, they found a loss of suitable habitats for the cranes at their historical staging site.

As a result, the birds had changed their migration route. "Some cranes were unable to adapt and disappeared, while others, more resilient and intelligent, relocated to the Shandian River Basin," Jia said.

Jia and his teammates have counted over 800 white-naped cranes in the area each year, and the estimated population is now around 1,000. "That means almost all birds of the western population will spend some time in the Shandian River Basin during their migration," he said.

He said the negative impact of habitat change on the cranes was obvious in Beijing's Miyun Reservoir area.

### Miyun case

The Miyun Reservoir was one of the capital's top birding sites until several years ago, and also a significant staging site for the white-naped crane. The northern shore of the Miyun Reservoir once had the highest bird diversity in Beijing, and had been a sanctuary for over 110 water bird species, Jia said.

In surveys conducted in 2013 and 2014, Jia and his team counted over 1,000 white-naped cranes at the site. "It could be considered a key stopover site for the cranes during their migration," Jia said.

However, Beijing is also a city with extremely limited water resources, and its underground water has been depleted due to a funnel-shaped geological structure. To address the water shortage, the massive South-to-North Water Diversion Project was carried out, and the Miyun Reservoir was designated as a backup water source for the project.

In 2015, the inflow of water from the Danjiangkou Reservoir in Hubei province caused the water level in the Miyun Reservoir to rise. The farmlands or shore areas that were previously suitable locations for cranes and other waterfowl to roost and feed became either wetlands or totally submerged.

While the rising water level in the reservoir might be good for some water bird species, such as ducks and cormorants, Jia said, it resulted in the decline of habitats for other species, such as cranes.

The decline in water bird diversity at the reservoir may not be irreversible, he said.

"Based on our satellite tracking data, we discovered that over 100 white-naped cranes temporarily stopped at the wetlands on the northern shore of the Miyun Reservoir from March 10 to 12," Jia said.

"It is a very rare record in recent years. It gives us hope. If we can restore the habitat of the Miyun Reservoir to a certain extent, water birds including the white-naped cranes are likely to continue using it as an important stopover site."

### Conservation strategy

He hopes better measures can be implemented in future large-scale projects to balance the relationship between conservation and development and achieve harmony between humans and nature.

Migratory water birds such as the white-naped crane need their habitats to be protected throughout their life cycle, he said, with any problems in breeding, resting, or wintering areas proving disastrous for migratory species.

The western population's breeding and wintering grounds are mainly within nature reserves and under better protection. However, Jia said, its staging and stopover sites — usually not in protected areas — need joint conservation efforts from scientists, local governments and people, conservation NGOs and volunteers.

In the Shandian River area, he said their research work had received local herders' support. "We helped them establish a volunteer association to protect birds in the area and provided training to volunteers," Jia said. "In this way, all relevant stakeholders can work together to protect the cranes."

He said the Chinese population of the white-naped crane had remained almost stable for a decade, and "with further research, we expect to find better ways to restore the population."

Four white-naped cranes feed on the shore of Poyang Lake in January last year. WANG JIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



## Team learns lessons from death of 'Hope'

By CHEN LIANG

Since 2013, when they began a project that uses satellite tracking to trace the migration routes of the white-naped crane's western population, Jia Yifei, a researcher with Beijing Forestry University's Center for East Asian-Australasian Flyway Studies, and his students and research partners have fitted small devices on more than 70 cranes.

"Once fitted with a satellite device, and without any incidents, a crane can provide its migration data to us for four to five years," Jia said. "Then the device becomes dysfunctional and we lose track of the bird."

With so many birds fitted with the devices, tracked and then disappearing, Jia has no specific impression of any individuals, apart from one they named "Hope".

Jia and his colleagues first installed tracking devices on six white-naped cranes in 2013.

They named them "Hope" in Chinese, English, Mongolian, Japanese, Korean and Russian, in the expectation they could bring some hope to reversing the decline of the wintering population in China.

One Hope, an adult individual, had a smooth first year with the tracking device. It migrated to Poyang Lake for wintering and returned to its breeding grounds in Mongolia in the spring of 2014.

In the fall of 2014, the researchers found it had returned to Chinese territory, arriving at the Shandian River Basin in Duolun county, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on Oct 12 and leaving on Oct 26. During the staging period, Jia and his teammates conducted field investigations and took a photo of the bird.

They then returned to Beijing, but Jia kept an eye on Hope's whereabouts.

On Oct 27, 2014, the bird arrived in Yang-

gu county, Shandong province. "We found that it was flying toward a location in the city, but the signal was lagging, making it difficult to confirm," Jia said. The next day, they confirmed the signal was coming from the city.

At the same time, a manager at a zoo in Yanggu contacted one of Jia's research partners and said local residents had found several white-naped cranes that appeared to have been poisoned. One was fitted with a satellite tracking device.

Jia and his teammates rushed to Yanggu and discovered that the cranes, including Hope, had eaten some winter wheat seeds that had been soaked in pesticide.

It was a common practice in northern China, Jia said. In autumn, winter wheat is planted on the North China Plain. In winter, the seedlings are covered by heavy snow and will grow well the following year.

But when farmers sow the seeds, they soak them in chemical pesticides to protect them from pests.

The cranes, however, were clever enough to dig up and eat the winter wheat seeds. As a result, they ended up getting poisoned.

After Jia and his colleagues arrived in Yanggu, they treated the birds by giving them enough water to drink and maintaining their physical condition to aid detoxification.

"After Hope and the other birds recovered, we released them on Nov 11, 2014," Jia said.

Everything was fine with the bird, and in the spring of 2015, Hope had returned to Duolun from Poyang Lake. "We were happy to see the bird again," he said.

But when Hope's signal stopped moving, the researchers located the bird, which had died.

They took the crane back to their laborato-

ry at Beijing Forestry University to discover why it died.

After removing part of its gullet, they found it was filled with crops grown in the area — mainly buckwheat.

The crane's body was relatively strong and bulky, indicating that it had not died of starvation, Jia said, but it did have a slight external injury.

"But we were not sure if it was an injury caused by some animal's attack or if it occurred after its death when other animals scavenged its body," Jia said. "It remains a mystery."

One thing he is sure of is that the staging site of the white-naped cranes in the area is mainly farmland, meaning the birds live close to all kinds of human activities.

"Sometimes it's too close," Jia said. "Even home cats or stray dogs might become a threat to their survival."

## WORLD



People wade through a flooded street following heavy rain in Mombasa, Kenya, on Nov 17. The Horn of Africa experienced intense rainfall and flash flooding linked to El Nino at the end of last year. PHOTO BY REUTERS

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya  
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## Africa seeks to make climate needs known on global stage

Experts want continent to focus on sustainable farming while it grapples with extreme weather events

In the year following Africa's hosting of the 27th United Nations climate summit, more commonly referred to as COP27, held in Egypt in 2022, the continent has endured a run of lethal and unprecedented extreme weather events.

In September, Libya hit global headlines when Storm Daniel made landfall, causing severe weather conditions, including strong winds and sudden heavy rainfall that affected several areas in the country. Massive floodings killed more than 4,300 people, and more than 8,500 are still missing, according to the United Nations Children's Fund.

Even though Libya's floods were among the few African climate extremes that made global headlines last year, many other deadly and life-threatening events in Africa failed to gain international news coverage.

The Horn of Africa has seen almost three years of some of the worst drought conditions in history, said the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, a global provider of early warning and analysis on acute food insecurity. Ethiopia and Somalia have experienced five failed rainy seasons since late 2020, which have displaced 1.4 million Somalis and killed 3.8 million livestock.

This period of extreme drought was followed by the El Nino-induced heavy rains and flash flooding that killed hundreds in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia last year, the United Nations said. The deluge swamped more than 1,000 hectares of cropland in Ethiopia and Somalia, challenging the agricultural economies in the two countries where more than 65 percent of the population relies on farming and much of the region's farmland relies on rainfall for irrigation.

Kilon Nyambuga, a research and planning expert involved in the resettlement of slum dwellers in Kenya, said Africa is responsible for only a fraction of global emissions but is suffering disproportionately from climate change.

"The fact that Africa is continuously facing the extreme effects of climate change despite the continent's low emissions is harming food security, ecosystems and economies while fueling displacement, migration and worsening the threat of conflict over dwindling resources," he said.

Emissions of carbon dioxide per person in Africa in 2021 were 1.04 metric tons, standing in stark contrast to the global average, which is



Children of the Turkana tribe go down a well to fetch water in northern Kenya on Feb 17 as climate change in East Africa causes the worst drought in its history. SIMONE BOCCACCIO / REUTERS



The first Africa Climate Summit is held at the Kenyatta International Convention Center in Nairobi, Kenya, on Sept 6. ANDREW KASUKU VIA GETTY IMAGES

### 2023 year in Review

more than four times as high, said a report published by the World Meteorological Organization in September.

The report, called "State of the Climate in Africa 2022", said the rate of temperature increase across Africa has accelerated in recent decades, with weather and climate-related hazards becoming more severe. Yet, financing for climate adaptation is a drop in the ocean of what is needed.

Nyambuga said the global approach, which seems fixated on mitigation, neglects Africa's pressing need for adaptation financing and loss and damage compensation. The decision by African countries to host the inaugural Africa Climate Summit in Kenya's capital Nairobi in

September 2023, was timely and "a plus for the African Union", he said.

Alex Mugambi, chair of the Environmental Institute of Kenya, said the African Climate Summit was a success, highlighting the adoption of the Nairobi Declaration, a comprehensive document that outlines Africa's vision, priorities, and demands for climate action and finance.

"The declaration call was a win for Africa for calling for a new global financial deal with fit-for-purpose financing instruments and products to serve Africa's specific growth goals," Mugambi said.

#### Disproportionate financing

"The declaration also shed light on the disproportionate global climate change financing system by urging developed countries to honor their commitment to provide \$100 billion per year in climate finance by 2020 and increase their ambition and support for adaptation, mitigation, technology transfer and capacity building in Africa."

Nyambuga said the Africa Climate Summit also drew attention to local African solutions in com-

bating climate change, adding that previous focus on local solutions generated by native communities had been inadequate.

As global delegates gathered in the United Arab Emirates in November for the 28th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, African experts have said the forum produced a range of outcomes that may help to scale up efforts to invest in clean energy, mitigate climate change damage and accelerate the development of carbon markets.

A key priority for the African continent heading into COP28 was to bring the loss and damage fund into operation, said Hardi Yakubu, movement coordinator of Africans Rising For Unity, Justice, Peace & Dignity, a pan-African civil society movement. This fund was agreed in principle at the previous summit as a vehicle to help low-income countries that are most exposed to climate change impacts, and was featured prominently in the Nairobi Declaration.

The financial commitments announced by several countries at

COP28, with pledges totaling more than \$700 million, reflect a glimmer of hope for developing countries, said Yakubu, a climate activist from Ghana.

"The first round of pledges will clearly be insufficient to support countries in Africa and around the world on the front line of the climate crisis. However, the success of this fund will depend on the speed and scale at which funds start flowing to people in need," he said.

Another area that received much attention at COP28 was Africa's contribution to the voluntary carbon market, he said. This market provides a route for Africa to financially benefit from its natural resources and assets which remove carbon from the atmosphere and provide other environmental services to the planet.

"COP28 achieved good progress toward realizing the win-win opportunities from the carbon markets. Africa is poised to benefit from a maturation of the carbon market over the next 18 months," Yakubu said.

Mugambi said all is not lost for Africa as the continent steps up efforts to make its climate needs known.

In addition to demanding climate compensation, he said African policymakers can create an enabling environment for green ventures that invest in research, innovation and education, as well as for promoting public-private partnerships and fostering collaboration across governments, businesses and local communities.

"Africa should prioritize transitioning to sustainable agriculture, which currently contributes about 17 percent to sub-Saharan Africa's GDP. Embracing organic farming, precision agriculture and agroforestry are some of the approaches that can enhance productivity while minimizing negative impacts on ecosystems," he said.

"Africa can also become a trailblazer in renewable energy solutions, with abundant solar, wind, hydro, biomass and geothermal resources that may contribute to an increase in the continent's GDP. Ocean renewable energy is another vast untapped resource for Africa."

#### Addressing challenges

Nonetheless, other experts have argued that despite Africa being one of the major victims of global warming, its countries must not forgo addressing their specific challenges in poverty alleviation and development. In other continents, they said, such development has often been fueled by the utilization of oil and gas resources.

Exploiting Africa's newly discovered fossil fuels will lead to new jobs and business opportunities, Nyambuga said. In addition, successful exploration on the continent will attract further investment, leading to a rise in employment across many industries and accelerated economic growth for oil-rich African countries.

"The global approach should not be fixated on mitigation while ignoring Africa's pressing need for earning revenue through its resources as others did before. The demand for greater consideration of Africa's needs will do nothing if African governments are not pulling in the same direction. Africans must approach climate change with a united voice, representing all the continent's people, and making their case clearly and firmly," Nyambuga said.

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## Youth find novel ways to fight environment crisis



Otiato Opali  
Reporter's  
log

During my formative years in Kisumu town, western Kenya, the shores of Lake Victoria significantly shaped my early experiences and memories.

As the world's largest tropical and second-largest freshwater lake, it offered plentiful fish for consumption and served as a source of income for local fishers selling their catch in the markets.

As primary school students, we would visit the lake's beach after school, basking in the cooling water for a refreshing swim. On weekends, armed with our improvised hooks, lines, rods and worms, we would troop to the lake's shores for lighthearted fishing escapades.

However, climate change has affected the mother lake for many Africans.

In the early 1990s, the majestic lake fell victim to an invasion by the intrusive water hyacinth plant, which cast a suffocating green cloak across its surface. Following the complete occupation by this invasive aquatic weed, the previously blue

lake turned to a field of green. The leaves of the floating plant extended like an immense green carpet, blown gently into the horizon by the wind.

The absence of natural predators for the weed, coupled with the perfect temperature conditions of the lake, facilitated rapid spread of the plant. It thrived by gorging on open space, cutting off fishing routes and creating a conducive environment for disease-carrying mosquitoes.

At the dawn of the hyacinth problem in Kenya, the government was at a loss on how to tackle the pervasive floating weed. The spread of this invasive species, challenging to manage and reverse, posed a significant

threat to biodiversity, economic development and human well-being.

The government's early efforts to control the weeds included chemical methods, namely the use of herbicides. Physical methods were also deployed, including the manual removal of the weeds and the employment of machines such as weed harvesters.

Despite showing initial success, these methods proved to be unsustainable because the use of chemicals might degrade water quality and put aquatic life at risk, and the deployment of crusher and destruction boats turned out to be expensive.

While working on an environmental protection assignment for China Daily, I came to admire the ingenious attitude of Africa's youth in developing sustainable solutions for environmental challenges.

During the assignment, I interacted with Rahmina Paulette, a young Kenyan who had started a venture of turning water hyacinth into fiber for making baskets, bags and printing paper.

To widen my sources, the assignment led me to other inventive biological methods devised by Kenyan youth to fight the pervasive weed. One such venture was set up by Biogas International, a Kenyan energy technology company. It has invented a machine that converts waste, such as water hyacinth, into biogas, a cleaner alternative for cooking fuel.

At Maasai Mara University in Kenya, students have done research on water hyacinth's ability to remove algae, fecal coliform bacteria, trace amounts of toxic metals, organic substances and other dissolved impurities from wastewater. The research has materialized into a system that can recycle wastewater from bathrooms and kitchens by collecting effluents and purifying them using water hyacinth.

It is said that when life gives you lemons, make lemonade. Climate change might be a real threat to human existence, but young people in Africa are demonstrating that some of these environmental and climate challenges can be tackled by simply tapping into the innovative and tech-savvy nature of the youth of today.

## WORLD



**Above:** Fireworks are seen over the Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge during New Year celebrations on Jan 1. DAN HIMBRECHTS / REUTERS  
**Right:** Revelers celebrate the New Year in Times Square, New York, on Jan 1. ADAM GRAY VIA GETTY IMAGES



## Joy, sorrow as world ushers in 2024

NEW YORK — Fireworks illuminated skies over Paris, Rio de Janeiro and Sydney to celebrate the entry into 2024, while rockets and strikes marked the year's earliest hours in Israel, Gaza and Ukraine.

Much of the world's population — now more than 8 billion — is hoping to shake off high living costs and global tumult in 2024, which will bring elections concerning half the world's population and the Paris Olympics.

But with the new year barely having started, there were already ominous signs: At the stroke of midnight in Gaza, a barrage of rockets was fired toward Israel in a twisted reflection of the fireworks lighting up night skies elsewhere around the world.

In New York City, thousands of visitors lined up to watch the annual dropping of a giant illuminated ball in Times Square as crooner Paul Anka saw out the final minutes of the year.

The march of midnight from time zone to time zone brought 2024 first to places such as Australia, where more than 1 million people watched a pyrotechnic display centered around Sydney's Opera House and Harbour Bridge. It would be another 16 hours before New York finished 2023.

Pyrotechnics also illuminated the skies in Auckland, Hong Kong, Manila and Jakarta, while revelers danced in the streets in Greece and bathed in the nude in southern France.

The past 12 months brought "Barbenheimer" to the box office, a proliferation of human-seeming artificial intelligence tools and the world's first whole-eye transplant.

India outgrew China as the world's most populous country and then became the first nation to land an unmanned craft on the moon's south pole.

It was also the hottest year since records began in 1880, with a spate

of climate-fueled disasters striking across the world.

Fans bade adieu to "Queen of Rock 'n' Roll" Tina Turner, *Friends* actor Matthew Perry, hell-raising Anglo-Irish songsmith Shane MacGowan and master dystopian novelist Cormac McCarthy.

Several pivotal elections are scheduled in 2024, with the political fate of more than 4 billion people to be decided in contests that will shape the European Union, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Venezuela and a host of other nations.

But one election in particular promises global consequences.

In the United States, Democrat Joe Biden, 81, and Republican Donald Trump, 77, appear set for a November rerun of their divisive 2020 presidential contest.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## NYC diverse leadership marks new year

By MINLU ZHANG in New York  
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New York City's diverse leadership gathered on Sunday at the Chinese Consulate General for its New Year Open Day in a celebration of cultural exchange.

"The outgoing 2023 is a turbulent yet transformative year," said Chinese Acting Consul General in New York Qian Jin. "Changes of the world, of our times and of historical significance are unfolding like never before."

"Yet, the overall direction of human development and progress will not change, and the overall trend toward a shared future for the international community will not change."

For China-US relations, Qian said it is a year of "recovery and resilience."

"Despite the twists and turns in our relations throughout the year, the historic San Francisco summit con-

cluded successfully (in November)," he said. "With hindsight, we can conclude that dialogue is better than confrontation, cooperation is better than decoupling, and stability is better than flip-flopping. This should be a consensus as well as the shared responsibility of the two sides."

2024 marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and the US, Qian said.

"As we gather together today to celebrate the dawning of the new year, let's build on the positive momentum of the San Francisco summit and join hands to build a community with a shared future, featuring openness, inclusiveness, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation," he said.

New York City Council Member Christopher Marte shared his experience of living in China.

As a curious young boy growing up in Chinatown, Marte decided to

live in China and study at Zhejiang University at the age of 18.

"My experience showed me the world," he said.

"I realized the vast beauty and the amazement that China had. It was more than I ever expected living in my tenement building as a kid in Chinatown," he said. "But what it really taught me is that no matter the beauty of the surrounding, the most beautiful thing I learned was that the people, the Chinese people, were so welcoming and friendly."

About 120 guests from all walks of New York attended Sunday's celebration, including state Senator Leroy Comrie; state Assemblyman David Weprin; Winnie Greco, senior adviser to the mayor and director of Asian Affairs; Sino-American Friendship Association President Peter Zhang; and China Institute CEO George Geh.

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## Xi's address stresses well-being of people

Experts reflect on speech, highlighting commitment to peace and prosperity

By YIFAN XU in Washington,  
LINDA DENG in Seattle, Washington  
and RENALI in Los Angeles

Chinese President Xi Jinping's New Year speech had a strong focus on the well-being of the people and promoting prosperity, giving hopes of a better life and creating a win-win situation for a world of peaceful coexistence, global experts have said.

Xi delivered his New Year message on Sunday to ring in 2024, in which he hailed the achievements China has made in various sectors in 2023 and vowed to comprehensively deepen reform and opening-up, enhance economic vitality and steadfastly advance Chinese modernization.

Keith Bennett, co-editor of the *Friends of Socialist China*, said the New Year address presents a profound, comprehensive and touching panorama and survey of China's present situation, achievements and perspectives.

What is particularly impressive is the way it relates a grand vision to the issues that most touch on people's daily lives, from the encouragement of grassroots sports and community activities, such as the "village super league" soccer games, to the embrace by more people of low-carbon lifestyles, he said.

Bennett said that when Xi talks about children being well taken care of and receiving a good education, and elderly people having access to proper medical services and care, he speaks not just to the Chinese people, but also to people's universal aspirations.

"Making the issues that matter to every family the top priority for government, that is serving the people, is the essence of socialist governance," he said.

Brian Renwick, a London-based adviser to organizations with a focus on China, said the speech is "positive and energetic."

To Renwick, what is meaningful of the speech is that the president mentioned China's ultimate goal is about delivering a better life for the people, and China will work closely with the international community for the common good of humanity and make the world a better place for all.

"Few other leaders pay attention to these philosophies," he said.

## Moving passages

David Chong, founder and president of the US-China Youth and Student Exchange Association, said the speech had two particularly moving passages for him.

The first emphasized the grand yet simple goal: to improve the lives of ordinary people.

Raising and educating children, facilitating the employment and success of the youth, and ensuring healthcare and well-being for the elderly are not just personal matters, but also national concerns. It calls for a collective effort to manage these affairs effectively.

The second passage addressed the current conflicts in some parts of the world.

Recognizing the value of peace, the Chinese people express their

willingness to work with the international community, holding the well-being of humanity and the prospects of people in mind, to build a community with a shared future for mankind and create a better world.

"Upon reflection, it's clear that the majority of people worldwide share simple aspirations: a secure and comfortable living, peaceful development and the opportunity to thrive in a fair global order, contributing to the well-being of humanity," he said.

Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Institute for China-America Studies, said the people's development and the right to a better standard of living and a happier future have been at the heart of Xi's leadership over the past decade, and this people-centric vision will continue to animate his politics and policies.

David Choi, co-chair of the National Congress of Chinese Canadians, said overseas Chinese are glad to see that China has weathered a complicated challenging world in 2023, and China continues to forge ahead and is advancing itself.

China overcame a challenging economy and international environment, made new accomplishments in space and aeronautics, in the energy sector, in green technology, continues to modernize developments, and stays focused in pursuing higher quality and long-term economic progress, he added.

Chen Yingqun in Beijing and Xing Yi in London contributed to this story.

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## US students embrace Chinese language, look to bridge cultures

By LIAZHOU in San Francisco  
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In a vibrant awards ceremony at the residence of the Chinese consul general in San Francisco, three US students, who recently took home top honors in the "Chinese Bridge" global Chinese-proficiency competition, stood proudly, their fluency in Chinese and passion for Chinese culture on full display.

Ivana Moreno, a high school student in a black kung fu uniform, captivated the audience with a dynamic display of martial arts.

Andrew Fowler, a college senior, showcased his newfound talent in the ancient art of Chinese bamboo weaving.

Sage Houdek, a bright elementary schooler, filled the room with the delicate melodies of traditional Chinese folk music played on her violin.

The three students were not just celebrating their victories at the competition; they were ambassadors of cultural understanding, building bridges of friendship between the US and China with every spoken word and graceful performance, said Zheng Xin, wife of Chinese Consul General Zhang Jianmin in San Francisco, who hosted the three students, their families and other Chinese-language learners from the Bay Area at their residence on Saturday night.

Moreno, a student at Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco, won the second prize and the best potential award at the global finals of the 16th "Chinese Bridge" World Chinese Proficiency Competition for Secondary School Students.

"I feel like my whole life I've benefited from learning Chinese just from a really young age. I started learning Chinese when I was 3," she told China Daily.

"I think in the future, this is going to be extremely beneficial for me, since I'm interested in a teaching job. I love teaching kids, and I would love to go to China and experience more about the culture and language and then bring that back to the US," she said.



I feel like my whole life I've benefited from learning Chinese just from a really young age. I started learning Chinese when I was 3."

Ivana Moreno, high school student in San Francisco

From kindergarten all the way to eighth grade, Moreno said all of her friends spoke Chinese because they went to a Chinese immersion school. As she grows up, she has made new friends who don't understand her experience.

"But they've all been very supportive and are extremely impressed every time I can just speak Chinese. Now two of my friends have been inspired. They're taking Mandarin class, and it's been really fun to be able to teach them and help them out when they need it," she said.

Fowler, who studies languages and mathematics at Lewis and Clark College in Portland, Oregon, was inspired by a passionate teacher in high school and then discovered Chinese as a gateway to new ways of thinking and learning.

"When I started learning Chinese, I had never truly learned a foreign language before, so it's very difficult," Fowler said. "First, I felt Chinese taught me to think in a new way and taught me how to learn something that was very difficult."

"After that, I was able to self-study German well enough and self-study a few other languages to a certain degree of proficiency. So the first way in which Chinese helped me was to help me become a better learner," Fowler told China Daily.

He participated in the 22nd "Chinese Bridge" Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students in China and finished

third in the global final.

Beyond language-learning, the experience in China "helped me immensely to enrich my life because I was really interested in literature, philosophy, and art," he said.

"It opened a whole new horizon for me of a foreign country. I did not go out of the US until late into high school. So the experience of learning Chinese helped broaden my horizons and gave me a sense of what's awesome," he added.

"It also helped me make new friends and to see that people around the world, even if they vary in some things, are very similar in a lot of ways. We can make friendships across the seas even though it's a far distance," he continued.

After graduation in 2024, Fowler said he planned to intensively study the Chinese language in China and potentially pursue further graduate work and look for a job in academia.

Similarly, Houdek, drawn to the vibrant traditions experienced at her immersion Yinghua Academy in Minnesota, embraced Chinese customs like celebrating Lunar New Year with fervor.

Having been studying Chinese for seven years, Houdek won the Best Performance Award at the third "Chinese Bridge" Chinese Show for global elementary school students.

"China is a beautiful country with a long history. I appreciate the opportunity of visiting China and communicating with Chinese people. The journey of Chinese Bridge not only helps me to learn the language but also make more friends. In 2024, I will work harder to learn Chinese and become an envoy for US-China friendship," she told the audience in fluent Chinese.

Beyond individual journeys, these young students represent a desire for cultural understanding and friendship with a nation and its people on the other side of the Pacific.

As Deputy Chinese Consul General in San Francisco Zou Yonghong aptly noted, "Learning Chinese can broaden one's horizons, share the benefits of China's development ... it can promote the healthy development of China-US relations."

## BUSINESS

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## HIGHER GROUND

## Experts urge monetary policy easing

Below-par demand, stabilizing RMB key factors behind calls for rate cuts

By ZHOU LANXU  
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China may need to further ease its monetary policy early this year as domestic demand remains insufficient while low inflation and a stabilizing renminbi have offered more scope for policy adjustments, experts said on Monday.

They commented as the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, had pledged to amplify policy

adjustments to strengthen economic recovery.

"The room for China to cut interest rates and the reserve requirement ratio — the proportion of money lenders must keep as reserves — will further expand at the beginning of this year," said Cheng Shi, chief economist at ICBC International.

Cheng also said that global central banks are poised for interest rate cuts this year, which will lessen the constraints on China's monetary policy.

As markets expect the US Federal

Reserve to cut interest rates this year, the renminbi has stabilized against the dollar. Since the beginning of the fourth quarter of last year, the central parity rate of the onshore renminbi has strengthened by 1.35 percent to 7.0827 against the greenback as of Friday, according to market tracker Wind Info.

Domestically, the foundation for China's economic recovery still needs to be consolidated, Cheng said, while a number of commercial banks have recently reduced deposit rates, a move that has eased pressure on their profits and created more room for lending rate reductions.

His words echoed a PBOC state-

ment on Thursday that the central bank will intensify adjustments in macroeconomic policies as the country's economic recovery is showing a strengthening momentum but facing challenges such as insufficient effective demand and weak social expectations.

China's consumer price index, a key gauge of inflation, dropped by 0.5 percent year-on-year in November after a 0.2 percent dip in October, which experts said has pointed to still-weak demand.

Indicating that factory activity has contracted for the third consecutive month, the country's official purchasing managers index for the

manufacturing sector fell to 49 in December from 49.4 in November, below the 50-point mark that separates contraction from growth, the National Bureau of Statistics said on Sunday.

The PBOC will implement a prudent monetary policy that is flexible, moderate, precise and effective, with a focus on expanding domestic demand and boosting confidence, the central bank said on Thursday after its monetary policy committee's fourth-quarter meeting.

The meeting decided to make government investment and policy incentives more effective in catalyzing private investment, promote

recovery in price levels, push for a moderate decrease in the financing costs of enterprises and residents, and make better use of financial resources that may have been allocated inefficiently.

As for the real estate sector, the meeting called for efforts to better support the demand for essential and improved housing and treat all real estate enterprises with different ownership structures equally in meeting their reasonable financing needs.

Wang Qing, chief macroeconomic analyst at Golden Credit Rating, said the PBOC will likely ramp up support for the property sector by boosting the quota of the targeted funding tools for the completion of presold housing projects and the relief of distressed real estate enterprises, as well as potentially introducing new policy instruments.

## Appliance exports put on strong 2023 show

By FAN FEIFEI  
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China's exports of home appliances were on the rise in 2023, as major brands intensify their efforts to penetrate more deeply into emerging overseas markets, such as Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Africa, experts said.

The General Administration of Customs said China's exports of home appliances rose 13.4 percent year-on-year to \$7.24 billion in November, fueled by the Christmas shopping season and a low comparison base the previous year. It was also the fourth consecutive monthly increase.

In the January-November period, the country's home appliance exports reached \$80.47 billion, up 2.8 percent year-on-year. Exports of Chinese-made home appliance products are expected to see steady growth in 2024 along with the drop in raw material prices and sea freight costs, said Guosen Securities.

Global market research company GfK said Chinese home appliance exports to the 22 members of the League of Arab States, Latin America and Africa rose by 15.41 percent, 18.36 percent and 21.84 percent year-on-year, respectively, during the January-October period.

Zhou Nan, secretary-general of the China Chamber of Commerce for Import and Export of Machinery and Electronic Products' home appliances branch, said the growth of China's home appliance exports to Europe and North America slowed in 2023 due to high inflation and trade barriers, which prompted these manufacturers to seek growth points and expand their footprint in



Export-bound air conditioners are assembled at a plant in Huzhou, Zhejiang province.

TAN YUNFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

emerging markets.

"The Middle East and Africa serve as important markets participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, presenting huge growth potential for enterprises to build self-owned brands and develop cross-border e-commerce," Zhou said.

In recent years, some Middle Eastern countries, such as the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, have accelerated economic transformation, expecting more Chinese companies to invest and start businesses there, which also brings about new opportunities for Chinese brands, he added.

Chinese home appliance maker Midea Group announced in November the launch of its third manufacturing base in Egypt. With a total investment of 830 million yuan (\$116.9 million), the new factories, where refrigerators and washing machines will be produced, are expected to begin operating in the second half of 2025.

Wang Jianguo, vice-president of Midea Group and president of

Midea's smart home business group, said once it begins operations, the new project will not only meet local demand in Egypt, but also satisfy consumers' soaring purchasing demand for home appliances in Africa, the Middle East and Europe.

Guangdong Xinbao Electrical Appliances Holdings Co Ltd set up its first overseas factory in Indonesia last year, and plans to tap more opportunities from countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative.

Chinese consumer electronics company TCL Technology Group Corp is speeding up steps to strengthen its capacity in global operations, with a key focus on three core business segments covering intelligent terminals, semiconductor displays and new energy photovoltaics.

The company's intelligent terminals unit has established production bases in Vietnam, India, Poland, Mexico and Brazil, which will further improve localized production and operations, said Li

Dongsheng, founder and chairman of TCL. The company has also established photovoltaic cell and module factories in Malaysia, the Philippines and Mexico through joint ventures.

ChinaOL.com, a research institute focusing on data monitoring in the home appliances market, said Chinese exports of air conditioners stood at 58.08 million units from January to October, an increase of 5.1 percent year-on-year.

Moreover, exports of refrigerators rose 22.2 percent year-on-year to 36.32 million units and washing machines reached 31.79 million units, up 36 percent, it added.

Establishing production bases in overseas markets not only brings China's advanced manufacturing, research and development as well as management capabilities to overseas markets, but creates job opportunities for locals and enhances the competitiveness of Chinese enterprises in the global market, said Liang Zhenpeng, an independent consumer electronics analyst.

## HK airlines to increase mainland flights as exchanges surge

By ZHU WENQIAN  
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Hong Kong Airlines, one of the major Hong Kong-based local carriers, and Cathay Pacific Airways, another Hong Kong airline, said they would continue to expand their flight networks connecting Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland as passenger demand in the region is growing.

After three exceptionally challenging years of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hong Kong Airlines said its operations returned to normal in 2023. In the Chinese mainland, flights to eight cities (totaling 10 airports) were resumed last year.

After China optimized its COVID-19 response measures, the number of outstanding talent and students from the Chinese mainland in Hong Kong reached a new high in 2023. Trade and government exchanges have increased. Hong Kong Airlines said it expects travel demand to grow continuously.

In 2023, the airline added more flights connecting Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. The frequency of its flights connecting Hong Kong with airports like Shanghai Pudong, Shanghai Hongqiao, Beijing Capital, Beijing Daxing, Hangzhou in Zhejiang province and Nanjing in Jiangsu province have rebounded to the pre-pandemic levels.

The airline anticipated its average passenger load factor to rebound to 85 percent in 2023, as full-year data for last year are yet to be finalized.

"We will continue to review our investment in the Chinese mainland market and enhance the existing flight network," said Jevey Zhang, chairman of Hong Kong Airlines.

With the recovery and further growth of the business, for the first time, the company held large-scale recruitment events in major Chi-

nese mainland cities and Japan in 2023.

The airline said it expects an additional 20 percent of staff members may be required this year. The company said it plans to hold cabin crew recruitment in various parts of the world, including in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, Thailand and South Korea.

In addition, the airline plans to launch flights connecting cities in Northwest China and Hong Kong, and has already started initial research and preparatory work. As Northwest China serves as a gateway that connects China with Eurasia and plays an important role in the Belt and Road Initiative, the carrier said it aims to contribute to the development of the initiative.

Hong Kong Airlines said it took delivery of a number of Airbus A330 widebody aircraft in 2023, bringing its fleet size to 21 by the year-end. The new planes will help enable flight resumptions, increase seat capacity and meet future operational demand. By the end of this year, it plans to expand its fleet by 30 percent and double the overall passenger traffic.

Meanwhile, Cathay Pacific Airways also said it would continue to launch more flights and increase frequencies of flights connecting Hong Kong and the Chinese mainland. Its newly recruited flight attendants from the Chinese mainland will soon conclude their training sessions in Hong Kong and start work early this year.

Elsewhere, the International Air Transport Association announced strengthened profitability projections for airlines in 2023. The industry is expected to largely stabilize this year. Combined net profit is expected to reach \$25.7 billion, a slight improvement over the projected 2023 profit of \$23.3 billion.

## Boeing announces full return of B737 MAX to Chinese skies

By ZHU WENQIAN

US aircraft manufacturer Boeing Co announced a complete return of its B737 MAX aircraft to commercial services in China, saying the model is operational across multiple regional and international routes, indicating that technical and safety issues of the past have been tackled in China.

"In 2023, the Chinese B737 MAX fleet that consists of nearly 100 aircraft were fully back in service with higher efficiencies," said Liu Qing, president of Boeing China, on the company's official WeChat account in late December.

The development marks a milestone for Boeing's operations in China, as orders and deliveries of Boeing aircraft to Chinese carriers were largely suspended after two fatal crashes of the single-aisle B737 MAX in 2018 and 2019, which led to the grounding of the aircraft model worldwide.

Since late 2020, the model was allowed to resume flights in many parts of the world. In January 2023, China Southern Airlines resumed

the operation of B737 MAX for commercial domestic flights, marking the model's return to the skies in China.

"Chinese carriers' full resumption of operations of the B737 MAX shows that technical problems have been dealt with, and corresponding market issues have been tackled. But it doesn't signify that China has completely opened the door to introduce new planes of the model," said Zou Jianjun, a professor at the Civil Aviation Management Institute of China.

China is Boeing's second-largest market and the largest for its European rival Airbus in terms of the number of aircraft delivered, according to the two jet makers.

Currently, China's 13 domestic carriers operate 97 B737 MAX planes in their fleet. China Southern, Air China and Hainan Airlines each own 24, 16 and 11 aircraft, respectively. Shanghai Airlines, Xiamen Airlines and Shandong Airlines also own some B737 MAX planes.

China's air travel market has been on a steady track of recovery since the country optimized its

COVID-19 response measures in late 2022.

The country is expected to handle about 620 million air passenger trips in full year 2023, including international and domestic flights, which are foreseen to rebound to 93.8 percent of the pre-pandemic level seen in 2019, according to a projection by Flight Master, a travel services platform in China.

In December, Boeing delivered a new B787 aircraft to Chinese private carrier Juneyao Airlines, its first widebody aircraft for a Chinese mainland carrier in nearly three years, indicating gradual recovery in China's international air travel market.

In addition, the company said the third-phase expansion project of Tianjin Boeing Composite Material Co Ltd, a joint venture of Boeing and Aviation Industry Corp of China, was completed in 2023, or the 50th anniversary of Boeing's entry into China. The new factory is expected to be operational soon.

In addition, Boeing's B737 completion and delivery center in



B737 MAX aircraft seen at Beijing Capital International Airport.

SHI YUKE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Zhoushan, in East China's Zhejiang province, organized competitions of aircraft painting and maintenance skills in 2023, which further enhanced the capabilities of local employees and prepared for future aircraft deliveries, the company said.

The center was put into operation in 2018 and suspended the

actual completion and delivery of aircraft after the B737 MAX was grounded.

Meanwhile, Airbus said China is expected to become the largest commercial aircraft services market globally by 2042, exceeding North America and Europe, and it will continue to increase investments in the country.

## Briefly

## Internet firms see revenue, profit growth

China's internet sector registered steady growth in business revenue and profits in the first 11 months of 2023, said the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology. Major internet companies and related service providers saw their cumulative profits rise 2.5 percent year-on-year to 118.9 billion yuan (\$16.79 billion) during the period. Their combined business revenue came in at 1.57 trillion yuan, up 6.1 percent.

## Balance of loans up in Yangtze River Delta

The balance of loans in China's Yangtze River Delta region rose 12.7 percent year-on-year to 63.85 trillion yuan (\$9.01 trillion) at the end of November, said the People's Bank of China Shanghai Head Office. The overall balance of yuan-denominated loans stood at 62.84 trillion yuan, up 13.5 percent. The balance of foreign currency-denominated loans in the region was \$143.1 billion, down 19.2 percent.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## BUSINESS

## HIGHER GROUND



A drone image shows the Tingjiang River railway bridge on the Longyan-Longchuan High-speed Railway in Fujian province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Nation's high-speed railway shows fast-track growth

With ample funds support, major infrastructure construction progresses

By ZHUANG QIANG  
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The nation's relentless push to bolster its infrastructure is bearing fruit, with a number of high-speed railway projects seeing completion and operation.

In Fujian province, the Longyan-Wuping section on the Longyan-Longchuan High-speed Railway began operations on Dec 26.

The opening of the section marks a transformative leap for Fujian's Wuping county, as the old revolutionary base has also stepped into the era of HSR connectivity, builders participating in the project said.

Construction of the 92-kilometer section, which was undertaken by several State contractors, presented multiple "notably challenging engineering tasks," such as the Tingjiang River railway bridge.

The bridge, mainly built by China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp — a China Railway Construction Corp unit — stretches 1.73 km and features a 325-meter continuous rigid frame beam crossing over the river, a significant technical and construction feat, said Yi Jun, chief engineer with CR24.

The project team employed

“All our teams were requested to bear in mind 'green construction' in projects that we carry out nationwide ...”

Yi Jun, chief engineer with China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp

building information modeling (BIM) technology, simulating collisions involving beam reinforcements and prestressed pipelines, to ensure optimized reinforcement and cutting positions and guarantee the engineering quality of the project, Yi said.

Furthermore, multiple monitoring devices, intelligent tensioning and grouting techniques were used to safeguard overall construction quality, he added.

“All our teams were requested to bear in mind 'green construction' in projects that we carry out nationwide, and the company is prioritizing ecological preservation as a key objective when evalu-

ating the quality of the project,” Yi said, adding that CR24 has been increasingly implementing stringent environmentally friendly construction measures to minimize any impact.

The Longyan-Longchuan High-speed Railway stretches from Fujian's Longyan to Longchuan West Station in Heyuan, Guangdong province, spanning a total length of 290 km.

The Longyan-Wuping section is one of three sections along the HSR. Some 64 km of track was newly constructed, allowing trains to run at speeds of up to 250 kilometers per hour.

The HSR project is part of the nation's broader push to form an “Eight Vertical and Eight Horizontal” railway network, which was proposed by the central authorities in 2016 to further develop the network over the mid to long term.

China Railway Group, the nation's railway operator, said that so far, more than 35,300 km of railways of the country's main HSR network have been put into service, accounting for some 80 percent of the network's total length.

During the annual Central Economic Work Conference held in Beijing in December, Chinese leaders highlighted that investment and financing mechanisms should

be improved, with new cooperation mechanisms for government and nongovernment capital to be implemented and nongovernment capital to be supported in participating in new-type infrastructure initiatives.

Due to the increasingly sufficient funds supporting the sector, many provinces reported new operations of HSRs by the end of the last year. Shandong province, for example, embraced the operation of two new HSR sections — the Jinan-Puyang section on the Jinan-Zhengzhou HSR and the Laixi-Rongcheng section on the Weifang-Rongcheng HSR.

Experts said such mass infrastructure work results at the end of the year have become a routine phenomenon in recent years.

“With abundant capital inflow into the infrastructure sector last year, major projects such as HSR construction will continue to see booming development in the first several months of this year,” said Long Chaocan, an investment consultant with China Galaxy Securities Co Ltd.

In the January-November period last year, 1,636 km of new railway lines were put into operation nationwide, including 1,488 km of HSR tracks. By the end of November, the operating mileage of railways nationwide reached 155,500 km, including 43,700 km of HSR, China Railway Group said.

## HSR development moves into high gear in 2023

TIANJIN — Every workday, Wang Manman takes the high-speed train from Tianjin to Beijing, in a journey that lasts around just 20 minutes. During the morning rush hour, she has the flexibility to choose from over 10 trains.

Passengers read magazines, bury themselves in their phones, or simply doze off while waiting to arrive. “It is fast and very convenient, just like taking a subway ride,” Wang said.

In 2008, the year China hosted the Summer Olympics, the Beijing-Tianjin Intercity Railway, with a designed speed of 350 kilometers per hour, began operations, unveiling a fast-expanding modern high-speed railway network in the world's second-largest economy.

China, a latecomer to modern transport, now has the world's largest high-speed railway network. As of the end of November, the total operational mileage of China's railway network exceeded 155,500 km, including 43,700 km of high-speed railways.

China's rail development continued to speed ahead in 2023, with the launch of more lines aimed at fostering economic and social development within the country and beyond.

One of the most notable additions to China's vast high-speed rail network in 2023 was the Fuzhou-Xiamen-Zhangzhou railway, the country's fastest cross-sea high-speed rail, where trains reach a maximum speed of 350 km per hour along the west coast of the Taiwan Strait.

The 277-km railway, which began operating from Sept 28, slashes travel time between the cities of Fuzhou and Xiamen, both in East China's Fujian province, to just under an hour.

The railway features a breathtaking sea view with 19.9 km of tracks built over the sea. It will connect multiple city clusters and transform the areas of Fuzhou and Xiamen into a one-hour living circle, officials said.

China has mastered advanced technologies for building tracks, long-span bridges, and complex tunnels in challenging geological and weather conditions, expanding high-speed rail service to remote and ethnic minority areas to foster economic and social development.

In late November, a 238-km section of the Sichuan-Qinghai railway in western China became operational after 12 years of construction, providing high-speed train travel options for Maoxian, home to many members of the Qiang ethnic group.



The Jinyuding Tunnel dug through by State contractor China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp spans across a forest park in Fujian province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In the same month, the railway connecting the captivating city of Lijiang and Shangri-La in Southwest China's Yunnan province opened to traffic. The new line will boost tourism and industrial development, particularly benefiting Shangri-La in the Diqing Tibetan autonomous prefecture.

In August, the Guiyang-Nanning High-speed Railway started full operation, linking the capital cities of Guizhou province and Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. The railway, designed for a top speed of 350 km/h, is the first of its kind in both Guizhou and Guangxi, known for their stunning karst landscapes.

High-speed rail is symbolic of the new structure of the Chinese economy, influencing all aspects of society.

From January to November, a total of 3.56 billion railway passenger trips were made nationwide, more than double from the same period last year, the China State Railway Group Co Ltd said.

To meet booming travel demand, China Railway has improved its railway operating plan and increased transport capacity. The average daily number of passenger trains reached 9,638 in China, a year-on-year increase of 52 percent.

China's high-speed railway has also gone global.

The latest example is the Jakarta-Bandung High-speed Railway in Indonesia, officially launched in October. It is the first overseas high-speed railway project fully utilizing Chinese railway systems, technology, and industrial components.

With a designed speed of 350 km/h, the 142.3-km high-speed railway shortens the journey between Indonesia's capital, Jakarta, and Bandung, a famous tourist city. It has handled more than 1 million passenger trips to date.

The train service can bring more convenience to locals and help boost the economy along the route, said Juni Stefanus Santoso, a 23-year-old Indonesian student who is studying at Tianjin-based Tiangong University.

“China's high-speed rail provides more countries and regions with the opportunity to join the fast track of shared development,” said Cong Yi, vice-president of Tianjin Administrative Institute. “In the future, it will continue to contribute to China's modernization and opening-up, and promote global balanced, coordinated and inclusive development.”

XINHUA

## Unique sectors inject momentum into local economy

By LI JIAYING  
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In the bustling harvest season this winter, fields in Changyi, a county-level city in Shandong province, are replete with a fruitful yield of reeds, signaling a prosperous year for local farmers.

Covering an area of 3,000 mu (200 hectares), the reed fields have become a source of economic prosperity for villagers in Changyi.

The skills of people in the city have transformed the tall reeds into a lucrative tool for income generation, as reed processing has emerged as a unique industry driving the local economy.

“The reeds have grown well this year, and I've contracted 200 mu. The harvested reeds are mainly used to make reed curtains, and the income is quite good,” said Li Hujun, a farmer from Changyi.

As China continues on its path of advancing rural revitalization and boosting modernization of the countryside in the new year, it will keep cultivating rural industries in a precise and pragmatic manner, improving the mechanism of connecting farmers with the market, and taking more steps to increase farmers' incomes and drive rural development, according to the annual central rural work conference held in Beijing in December.

“The revitalization of industries is a top priority during the process of rural revitalization. We will focus on expanding the multifunctionality of agriculture, developing diverse values in rural areas, and pushing forward rural industries with unique features in the future,” said Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Tang Renjian, in an earlier interview.

Agricultural clusters with distinctive

features and specialized products will have a key role to play, Tang said.

The development of rural industries should be based on local resource advantages, giving full play to the distinctive characteristics of the region, said Li Guoxiang, a researcher at the rural development institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Throughout 2023, Changyi strategically prioritized agricultural development as a key driver for fostering the local economy's distinctive features.

By leveraging unique agricultural resources, adjusting the agricultural industry structure, and promoting the development of specialized agricultural brands, the city is actively contributing to the high-quality growth of its agricultural sector.

“We aim to make industries with unique features the pillar industries

that drive farmers' income growth by improving the quality and efficiency of agricultural supply. We are also consistently introducing policies that benefit and support new business operators and farmers in their industrial development, and providing additional subsidies to help them embrace modern agriculture,” said Yan Wenzhi, head of Changyi's agriculture and rural affairs bureau.

In addition to these efforts, Changyi is also actively engaging in comprehensive education and training for farmers to enhance their overall capabilities. The objective is to cultivate farmers who are not only skilled in agriculture, but also possess cultural knowledge, technical expertise, good management skills and entrepreneurial acumen, according to the local government.

To inject momentum and vitality into agricultural modernization, it is

important to strengthen the driving forces of science and technology and reform, intensify efforts to achieve breakthroughs in core technologies, and improve work mechanisms for agriculture, rural areas and farmers, said the rural work conference.

To achieve this goal, the city is ramping up efforts to optimize its training and branding mechanism for farmers, through a series of educational activities focusing on improving planting skills, establishing agricultural product brands, and mastering marketing strategies.

A total of 2,432 individuals have completed high-quality farmers' training so far, while 314 grassroots agricultural technicians have undergone specialized training, a testament to the city's commitment to creating a more sustainable and prosperous future for its agricultural communities, said the local government.

“We will focus on expanding the multifunctionality of agriculture, developing diverse values in rural areas, and pushing forward rural industries with unique features in the future.”

Tang Renjian, minister of agriculture and rural affairs

Currently, the county-level city has successfully applied for the recognition of 12 villages as provincially acknowledged villages with renowned brands, one town as a provincial-level strong agricultural township, and two provincial-level agricultural industrialization demonstration joint bodies.

## BUSINESSFOCUS

# Realty recovery forecast on optimized policies

Regulations in property sector to focus on long-term mechanisms for stable market development

By WANG YING in Shanghai  
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The domestic real estate market had seen unprecedented adjustments and changes in 2023, and experts said they expect 2024 to be a year of recovery, propelled by supportive policies and increased investor confidence as the overall property market explores a new development model.

Shaun Brodie, head of research on the China market at global real estate services firm Cushman & Wakefield, said the residential market "in first-tier cities is expected to take the lead in market stabilization and recovery in 2024, which will be gradually seen in second- and third-tier cities."

Meanwhile, government regulation of the residential market will focus on long-term mechanisms, aiming to avoid excessive volatility and maintain stable overall market development, Brodie said.

Property consultant JLL China said "timely" policy adjustments will consolidate the recovery momentum of the sector.

"Policymakers have clearly noted that a significant change has taken place in the real estate market's supply-demand relationship, and in order to adapt to the new situation, policy adjustments and optimizations should be made in a timely manner," said Bruce Pang, chief economist for JLL China.

The measures should come after thorough study and judgment of major trends and structural changes in the real estate market, as well as the urbanization pattern, while efforts should be made to eliminate negative effects — such as high debt and high leveraging — that have accompanied the previous property development model.

Hui Jianqiang, head of research at Beijing Zhongfang-Yanxie Technology Service Ltd, said a meeting of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee held on July 24, 2023, had sent out a clear signal, and a raft of measures soon followed.

The meeting, which analyzed the economic situation and made arrangements for economic work in the second half of the year, called for concrete efforts in preventing and defusing risks in key areas, and adapting to the major changes that have taken place in the relationship between supply and demand in China's real estate market.

Real estate policies should be adjusted and optimized in a timely manner, the meeting said, adding that the policy toolkit should be well utilized with city-specific measures to better meet residents' essential housing demand and their needs for better housing, as well as advance the stable and sound development of the property market.

As many as 751 policy easing measures had been issued by local governments, covering more than 330 cities across China as of Dec 18, over 140 more than that in 2022.

The easing measures peaked in September, with more than 140 such announcements, according to data collected by Zhuge Real Estate Data Research Center.

The measures included reducing down payment ratios, lowering mortgage interest rates, encouraging commercial banks and borrowers to negotiate more favorable interest rates, providing financial support to ensure the timely delivery of property projects, and giving financial support to local governments' low rental housing, among others, said Guan Rongxue, a senior analyst at Zhuge Real Estate Data Research Center.

Guan said these measures reached a new level in December with the nation's two biggest cities, Beijing and Shanghai, announcing adjustments to their existing home purchase policies in favor of home trading on Dec 14.

The optimization measures, like lowering down payment ratios, cutting mortgage interest rates, and optimizing the definition of ordinary housing, will activate the home



A view of a real estate construction site in Huai'an, Jiangsu province, in December. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Potential homebuyers check out a residential property model at a real estate developer's office in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, in November. WEI LIANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Workers are seen busy at a construction site in Huai'an, Jiangsu province, in December. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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construction and development of affordable housing will be further accelerated. In addition, the long-term rental housing market and real estate investment trusts will continue to develop," said Brodie.

"In our view, China's real estate market has transitioned from a phase where supply falls short of demand to a new stage featuring more balanced supply and demand dynamics," S&P said in its report.

Despite its prominent position in China's economy, the real estate sector is set to witness the end of a boom period and enter a new era of high-quality and healthy growth, as the market landscape has undergone fundamental changes, it said.

"In the medium and long run, we expect to see a new balance point between real estate sector's supply and demand that fits the current market scale. The nationwide new residential house sales are unlikely to hit (the 2021 level of) 18 trillion yuan (\$2.54 trillion) again. In our view, the new balancing point will be driven by two factors — the central government's top-level policy guidance addressing housing issues, and the actual homebuying demand," according to the report.

Riding on the spirit of the Central Economic Work Conference, a national housing and urban-rural construction meeting was held on Dec 21 and 22 in Beijing, which outlined key tasks for 2024.

The meeting promoted the high-quality development of urban and rural construction to a new level, said Chen of JLL China.

Chen also said the meeting further clarified the direction of real estate policy in 2024, stressing that it is necessary to make efforts to build quality homes and that an increased supply of quality houses will drive demand for better living conditions in the future.

"After more than two years of market adjustments, quite a few favorable elements have emerged in the market, which will join forces with existing measures to realize the stabilization of the property market in 2024," Chen said.

market in the two cities and boost overall market confidence, helping to promote the stabilization of the Chinese housing market, said Chen Wenjing, director of research at the China Index Academy.

"The series of measures has gradually paid off, and there are already some positive signs emerging. Overall, China's real estate industry is looking for a new balance," said Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China, China's central bank, at a conference in Hong Kong in late November.

"Although efforts should be made to prevent an extended effect in the short term, the property market's current adjustment will be beneficial to China's economic growth and sustainable development over the long term," Pan said.

#### Broad consensus

The property industry has broadly echoed Pan's views.

"The latest macro data suggest that some major indicators of the real estate market have indeed continued to show signs of marginal improvement recently, although it must also be noted that the growth rate of real estate investment continues to decline, and the decline in sales continues to expand, indicating that the real estate market is still at a stage of bottoming out," said Pang of JLL China.

"While waiting for the previous policies to take effect, confidence and patience are also imperative before any further improvement in the real estate market," Pang said.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, property investment fell 9.4 percent in the first 11 months of 2023 compared with a year earlier, while in the first 10 months, it declined by 9.3 percent.

During the same period, commercial housing sales fell 8 percent year-on-year in terms of floor area, extending the downward trend by 0.2 percentage point, NBS data showed.

"Despite market changes, as a real estate service provider, we will always put the focus on meeting the needs of consumers and solving every problem emerging in home transactions," said Wang Yongqun, chief operating officer of real estate broker Lianjia.

For example, as residential consumption becomes more service-oriented, safety has turned into a primary concern for home trading consumers, Wang added.

As per a recent S&P report, both market sentiment and prices in China's property market are starting to become normalized.

S&P projected that the Chinese property market has bottomed out.

From a long-term perspective, the real estate sector will strike a new balance between supply and demand that adapts to the current market scale, given the top-level policy guidance and actual market demand, S&P Global (China) Ratings said in its report dated Nov 24.

Chen Sheng, president of the China Real Estate Data Academy, said anticipation was the keyword of the property market in 2023.

Chen said that despite all the chal-

lenges, the spirit of "never giving up" led various parties — the government, industry players, property developers and consumers — to work together with the hope of stabilizing the market and aiding in its recovery.

"Such a spirit will carry on in 2024 and bring about positive changes in the property market," Chen said.

#### Positive signals

The tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference held in December has also sent out positive signals that further measures will be introduced along with the existing supportive measures to stabilize the sector, he added.

During the conference, existing risks and difficulties in the real estate industry were mentioned, and relevant support policies may be introduced in 2024.

Meanwhile, clear requirements for the future development of the real estate industry have been put forward, guiding the industry to accelerate toward a new development path in the mid- to long-term.

The conference called for proactive and prudent efforts to defuse risks in the property sector, equal treatment toward reasonable financing needs of real estate enterprises regardless of ownership, treating equally different kinds of ownership, and the accelerated building of a new development model for the industry.

Based on the existing status of the realty market, measures introduced by central and local governments, as

well as the intent of the Central Economic Work Conference, Pang said he expects the real estate market to stabilize in 2024.

With the formation of a virtuous cycle of finance and real estate and the establishment of a new property development pattern, the property market can show stable and healthy development, he added.

"We think the government will continue to implement measures to stabilize the property market, improve expectations, support homebuyers' demand for housing and home improvement, boost social housing and meet the reasonable financing needs of property developers," Pang said.

The property sector remains a pillar industry of the Chinese economy. The policy stance has shifted to supporting the property sector as a stabilizer and growth driver of the Chinese economy, preventing it from becoming a drag on the economy.

Policies could be further eased until the physical market shows signs of stabilization and recovery, and industry leaders with solid fundamentals sail through the tough times, Pang added.

Brodie said he expects support for the residential market to be strengthened in 2024 and more policy concessions and safeguards used to promote the healthy development of the residential market.

"It is expected that the house purchase policies within first-tier cities and second-tier hotspot cities will continue to be adjusted and optimized. It is also expected that the

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Another provocation by Manila shows it risks running foul of Washington's games

The Chinese Foreign Ministry has once again stressed that the country will take resolute measures in response to any provocation or violation of China's sovereignty, and that Beijing will firmly safeguard the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity and maritime rights and interests.

That this was necessary is due to the irresponsible behavior of the Philippines, whose recent moves have been extremely provocative. By repeatedly sending vessels to the waters adjacent to China's Ren'ai Reef and even making moves endangering China Coast Guard vessels, the Philippines has walked back on its commitment to resolve its sovereignty dispute over the reef with China through talks.

Showing that it has no intention of easing the rising tensions that it has triggered, Armed Forces of the Philippines spokesman Medel Aguilar said last week that the Philippine government was considering building a permanent structure on the reef. This would renege on the commitment Manila has made to Beijing and be in contravention of the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea signed by China and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, in which all parties agreed to maintain the status of the reef without people or facilities.

The Philippine government's latest inflammatory remarks are a further indication of the disruptive designs of the United States in the South China Sea. It is only after it once again fell under the sway of Washington that Manila has been engaging in

such antics, while pretending to mend ties with Beijing.

Considering the improvement in relations between the two countries that had been fostered through the joint efforts of Beijing and Manila, it is particularly disappointing that the incumbent Philippine government under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr should be willing to put itself in hock to Washington to try and grab what it can.

Early last year, the Philippine government identified four new military bases, including some across the sea from China's Taiwan island, where rotating batches of US forces are to be allowed to be stationed. It is clear that the Philippine government believes that it can take advantage of the increased US military presence to leverage gains from China. It fails to recognize the reality that in doing so it is acting as a pawn of the US, with all the risks attendant on that role.

The Philippine government should be aware that the presence of US troops in the Philippines only functions as a scarecrow, and China will not hesitate to act if push comes to shove.

As Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said, it is against the principles of international law and legally untenable for the Philippines to cite the "award" of the South China Sea arbitration, "which is illegal, null and void", to claim that Ren'ai Reef falls within its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf and deny China's sovereignty over it.

Manila should beware where Washington is leading it.

## Prudence urged in dealings with Taliban

Afghan history over the past few decades has shown that externally imposed solutions aimed at securing peace and stability in the country only end in failure.

That is why Beijing chose to abstain in a United Nations Security Council vote on Friday.

Thirteen of the 15 members of the UNSC passed Resolution 2721, which calls for the appointment of a special envoy for Afghanistan to increase engagement with the country and its Taliban leadership. China and Russia abstained.

Based on a UN-commissioned independent assessment report on the conditions in Afghanistan, the resolution is considered a step toward the country's reintegration with the international community. But the envoy, who is anticipated to facilitate communication, may become an obstacle to it instead.

While Kabul welcomes "more robust and enhanced engagement" with the UN, special envoys "have complicated situations further via the imposition of external solutions", said a spokesman for the Afghan Foreign Ministry.

The UN report linked recognition of the Taliban authorities to their compliance with international treaty obligations and commitments, particularly with regard to the rights of women and girls.

What the UNSC resolution deems as appropriate and indispensable may end up becoming what in the Taliban's eyes is undue meddling in its domestic affairs. The Taliban authorities have

called the idea of a special envoy to promote gender and human rights "unnecessary".

The Taliban has made clear that it will not bow to external pressure.

"The approach of the government of Afghanistan will ultimately be guided by the unaltered religious beliefs, cultural values and national interests of the people of Afghanistan," said the Taliban official.

Thus appointing a special envoy may not be such a forward-looking recommendation for an integrated and coherent international approach to Afghanistan as anticipated.

Geng Shuang, China's deputy permanent representative to the UN, expressed the Chinese government's wish after the vote that the UN secretary-general proceed with prudence.

He urged the UNSC and secretary-general of the UN to communicate fully with and respect the opinions of the country in question, and make a decision after "broad consultations with all stakeholding parties".

Appointing an envoy in disregard of the Taliban authorities' opposition "may result in the envoy being unable to perform his/her duties," Geng warned.

Thus while a special envoy might sound like a good idea, it may not be the right prescription for Afghanistan. Instead, it may only worsen the contradiction and antagonism between the international community and the Taliban.

## Lai tries to be savvy, but no hiding his true colors

In a televised debate between candidates vying to lead the next government on Taiwan island on Saturday, Lai Ching-te of the secessionist-minded Democratic Progressive Party chose to beat around the bush while taking a question on how he would pursue "Taiwan independence" if elected.

Having done his homework to ensure his reply was in accordance with not only the policy of the current DPP authorities but also that of the United States, Lai tried to play the "peace" card and downplay his separatist stance.

Yet he revealed his true colors by saying that "the two sides of Taiwan Strait do not belong to each other". He should be aware that the island cannot be separated from the motherland, and seeking its "independence" is not the path to peaceful cross-strait relations.

By emphasizing that he will try to maintain the "status quo" and strive to maintain cross-strait "peace and stability", Lai tried to pass the buck for any disrupting of those to the Chinese mainland. And even though he avoided referring to Taiwan as an "independent state", which the island's current leader Tsai Ing-wen has done on a number of occasions, Lai sought to create the illusion that the island is already "independent" by claiming that "Taiwan sovereignty belongs to the Taiwan people".

Thus while trying to avoid giving the impression

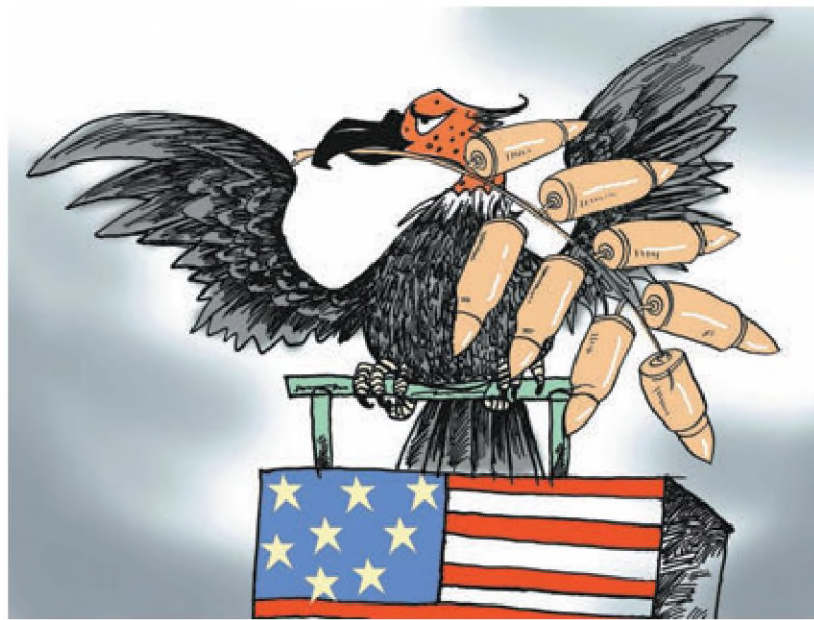
that if elected the island will be a willing proxy — or patsy — of Washington, by pledging to maintain the "status quo", he is already proclaiming himself to be the defender of "Taiwan independence" and setting the island on a collision course with the Chinese mainland.

What Lai is peddling is actually no different from what Tsai has peddled. It is all about the fallacy of "Taiwan independence" and the cliché of the "two nations theory". Despite his attempts to pretend to be championing peace, Lai's confrontational thinking and his readiness to try and use Washington's backing as bulwark for an insidious creep toward the island's "independence" are crystal clear. His political maneuverings will not achieve that purpose, even though he is trying to prove that he can do that more skillfully than Tsai did.

Since taking office in 2016, the DPP authorities of Taiwan island have refused to acknowledge the one-China principle and the 1992 Consensus, and engaged in provocative actions, deliberately undermining the peaceful development of cross-strait relations, and forcefully obstructed and restricted cross-strait exchanges and cooperation.

Lai's remarks show that he intends to act as another saboteur of ties with the mainland at the risk of damaging the interests of Taiwan compatriots and even triggering a cross-strait conflict.

Yang Zhongkui



## Opinion Line

## US election has direct bearing on outcome of Ukraine conflict

More than 70 countries and regions will hold elections in 2024. The presidential elections in Russia and the United States being among the most important in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The Ukrainian constitution allows its president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, to continue as "wartime president". The Russia-Ukraine conflict is thus unlikely to see much change.

Clearly, Ukraine's ambitious counteroffensive has not achieved expected results. On the other hand, Russia and its people are accustomed to Western sanctions. Russia has endured the sanctions imposed by the US and its allies, and its economy is actu-

ally slated to see more than 2 percent growth in 2023, proving wrong those speculators who had forecast negative growth for the Russian economy.

From a broader perspective, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is actually a confrontation between Russia and the West after the end of the Cold War, and its geopolitical significance and impact are profound. From the perspective of the US and Europe, the conflict is a proxy war, and Ukraine cannot win without Western military and economic assistance. Therefore, the outcome of the 2024 US election will greatly influence the final course of this conflict.

If Joe Biden is reelected president, the US is expected to contin-

ue its policy of offering comprehensive support to Ukraine, given that it is well aware that Ukraine cannot survive without military and economic aid from the US. If former US president Donald Trump can take part in the election and wins, he is very likely to abandon Biden's policy of one-sided support for Ukraine.

Trump has always criticized Biden's policy toward Ukraine and advocated negotiations for peace, claiming that if he comes to power, "the Russia-Ukraine war can be easily ended in just one day".

In short, the US presidential election serves as the greatest variable in the course of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

— BEIJING YOUTH DAILY

## Regulating low-speed EVs for road safety

Starting from Monday, the first day of 2024, the Beijing government has banned illegal electric three-wheelers and four-wheelers in the capital city.

For long there were loopholes in the regulatory mechanism of such vehicles. Most of these vehicles are of lower safety standards, making them vulnerable in accidents.

To make matters worse, because of ambiguities in the regulatory mechanism, many users of such vehicles simply drive them on the road without applying for registration. That means the law enforcement departments have little means to regulate these vehicles when they break traffic rules.

And these vehicles were even exempted from paying parking fees.

In 2022 alone, such vehicles were involved in 131 fatal accidents in Beijing, claiming 138 lives.

That's why the traffic regulatory departments in Beijing issued a directive last year that has finally come into effect after a transition period. Those meeting safety and technology standards can still be used after registration.

In other words, the earlier ambiguity about their regulation has been removed. That should prompt manufacturers to follow safety standards more strictly in the design of such vehicles.

According to the official news release, any person over 16 years of age with limb disability can register for an electric vehicle that meets certain standards, while the transportation regulatory departments have set up over 430 taxi-hailing stations from where senior citizens can call a cab by just scanning a code. These measures serve to fill the vacancy left by the ban.

The Beijing authorities not only set a buffer period of half a year for owners to prepare for the ban, they have also provided subsidies for the owners of the banned vehicles to reduce their loss.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Tokyo cannot shift its moral burden onto others

The anxiety of Japan's top diplomat in Hong Kong over the difficulties most Japanese restaurants face in the city, due to its ban on Japanese seafood imports, is fully understandable. But it is highly improper for Japanese Consul General in Hong Kong Kenichi Okada to urge the government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region to lift the ban to show "a stark contrast between the mainland and Hong Kong".

In saying that Hong Kong can make decisions separately from the Chinese mainland under the "one country, two systems" framework, Okada is doing nothing but trying to take advantage of the ban to smear the central authorities.

The major reasons Okada gave for the SAR government lifting the ban imposed on imports of Japanese seafood, as a result of Tokyo going ahead with the discharging of

nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant since August last year, included the G7 having called for a lifting of the ban and the Japanese side continuously keeping the SAR government updated with the data related to environmental impacts of its toxic water discharge.

Neither of the two reasons holds water. The whole world knows that the G7's stance on the issue is dictated by Washington's pro-Japan diplomacy in exchange for the latter's support for the United States' "value diplomacy" in the Asia-Pacific.

While the environmental data provided by Japan itself lacks objectivity and transparency. No responsible government can afford to bet people's health on the impartiality of that data.

Despite the wide concerns of the world, especially those of its neighbors, Japan has chosen the cheap-

est way of disposing of the nuclear-contaminated water, a process that will last for at least three decades. Instead of working closely with its neighbors to address their concerns and look for the safest way to deal with the water, Japan feels no qualms about playing a thief-crying-thief-trick.

Okada should be reminded that the difficulties many Japanese restaurants face in Hong Kong and elsewhere in the world are by no means caused by local government's prudent way of dealing with seafood imports from Japan but the Japanese government's irresponsible way of disposing of the nuclear-contaminated water. The more moral burden that Japanese diplomats try to put on the shoulders of others, the more they are showing that the Japanese government is indebted to its own people and the rest of the world.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Chinese Modernization

**Editor's note:** As the world faces unprecedented challenges, the Chinese path to modernization will be an opportunity for the world. How has the country made achievements in social and economic aspects while promoting people's well-rounded development? Four experts share their views with China Daily.

Zhou Yuehui and Gao Yongzhi

## China seeks better lives for the people

The Communist Party of China has been pursuing modernization since its founding in 1921. It was under the leadership of the Party that reform and opening-up were launched, transforming China into the world's second-largest economy and greatly improving people's living standards. The Party has also led China in eradicating absolute poverty, which is a miraculous achievement for a country of over 1.4 billion people.

Under the leadership of the Party, China has chosen a path of modernization different from that of the West, blazing a trail which other developing countries can learn from and achieve economic development and modernization. All this while, the CPC has remained committed to promoting the high-quality development of Chinese modernization in the new era.

Since its founding in 1921, the Party has drawn lessons from the experiences of China when it was a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, and early on it realized that real modernization cannot be achieved without gaining national independence.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the Party laid the social foundation for advancing modernization. One of the Party's unshakable commitments is to promote Chinese modernization.

However, China's path to modernization was rocky and tortuous till the launch of reform and opening-up in the late 1970s. Since then China's rapidly growing economy and comprehensive national strength have made great contributions to the development of Chinese modernization.

Following the 18th National Congress of the CPC in 2012, China's pursuit of Chinese modernization has become a strong driving force for global economic growth. For example, China achieved the goal of eliminating extreme poverty at the end of 2020, winning the biggest battle against poverty in human history and making significant contributions to the cause of global poverty reduction.

The rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has now become an irreversible historical trend, and the Chinese people are marching toward the second centenary goal of building China into a great modern socialist country in all respects.



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Significantly, Chinese modernization has shown that modernization is not a one-size-fits-all process, nor is modernization equal to Westernization. As a model, Chinese modernization can help the international community, especially developing countries, to realize their modernization.

It is to be noted that high-quality development is essential to building a modern socialist China and realizing Chinese modernization. As such, more efforts should be made to promote high-quality development.

First, the pursuit of Chinese modernization through high-quality devel-

opment requires upholding the CPC's leadership, because history shows that only under the CPC's leadership can China move ahead on the right path to modernization amid the fast-changing global landscape. To be sure, the Party's leadership is the fundamental guarantee for Chinese modernization to advance. In fact, high-quality development is the route the Chinese economy has taken during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) period to achieve comprehensive modernization.

Second, the pursuit of Chinese modernization through high-quality devel-

opment requires the implementation of the new development philosophy. And it is the adherence to the principles of this philosophy that will ultimately determine the success or failure of development.

Chinese modernization is the modernization of a huge population, so it is not possible to rely on traditional forces to drive modernization while facing resource constraints. Instead, it is necessary to improve the quality of development. Chinese modernization is also the modernization of common prosperity, so it is essential to adhere to the shared development philosophy.

Since Chinese modernization is the modernization of harmonious relationship between humankind and nature, it is necessary to adhere to the green development philosophy and prioritize ecological protection while pursuing the Chinese path to modernization. Chinese modernization is also the modernization of peaceful development, so it is necessary to expand opening-up to ensure development benefits for people around the world.

And third, the pursuit of Chinese modernization through high-quality development requires comprehensive deepening of reform. There are still many institutional obstacles restricting high-quality development. Hence, efforts should be made to carry out all-round, multi-faceted reforms in all fields to further stimulate market vitality and the endogenous driving force for high-speed development.

It is also necessary for the country to deepen market-oriented reform, improve the property rights system, and reform the State-owned enterprises as well as the fiscal, taxation and financial systems, in order to optimize the economic structure, improve market competitiveness and promote sustained and healthy economic development.

In the theory and practice of the Party, comprehensively deepening reform also includes promoting the rule of law and modernization of governance, and strengthening integrity so as to promote Chinese modernization.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

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Khalid Taimur Akram

## Chinese modernization to benefit humanity

China has displayed remarkable resilience and unity, making unparalleled achievements in areas such as reform, opening-up and socialist modernization, as China-led initiatives prioritize cooperation and form the basis for China's modernization and progress in different fields.

The pursuit of comprehensive development is the primary objective of China's leadership with the aim of building a modern socialist country. Apart from improving work and people's daily lives, China's innovative breakthroughs in science and technology offer developing countries ways to boost their economic growth.

The Chinese path to modernization, characterized by its focus on economic growth and efficient policy implementation, has yielded immensely impressive results, with China's governance system and development model serving as a testament to the remarkable potential the country will have after realizing its development and modernization goals.

The pursuit of high-standard opening-up remains a key facet of China's modernization as it embarks on the path to a brighter future. Events like the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation and the China International Import Expo are emblematic of China's deepening alignment of interests with the global community. In fact, China is investing more and more resources in global development and cooperation, while making efforts to ensure global financial and monetary systems fulfill their fundamental role of serving the real economy and promoting modernization.

The Chinese path to modernization is rooted in the principle of common prosperity. This commitment to ensure that every person benefits from the country's development has led to the creation of a more equitable and inclusive society. Common prosperity is a core requirement of socialism and a distinctive feature of China's modernization, providing insights into the historical patterns governing the country's unique modernization journey.

China's rich cultural heritage plays a pivotal role in shaping its society. China's approach to modernization emphasizes the importance of preserving its rich cultural heritage while pursuing economic growth and fostering a prosperous future for the Chinese people. Recognizing the significance of environmental protection and a sustainable economy, the Chinese government has implemented policies aimed at achieving sustainable development, reducing pollution, safeguarding natural resources, and better protecting the environment.

Under the Communist Party of China's leadership, China has not only become the world's second-largest economy, a manufacturing powerhouse and leader in global trade and holder of the highest foreign exchange reserves in just four decades, but also charted its unique course toward modernization. On this remarkable journey, it has also established extensive education, social security and healthcare systems.

The Chinese leadership has fostered national unity and social harmony, and the Chinese approach to modernization places great emphasis on socialism with Chinese characteristics for the country's journey toward modernization. This approach involves developing the economy while upholding socialist values and maintaining social stability and harmony, and its priorities include improving people's livelihoods, providing equal opportunities to the people, and ensuring economic growth benefits all.

The path to Chinese modernization recognizes that spiritual enrichment is essential for the overall well-being of the people, and the ultimate goal of Chinese modernization is the well-rounded development of the people, including their material, cultural, ethical and spiritual enrichment. However, the CPC's dedication extends beyond seeking happiness for the Chinese people and realizing national rejuvenation; it encompasses the pursuit of humanity's progress and global harmony. The China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative and Global Development Initiative, and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation can be seen as extensions of the concept of common prosperity.

China's contribution to global modernization is exemplified by initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, which are global public goods that reduce physical distances and foster shared interests and prosperity.

China's approach to modernization is not limited to its borders; instead it extends beyond its borders, offering hope for a shared and better future for humanity as a whole. China's approach is one of all-inclusive development. In fact, China has established a distinct and effective development model, which other countries can learn from to achieve development, maintain peace and pursue prosperity on its terms. China's approach prioritizes all-inclusive development.

Therefore, the West should refrain from interfering in China's modernization drive and stop disrupting its progress toward modernization. It is imperative that the Western world recognizes and respects China's unique path to modernization, refrains from taking actions that could hinder its progress or engaging in anti-China propaganda.

In short, China's journey toward modernization underscores the possibilities that lie ahead for countries willing to chart their own course of development and modernization. As a nation that continues to evolve and thrive, China exhibits the potential for a brighter future, both at home and on the global stage, through its unique approach to modernization.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



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Paul Frimpong

## Catalyzing sustainable growth in developing world

Modernization is a process — progressive transition from a "traditional" or "pre-modern" to a "modern" society — which affects all of humanity. There is no single paradigm for modernization, though, with the nature and level of modernization being greatly different from one country or culture to another, reflecting their own historical, cultural and economic conditions and the needs of their people for progress.

The modernization of China — a country with over 1.4 billion people — while progressing smoothly has had far-reaching, positive impacts on the world. China's modernization policy, initiated in the late 1970s, represents a transformative endeavor aimed at turning the country into a global economic and technological powerhouse.

The policy can be seen as a transformative effort aimed at maintaining social stability and achieving economic prosperity on the road to realizing national rejuvenation. The policy encompasses various aspects, including economic development, technological advancement, infrastructure improvement, military modernization and poverty alleviation.

The multifaceted approach to achieving modernization China has taken includes deepening reform and opening-up, improving infrastructure, advancing technologies, developing a knowledge- and innovation-driven workforce, and sharpening diplomacy, which stand as a testament to the country's determination to pursue modernization.

China has made unparalleled progress toward realizing modernization. As China continues to evolve, its



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modernization policy has been serving as a blueprint for sustainable development and a model for other countries aspiring to achieve high-level development.

China's modernization policy is rooted in the country's historical journey. Despite once leading the world in terms of wealth and technologies, China faced setbacks, especially during the two Opium Wars — (1840-42 and 1856-60) — which hindered its economic progress. However, the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 provided a fundamental basis for China to pursue modernization. Since then, China has made remarkable achievements in the field, as evidenced from the huge jump in Sino-African trade — from \$12.14 million in 1950 to a staggering \$282 billion in 2022.

China's relentless pursuit of modernization, driven by its fast-paced economic growth, technological innovations, spread of education and international collaboration, is aimed at realizing the ultimate goal of building a "great modern socialist country" by the middle of the 21st century, and thus significantly contributing to global progress.

China's unique approach to modernization, rooted in socialism with Chinese characteristics, offers an

alternative path to socioeconomic development. This approach prioritizes the well-being of its people and emphasizes the harmonious co-existence between humans and nature. This has led to multiple global initiatives and programs that have helped boost economic growth in African and other developing countries.

China's modernization policy is focused on people-centered development, common prosperity, and the peaceful co-existence of humans and nature. Using this approach, China lifted about 800 million people out of poverty since reform and opening-up and built a moderately prosperous society in an all round way in just more than four decades, and looks forward to achieving socialist modernization by 2035 and becoming a "great modern socialist country" by 2050.

Amid all this, Sino-African ties continue to receive positive feedback, highlighted by the significant increase in two-way trade, which has played a pivotal role in China's modernization policy.

The substantial investments China has made in infrastructure projects across Africa reflect its commitment to foster economic development and innovations beyond its borders. And China's agricultural modernization initiative in Africa shows that it recognizes the continent's agricultural potential. No wonder despite the challenges, China plans to enhance agricultural cooperation with Africa on multiple fronts.

Also, China aims to support the development of Africa's agricultural and industry chains through the Common Africa Agro-Parks Program, by engaging in localized production of

agricultural inputs and improving productivity. And the Sino-African collaboration on agricultural technology will intensify through joint research centers, focusing on seed varieties and high-yield production.

More important, thanks to the Belt and Road Initiative, China's investments in African countries have increased, including in sectors such as manufacturing, mining, agriculture, telecommunications and energy. These investments have not only created jobs but also contributed to technology transfer, boosting the industrialization process and skill development, and expanding the production capacity.

In fact, the Belt and Road Initiative's focus on economic development aligns with Africa's aspirations for sustainable growth and poverty reduction. By investing in infrastructure and industries, the Belt and Road Initiative has the potential to boost Africa's economic growth, sharpen the country's international competitiveness, improve connectivity and facilitate trade, which could alleviate poverty and raise the living standards of the people.

In other words, China's modernization campaign has been successful in transforming its economy and infrastructure, and there is little doubt that the Belt and Road Initiative has created opportunities for many developing countries, including African countries, to benefit from China's pursuit of modernization. Despite criticisms, the BRI remains a useful platform for promoting international trade, investment, and fostering economic growth.

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## GLOBAL VIEWS

LING SHENGLI

## Piecing peace together

Overarching mechanism required to improve security governance in Asia-Pacific

Currently, security risks in the Asia-Pacific region are rising. As part of its intensifying competition with China, the United States has been reinforcing its alliance system in the Asia-Pacific region by creating a number of mini-multilateral institutions — such as the US-Japan-Republic of Korea, US-Japan-India-Australia cooperation mechanisms and US-United Kingdom-Australia (AUKUS) partnership — to intervene in regional hotspot issues. This has resulted in intensified division and confrontation in the Asia-Pacific region and greatly undermined regional security.

There are various security mechanisms in the Asia-Pacific region, which have vastly different security cooperation concepts. To build a more holistic and comprehensive security architecture for the entire region, we should not start all over again, but should create it on the basis of coordinating existing security mechanisms.

Since the US-led security mechanisms are exclusive, they can hardly serve as the foundation for inclusive Asia-Pacific security cooperation. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations acts as a platform for member states to coordinate on security issues. This, to a certain extent, constrains the US' influence on Asia-Pacific security and encourages all major countries to compete and cooperate with each other in a controllable way. This is also helping to elevate ASEAN's status on the global stage.

China meanwhile advocates cooperative security. That is, differences and disputes should be addressed through dialogue and consultation.

China and ASEAN share similar security concepts and these two concepts could be combined to serve as the foundation for a multi-

layer, multi-domain, holistic and comprehensive security architecture for the Asia-Pacific region.

Meanwhile, the East Asia Summit and the Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia have the widest participation among Asia-Pacific countries. Although the two currently have limited involvement in security issues, they could serve as the foundation for a coordination mechanism to uphold common, cooperative and coordinated security for Asia-Pacific countries.

A step-by-step approach should be adopted to build an Asia-Pacific security mechanism. Coordinating among major powers in the region is essential, given the complexity of the major-country competition in the Asia-Pacific region. Coordinating requires regional major powers to compete with each other in a peaceful manner and avoid resolving disputes and conflicts by force.

Coordinating among major powers is the foundation for maintaining regional stability and an essential means for safe-



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

guarding regional peace in the context of the various security mechanisms that exist at present.

On the other side of the equation, mechanism coordination requires relevant parties to regulate their security actions in the Asia-Pacific region and to act in concert to resolve regional security conflicts. This will help balance the stronger and weaker powers in different mechanisms and promote fairness and justice in Asia-Pacific security governance.

To promote the building of an Asia-Pacific security architecture, China needs to follow the concept of "dual coordination" and "dual tracks", that is, to coordinate power and mechanisms and to promote two coordinations simultaneously and let them support each other.

Specifically, it should advance the building of a new security architecture through the following measures.

To start with, major regional powers should form a coordination mechanism and establish an effective communication mechanism, through which they can coordi-

nate with each other on major regional events and crises when necessary.

Second, the existing security cooperation mechanisms should be improved. The three major sub-regional organizations — ASEAN, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation — should jointly advance the building of an overarching Asia-Pacific security architecture.

Third, the cooperative area for the holistic cooperation mechanism should be expanded. Commencing with relatively easier security topics, more security issues can gradually be introduced into the discussions in an attempt to eventually cover almost all security issues in the region on the basis of effective security governance.

Fourth, the new security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region must be inclusive. It needs to include all countries in the region to demonstrate its inclusiveness, representativeness and strengthen regional consensus and regional coordination.

Major powers in the region should vigorously participate in the mechanism. China, the US, Russia, Japan, India, and ASEAN should be active participants of the mechanism, wherein they can build a broader consensus of "not resorting to violence and preventing armed conflicts" and are willing to carry out cooperation to safeguard Asia-Pacific security.

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NING LIUFU

## Rite of passage

Advancing construction of the economic corridor between China and Europe calls for greater strategic mutual trust among the participating countries

Among the Belt and Road Initiative's six economic corridors, the New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor stands out as the only direct link between China and the developed European countries. It has created a new passage of trade and logistics between Europe and Asia, and has strengthened the resilience of the global supply chains.

In recent years, within the framework of the BRI and facilitated by the growing political mutual trust between China and Eurasian Economic Union countries, the long overdue China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway has been put under construction. Meanwhile, China's trade volumes with countries along the corridor keep growing. For instance, China and Russia have achieved the goal of bringing bilateral trade volume to \$200 billion by 2024 ahead of schedule.

Between 2014 and 2022, trade in goods between China and 17 Central and Eastern European countries increased by 120.5 percentage points, 3.2 times the growth rate of trade between China and the European Union in the same period. Up to now, the China-Europe freight trains have reached 217 cities in 25 European countries. Landmark projects such as the Hungarian-Serbian railway and China-Kazakhstan and China-Belarus production capacity cooperation are garnering international recognition.

At the same time, problems and challenges exist alongside the construction of the corridor. First, headwinds come from the policy communication and people-to-people exchanges. The areas along the corridor have always been the cen-

ter of the geopolitical power play among major powers. The lingering Russian-Ukraine conflict has had a direct impact on the corridor. So has the Baltic states' successive withdrawal from the "17+1" platform, or the cooperation mechanism between China and the Central and Eastern European countries. Second, there is the problem of the unevenly distributed infrastructure connectivity along the corridor. Third, the free flow of trade is increasingly blocked by political factors, with the changes in the EU's China policy being the chief reason. Imbalanced and single economic structures still bother the countries along the corridor. Last, construction of the corridor has limited financing channels and relies heavily on the bank credit provided by the Chinese side. Risks of default loom from low- and middle-income countries along the corridor.

Because of these considerations, the high-quality construction of the economic corridor requires the deepening of strategic mutual trust among the participating countries.

First, policy communication and cooperation needs to be more transparent and standardized, while being attuned to the international rules and the EU's laws and regulations. Exchanges and cooperation between the BRI and the EU's Global Gateway strategy should be further explored, therefore attracting the developed European countries to jointly carry out trilateral cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe countries, if not establishing an official mechanism of cooperation covering all countries along the corridor.

Second, it is necessary to improve the connectivity capacity of facili-

ties among the Eurasian countries. Efforts need to be made to jointly promote the upgrading and transformation of core technologies in key sectors, enhance the distribution capacity of key hubs, and improve the operation quality and safety of China-Europe freight trains. Its information platforms and smart ports should open up and keep up, along with a set of internationally accepted trade rules and standards.

Third, it is crucial to expand the scale of trade and investment, and carry out targeted cooperation in the industrial and technological sectors. China should actively respond to EU's demands for China-EU economic and trade cooperation, promote the balanced development of bilateral trade, and implement the plan to expand its imports from Central and Eastern European countries, especially the imports of advantageous and special agricultural products. On top of that, projects allowing young scientists from countries along the corridor to work in China should be facilitated, so that a joint feasibility study on the free trade agreement between China and the Eurasian Economic Union can be reached.

Finally, it is imperative to improve the financial cooperation mechanism and expand the coverage of cross-border renminbi settlement. China should seek to strengthen cooperation with third countries and multilateral financial institutions as well, attract private capital, and build a long-term, stable, and diversified financing system for the corridor. China's financial institutions are well motivated to open more outlets in countries along the corridor, and this can help broaden the channels for



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

renminbi investment and financing. Cooperation in digital currency and green finance should be on the future agenda. Accordingly, there is the need to establish a real-time monitoring and early-warning system for debt risks of the participat-

ing countries. The end goal is to seek long-term and targeted solutions to debt problems and foster sustainable development for all.

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LIFE

# Celebrating its leading role

National Centre for the Performing Arts welcomes the public to its anniversary events, **Chen Nan** reports.



It was early in the morning one Friday when the capital's Chang'an Avenue was already busy with heavy traffic. At the National Centre for the Performing Arts near Tian'anmen Square, a crowd was already forming.

These people were not just regular tourists visiting the iconic venue where musicians and artists from around the world come and perform. They were going to the venue's annual open day on Dec 22, to mark the center's 16th anniversary.

People entered the north-to-south entrance galleries, which led to the venue's major auditoriums. Throughout the day, various activities took place at different parts of the center, such as the resident singers performing arias from classic operas, musicians from the NCPA Orchestra playing popular pieces and dancers displaying their well-honed technique.

"I have been participating in the NCPA's open day event since 2009. It feels like celebrating my birthday whenever I come here on Dec 22," says Jin Li, who arrived at the venue at 8 am.

"We brought our 2-year-old daughter with us, letting her enjoy the celebration of art," says a young mother surnamed Yang, who came here with her husband and daughter. The couple used to participate in the open day event before becoming parents.

At 9 am, the resident singers opened the celebration with the song, *Happy Birthday to You*, which was followed by more songs, such as the popular aria, *Drinking Song*, from Verdi's opera *La Traviata*.

Inside the concert hall, musicians from the China Broadcasting Chinese Orchestra performed works featuring a diversity of traditional musical instruments, such as *A Moonlit Night on the Spring River*, a *pipa* (a four-stringed plucked lute) piece of the Chinese classical repertoire, named after a Tang Dynasty (618-907) poem by Zhang Ruoxu, and *Hundreds of Birds Paying Homage to the Phoenix*, a *suona*

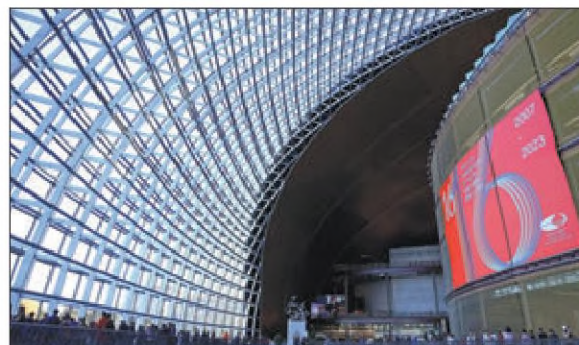


“It's like a reunion with our audience. We feel very excited this year.”

**Gong Jicheng**, vice-president of the National Centre for the Performing Arts

(a double-reed woodwind instrument) piece.

According to Gong Jicheng, vice-president of the center, the institution had to celebrate its birthday by holding online events from 2020 to 2022 due to COVID-19. A 12-hour "online arts festival", for example, was held to mark its 13th birthday.



**From top:** A scene from Peking Opera piece, *The Drunken Concubine*, is displayed on a large 3D LED screen, as part of an exhibition at the National Centre for the Performing Arts. Its resident singers perform arias in front of the opera house on Dec 22. Visitors gather at the venue. **Bottom:** The Beijing Performing Arts Centre, one of the NCPA's two new venues. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"It's like a reunion with our audience. We feel very excited this year," Gong says.

Veteran actor-director Pu Cunxin and writer Liang Xiaosheng

appeared at the celebration with their new books.

"It's a great delight to be an actor, not only because I can play different roles, which allow me to experience different lives, but also because I can get instant feedback from the audience," says Pu, who just

wrapped up his latest performance in the drama, *Jane Eyre*, produced by the center based on English writer Charlotte Brontë's novel of the same title.

Pu, 70, has played the role of Rochester in the drama since 2009. The actor from the Beijing People's Art Theatre also read a chapter from his new book, titled *Wo He Wo de Juese* (Me and My Roles), in which he recorded his decades-long acting career.

Liang also met the audience at the center, with his new book, titled *Ren Huozhe* (Living), a prose collection of Liang. His award-winning novel *Renshijian* (A Lifelong Journey) has been adapted into a Chinese play, which was staged at the center.

Liang was impressed by the large audience for the center's 16th birthday. The 74-year-old says that he doesn't visit the venue regularly to watch performances, but he often passes by the iconic architecture. "It changes colors during the four seasons and has different looks during the daytime and the night," he adds.

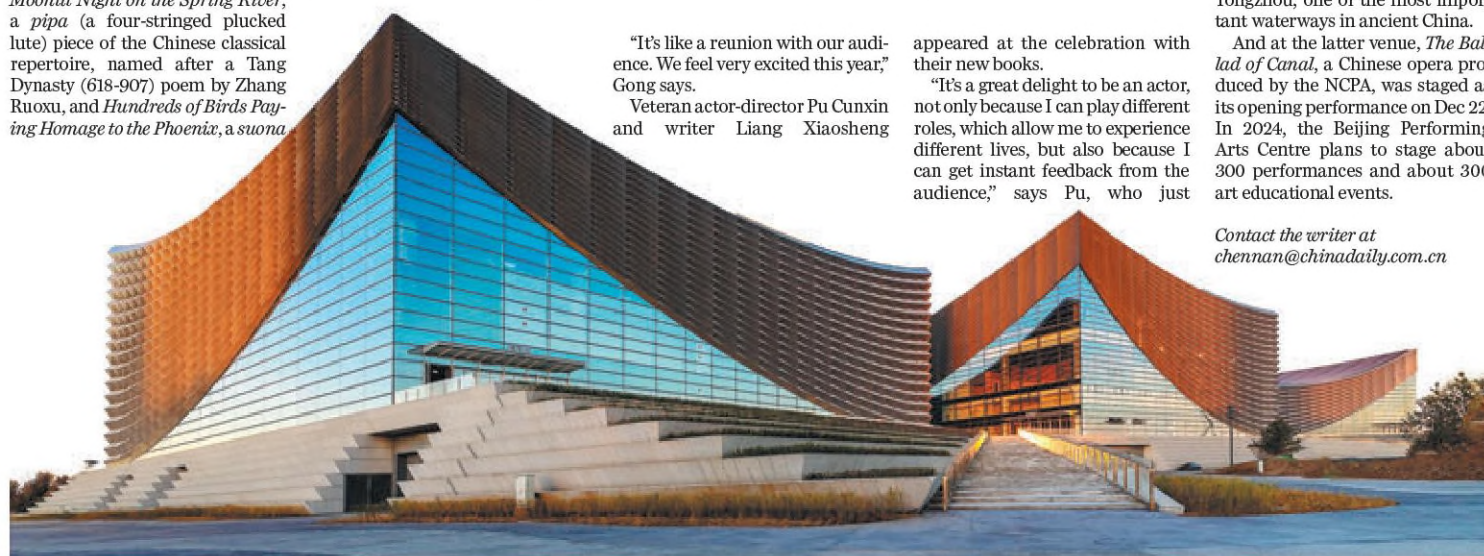
Since its inception in 2007, the center has produced 103 theatrical productions and held more than 600 exhibitions. It has built connections with 400-odd art institutions from over 70 countries and regions.

According to Gong, art education has been a major part of the center's mission with about 14,000 art educational programs, which attracted 5.4 million people since 2007. The online programs have garnered 5.5 billion clicks.

What made this year's celebration special is that two other venues also opened to the public — the NCPA Taihu Stage Art Centre, located in Taihu town, Beijing's Tongzhou district, and the recently opened Beijing Performing Arts Centre, near the Grand Canal in Tongzhou, one of the most important waterways in ancient China.

And at the latter venue, *The Ballad of Canal*, a Chinese opera produced by the NCPA, was staged as its opening performance on Dec 22. In 2024, the Beijing Performing Arts Centre plans to stage about 300 performances and about 300 art educational events.

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## Principal gives play and fun a key place in school

SHENYANG — Cycling, climbing and rowing. At an urban public primary school in China's northeastern province of Liaoning, it is common for students to play and simply have fun for at least three hours a day.

Sounds crazy? Many people had doubts over the decision of Hou Mingfei, principal of No 9 Primary School of Hunnan District, Shenyang, Liaoning province. But now, the principal has received credit from Chinese Basketball Association President Yao Ming, recognizing his contribution to promoting physical education at school.

"Principal Hou has built an amazing school, which allows children to have fun in sports and unlock the infinite possibilities of life," Yao says.

Walking on campus, reporters are greeted by three 16-meter-long slides where children can enjoy a smooth descent. Over 1,400 big car tires are piled up like hills for children to play on and have fun. On the playground, students run freely here and there.

“I value the lifelong influence of sports on children. Most children even performed better in exams after playing more sports.”

**Hou Mingfei**, a primary school principal in Shenyang, Liaoning province

"Play is the most direct way for children to be happy. I think one hour of physical exercise a day is far from enough," says Hou, noting that three hours of sports a day is a must-do for his students, and they can continue playing until 7 pm before returning home.

Hou, who had engaged in special education and brain science research before the school was built, incorporated the function of sports into the design of the school. The teaching building has a design load of 500 kilograms per square meter. The 2,000 sq m area on the second floor of the building has become a sports field, and the fifth floor has been transformed into an inline hockey training center.

More than 15 sporting activities have been introduced to the school, including unicycles, rock climbing and rowing.

"Every activity is carefully selected. For example, rock climbing is good for the treatment of scoliosis. Riding unicycles can help students coordinate their body, cognition and emotion. More than 90 percent of the over 2,500 students in our school can ride unicycles now," Hou says.

Adequate exercise builds a robust body for children at the school. For example, 71.55 percent of the students have excellent vital capacity. Only 3 percent of the students are obese, while 13.8 percent have myopia, far below the national average of 52.7 percent.

"I value the lifelong influence of sports on children," Hou says. "Most children even performed better in exams after playing more sports."

After years of efforts, Hou's educational concept has been welcomed by most of the parents, and generated a great deal of attention.

Hou's initiative saw him getting selected onto the Outstanding Sports Principal Program initiated by the Joe Tsai Foundation.

"Although he and his school were once questioned by others, today the school is very eye-catching and popular," Yao said during the award ceremony.

"I know that in many people's eyes, I am a 'crazy principal,' but I am willing to do something to give children back their childhood," Hou says, noting that with the support of the foundation, he is currently preparing to build a professional hockey rink for students. "The children have been looking forward to it for a long time."

XINHUA

## LIFE



# The bones of a good story

Chamber opera production resurrects a Chinese classic on the cycle of life  
by renowned writer Lu Xun, **Chen Nan** reports.

**L**u Xun (1881-1936), whose real name was Zhou Shuren, was known for his versatility as a short story writer, essayist, literary critic and editor.

*Resurrection of the Skeleton*, the final story in the writer's collection of rewritings of ancient myths *Gushi Xinbian*, or Old Tales Retold, which was published in 1936, is rare among his works, as it is written as a play.

On Dec 20, a Chinese chamber opera, titled *Rising From the Dead*, which was inspired by *Resurrection of the Skeleton* and composed by Wen Deqing, premiered in Beijing.

Directed by Yi Liming, the chamber opera depicts the cycle of life and death.

It tells the story of the philosopher Zhuangzi of the Warring States period (475-221 BC), who is invited to visit the ruler of Chu State and has been on the road for many days. As he passes through an area of wilderness, he discovers a skull, and decides to bring it back to life. When he calls upon the Master of Fate, ghosts warn him of the consequences, but Zhuangzi insists. The resurrected skeleton comes back to life as a naked peasant, who is lost and confused by the questions asked by

Zhuangzi, such as where he came from and which year he lived in. All the peasant wants is clothes to cover his nakedness and money to return home. Zhuangzi tries to scare him off by invoking his reputation, but the peasant has never heard of him. When the peasant attacks him, Zhuangzi pulls out a whistle, and an officer of the law comes to his aid.

According to Wen, the chamber opera is an expanded adaption of Lu Xun's *Resurrection of the Skeleton* and Zhuangzi's parable *Zhile*, or Perfect Enjoyment. The time and space of the original work has been extended into the modern era in the opera, with the second act, which is titled *Return as a Skeleton*, added to the original plot. While Zhuangzi's dream of resurrecting the skeleton is "fulfilled" in Lu Xun's version, in this opera the resurrected peasant becomes a skeleton again.

"I am very interested in the Taoist philosopher Zhuangzi and his philosophy has profound, and far-reaching influence on Chinese literature and art," says Wen. "The story of *Resurrection of the Skeleton* and how Lu Xun reimagined it intrigued me. The embarrassment of the gap between the enlightened and the ignorant, as well as the contradiction and conflict between



**Top:** Chinese chamber opera, *Rising From the Dead*, adapted from writer Lu Xun's work *Resurrection of the Skeleton*, had its world premiere at Beijing Dahua City Centre for the Performing Arts on Dec 20. It features Yi Liming as director and Wen Deqing as composer and scriptwriter. **Above:** Tenor Shen Jiayu plays the leading role, Zhuangzi, in the opera. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

ideals and reality, remains, and will always be, unresolved."

With satire and elements from the modern world, such as mobile phones, the opera brings a sense of humor, appealing to a contemporary audience, especially young people.

It took Wen about a month to write the script and over a year to compose the opera. As the closing

production of the First Beijing Chamber Opera Festival, which was initiated by Yi, a veteran director, lighting and set designer, the opera features a 14-member orchestra playing under the baton of conductor Dong Chao.

"I am 65 years old and it's an age to consider life and death," says Wen when asked why he decided to

adapt the story into an opera.

He also notes that *Rising From the Dead* is his second attempt to explore a philosophical subject. His debut opera, titled *The Wager*, which premiered 20 years ago, was based on the novel, *A Gamble on a Snowy Night*, by Gao Xiaosheng, which recounts a bet between a squire and a beggar on New Year's Eve.

Born in a small village of Fujian province, Wen studied *erhu* (a two-stringed bowed musical instrument) as a child. He began composing in the late 1970s. In 1987, he went to Beijing to study composition at the China Conservatory of Music, and his teachers included Luo Zhongrong (1924-2021) — an influential composer of modern music. In 1993, Wen began to study at the Conservatory of Geneva, Switzerland, as well as gaining more experience studying in France and the United States.

In 2017, he returned to China and joined the faculty of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, where he founded an annual modern music festival.

"Though it's a small-budget opera production, the audience get a glimpse of chamber opera, which is still new in the market," Wen says.

The costumes for the opera, which is contemporary, pioneering and breaks boundaries of cultures, was created by Yi.

Back in 2020, Yi established the Dahua City Art Theatre, which is located near the Chang'an Avenue in Beijing.

From October to December, it held the First Beijing Chamber Opera Festival, which featured eight chamber opera productions, including the opening presentation *The Death of Oedipus*, composed by Qu Xiaosong and directed by Yi, on Oct 6.

"Dahua City Art Theatre, unlike other venues for opera productions, is much smaller. However, it offers a sense of intimacy for the audience," says Yi, adding that the venue is located in the *hutong* area of nearby Dongdan, which has a large flow of people, making it easier to entice them to come inside and experience theater.

Yi also notes that the architectural design of the auditorium was inspired by the ancient Greek open-air amphitheaters, where the public could watch performances by sitting close to the stage.

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## North African Sinologists open new page

By FANG AIQING

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Around 30 Sinologists and translators from North African countries including Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, gathered in Rabat, the Moroccan capital, on Dec 22 to discuss mutual learning between civilizations and regional development.

The conference, held at the city's China Cultural Center, has keynote speeches and roundtable dialogues on topics like development of Sinology in North Africa, the translation and publication of Chinese literature in the region, as well as Chinese language education and talent cultivation in the area.

"The history of civilizational exchanges between China and Africa shows that it is only through exchanges and mutual learning can a civilization maintain its vitality," says Ji Bingxuan, head of the Chinese Association for International Understanding.

He stresses the importance of holding dialogue between the two



Ji Bingxuan (second from right), head of the Chinese Association for International Understanding, presents translated works from Sinologists as gifts to the China Cultural Center in Rabat, Morocco, on Dec 22. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

sides, promoting inclusiveness and mutual learning, and suggests that China and the North African countries explore together, within their cultural traditions, the enduring ideas that can contribute to today's development.

The director hopes that the Sinologists can take action to eliminate misunderstanding, misinterpretation and misjudgment caused by cultural differences between countries and their people, and to interpret Chinese civilization and share

its wisdom with the world.

Abdel Aziz Hamdi, Sinologist and head of the Chinese language department of Al-Azhar University in Egypt, reviews the more than 20 Chinese literary works he has translated, and pointed out the crucial role that the Chinese authorities, foreign academic institutions and publishers have played in translating and publishing Chinese literature globally.

He says, a greater number of Arab readers these days expect to learn more about Chinese history, culture and society through literary works, and a growing number of young translators have joined the undertaking of transposing Chinese literature into Arabic.

Khalid Hammes, Moroccan Sinologist and an economics professor at the Mohammed V University in Rabat, compares the Confucian ideal "the doctrine of the mean" that is embedded in the Chinese culture and that has similar reflections in the Moroccan culture.

Despite the differences in cultural backgrounds and historical develop-

ment, he says, the two countries both uphold the principles like balance, coordination, as well as respect for each other's sovereignty and independence, when dealing with international relations and regional affairs.

This approach not only embodies the essence of the doctrine, but also demonstrates the wisdom of both countries in tackling complex international relations, he adds.

According to Tunisian Sinologist Samah Mohamed Korashy Abdelkader, for the past two years, seminars on Chinese language education in North Africa have been held by the Confucius Institute of the University of Carthage in Tunis, the capital city, and the university's higher institute of languages, in order to deepen knowledge in the field.

She adds that Chinese books on various topics have been introduced to the region via the effort of platforms such as the Oriental Knowledge Publishing Company, which have become an important window through which the Arab world can learn about China.



“The history of civilizational exchanges between China and Africa shows that it is only through exchanges and mutual learning can a civilization maintain its vitality.”

Ji Bingxuan, head of the Chinese Association for International Understanding

## LIFE

# New film shows a lair of intrigue

*Wolf Hiding* portrays quest for revenge and criminal infighting, **Xu Fan** reports.

Despite the cold wave sweeping across major parts of China, Nick Cheung Ka-fai and his fellow cast stars, like Ethan Juan, have found a fervent passion for cinema during a tightly scheduled tour to promote their latest endeavor, *Wolf Hiding*.

Since its theatrical release on Dec 16, the movie has grossed more than 210 million yuan (\$29.4 million), to become one of the most popular action blockbusters in the last month of the year.

Set in an unnamed foreign country, the film opens on the eve of a leadership change within a powerful criminal group. This results in a major city being plunged into darkness and a spate of crimes, ranging from illegal human organ harvesting to forced prostitution and human trafficking. However, a mysterious killer emerges and kidnaps the chosen successor. Various criminal factions and even law enforcement agencies become entangled in the ensuing chaos.

Cheung, a two-time winner of the Best Actor gong at the Hong Kong Film Awards, recalls that he received the script a few years ago from director Ma Yuke, with whom he struck up a friendship on the 2013 movie *The White Storm*.

The movie also marks the directorial debut feature of Ma, a native of Lanzhou, Gansu province. After shooting to fame for portraying You Tazhi, a martial artist who falls for a woman who doesn't love him back in the popular 2003 TV series *Demi-Gods and Semi-Devils*, Ma has played in more than 50 TV dramas and movies, and started conceiving the plot of *Wolf Hiding* over a decade ago.

In addition to trusting Ma, due to

his decades of experience in the film and TV industry, Cheung was also deeply drawn to the script's portrayal of his character — a man seeking vengeance for his beloved younger sister.

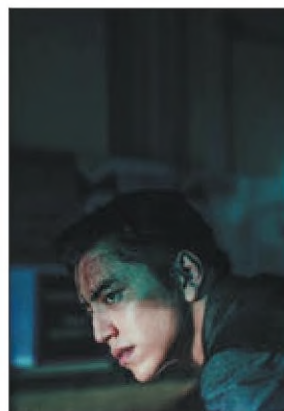
In the movie, flashback scenes show that Chen An, Cheung's character, and his younger sister grew up in an orphanage. Although they lived in poverty and resided in a small wooden house in the suburbs, their lives were simple and happy. However, tragedy struck when his sister was kidnapped on the street by members of a criminal gang and met a tragic end. Overwhelmed with immense grief, Chen began planning his revenge.

Filming took place in Shenzhen and Shanwei in Guangdong province in 2021. Cheung remembers that the crew constructed the wooden house on a piece of open land, situated about two to three hours away from downtown Shenzhen. The surrounding area was planted with beautiful, blooming sunflowers, creating a serene and vibrant atmosphere that allowed Cheung to easily connect with the correct emotions for the scenes.

As one of the most renowned stars in the Hong Kong film industry, Cheung began his acting career in the late 1980s after previously serving as a police officer. During his early days, he worked as an extra or in cameo roles and did stunts, enduring pain and injuries when required to perform realistic kicks or beatings.

"I entered the film industry during that era. Despite it being a tough period, I felt proud to see that I could successfully complete these challenging stunts," says Cheung.

With those early years helping him accumulate experience in per-



*Wolf Hiding*, one of December's most popular films, features Hong Kong star Nick Cheung Ka-fai (top) as a mysterious killer. Ethan Juan (middle left) and Wang Ta-lu (middle right) respectively play a police officer and a gangster. Actor Paul Chun (above left) plays a retiring gang leader. The movie marks the directorial debut of Ma Yuke (above right), who also portrays a gangster in the film.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



I entered the film industry during that era (late 1980s). Despite it being a tough period, I felt proud to see that I could successfully complete these challenging stunts."

Nick Cheung Ka-fai, actor

forming stunts, he reveals that he took regular exercise under the guidance of a foreign action choreographer and performed a lot of the action sequences in *Wolf Hiding* himself.

One of his most impressive sequences includes a fierce fight between Chen, his two friends, and the gangsters in an abandoned shipyard, as the protagonists attempt to rescue some young women who have been kidnapped.

Actor Ethan Juan, who portrays one of the friends — a police officer — says that the fight scene was filmed over the course of five days, amid inclement weather caused by a typhoon hitting Guangdong province. Each day, shooting had to resume from where it left off the previous day, requiring the actors to vividly depict a state of exhaustion while also fiercely battling the criminals.

"I needed to find the right way to approach each day's filming. So, I discussed with the director, 'can I engage in a brief fight with the stunt performers three times before each shot, and then continue filming the fourth time without resting?' By artificially inducing a sense of fatigue, I felt content with the final visual effect," says Juan.

As seasoned actors with years of experience in the film industry, they each have their own views on how to deliver a great performance. While Cheung believes that a good script and a good director lay the foundation for an actor's success, Juan says he relies on reading books, watching more movies, and listening to music to enrich his knowledge and better prepare himself for future projects.

Currently, the movie has earned a rating of 9.3 points out of 10 on Maoyan and 9.1 points on Taopiaopiaopiao, two of the country's largest online ticketing platforms.

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## A different culture means I watch my language

Early in my time in China, I asked a coworker if she noticed anything Americans do that is strange. "You're always fighting, even with your best friend," she said. She had never seen me fight with my friend, so I was dumbfounded, until I realized she was referring to a philosophical debate she'd overheard. Though the disagreement was passionate, my friend and I would hardly have considered it a fight. According to that coworker, many Chinese wouldn't dare tell their friend

to "shut your mouth when you speak to me" or tell them, "your logic is so dumb I'm concerned you don't have object permanence", because the insults would be viewed as antithetical to social harmony.

It was not the first time I noticed differences in communication between Chinese and Americans.

For all scientists have learned about language, many questions about its origins are still answered with, "Beats me." We can explain a language's phonology, semantics, grammar, pragmatics, and register, describe individual words with pages of definitions and examples, and measure how our body language supports or denies what we say. Yet, when our brother says, "You're an absolute idiot," we are likely to think, "I wonder what he meant by that?"

Words are metaphors, serving as vessels to comprehend abstract notions. Each language possesses an interior logic, influencing how its speakers structure sentences and understand words. This uniqueness extends beyond mere vocabulary; it permeates the fabric of expression, shaping thoughts and ideas. Regardless of how adept one becomes at communicating, how many dictionaries they've read, or how many public speaking courses they've attended, they cannot guarantee that the listener understands them correctly. Odds are quite good that the listener wasn't listening at all.

Each language barrier exists within speakers of the same language, between the closest of friends, and between mother and child. What do you do when you are in a foreign land, participating in a foreign culture? Beats me.

When I moved to Beijing in 2013, I worked with a British man who had lived in China for a decade and spoke Chinese fluently. He told me it takes about 10 years to fully understand the culture. Either I'm daft, or he was trolling me. It might be both.

I can confidently say that after all this time, I'm even more confused than I was then. The concepts and ideas I learn about Chinese culture expand endlessly, and I suspect that will always be true. If I'm lucky, I'll have another 30 years of life, less time than more intelligent men than I have spent studying culture.

Perhaps I'm not meant to understand China. There is acceptance and peace in that thought. With my expat friends, I will banter and taunt, and with my Chinese friends, I will ask questions to avoid giving the impression I am fighting with them. I will embrace cross-cultural confusion and persist in understanding my Chinese friends, family, coworkers and neighbors, because that knowledge bears gifts of wisdom and joy. My life is better for it.

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## Living Buddha keeps in tune with modern era of life

LHASA — On a cool autumn night along Barkhor Street in the heart of Lhasa, the tranquility was complemented by a Buddhist chant accompanied by ethereal melodies. Not too many in the audience were aware that the lead singer of the band was no ordinary vocalist but, in fact, a "Living Buddha".

As Balog Tenzin Dorje, who is also known as Balog Rinpoche, commenced chanting, accompanied by flute, guitar, ritual drum and bell, devout Tibetan Buddhists at the scene knelt on the ground, hands clasped together, bowing in prayer. The scene unfolded at a folk art festival, held in the capital city of Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region in September. The festival aimed to promote various forms of intangible cultural heritage, including Naru Great Dancing, an ancient Lhasa dance dating back to the seventh century, and the well-known *dramyen*, a traditional Tibetan plucked string instrument.

Balog Rinpoche and his band named Dharma presented the ancient *Songs of Milarepa*, also listed as an intangible cultural heritage item, of which the Living Buddha himself is an inheritor.

Born in Lhasa in 1982, Balog Rinpoche was identified as the reincarnated Living Buddha of Yanggrigar Monastery in Maldrongkar county at the age of 8.

Growing up in Norbulingka, dubbed Lhasa's "Summer Palace", he not only studied Buddhist doctrines, but also learned Mandarin, English, painting, music, and other subjects from a young age.

As the 42nd-generation inheritor

of the *Songs of Milarepa*, which was listed as a national-level intangible cultural heritage in 2021, Balog Rinpoche began learning and preserving the item in 2004.

There are currently over 600 bearers of intangible cultural heritage items at various levels across the region.

Milarepa was one of the most influential figures of the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism. His oral teachings of Buddhist doctrines were passed down and collected by his followers as the *Songs of Milarepa*, serving as a valuable resource for understanding Buddhist philosophy. The *Songs of Milarepa* were traditionally passed down among practitioners, but Balog Rinpoche aims to better preserve and introduce them to more people. As a result, he established Dharma in 2013, with the band attempting to incorporate a moderate amount of instrumental accompaniment.

The band comprises guitarists, a drummer, and a keyboard player hailing from the Mongolian, Manchu, Tibetan and Han ethnic groups.

Though their performances are not frequent, they have graced stages in Beijing, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, Chengdu, Sichuan province, and Lhasa.

"The *Songs of Milarepa* are meant to be diverse. They can offer spirituality to the public. Through our interpretation, we aim to contribute to the inheritance of this intangible cultural heritage today," says Balog Rinpoche.

Apart from preserving the *Songs of Milarepa*, Balog Rinpoche teaches *The Thirty-Seven Practices of*

*Bodhisattva* and Mandarin at the Tibet Buddhism Academy.

Nestled in Chushul county and inaugurated in 2011, the academy is the region's only high-level comprehensive Tibetan Buddhist institute. It has nurtured thousands of outstanding monks and nuns to serve the Tibetan Buddhist community.

Inside the academy, there are sacred religious buildings such as Tshogs Chen Hall, scripture-debating grounds and white pagodas, which coexist harmoniously with modern teaching facilities including a 400-meter standard running track, an artificial turf soccer field, and indoor and outdoor basketball courts.

Balog Rinpoche usually meticulously arranges his robe before class and carries a laptop that connects with the classroom's screen projector to show students his course material.

His students, also clad in monks' robes, attend the class with their laptops, tablets and translation pens. He guides the students to use Mandarin to compose sentences, while giving explanations in Tibetan.

Different from typical teaching buildings, red carpets are laid in the corridors of the academy, while the classrooms are equipped with shoe cabinets, requiring students to take off their shoes before entry. Some classrooms feature Tibetan carpets and tea tables, where students sit on the floor.

"It's not that common to see someone teaching at the academy who is simultaneously a Rinpoche. But, as far as I'm concerned, an excellent knowledgeable professor,



Balog Rinpoche teaches *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattva* and Mandarin at the Tibet Buddhism Academy. XINHUA

abbot or Geshe should also be respected as a Rinpoche," Balog Rinpoche says.

Influenced by the artistic milieu of his family life, Balog Rinpoche embarked on learning *thangka* painting from a young age and graduated from Tibet University with *thangka* painting as major.

Through diligent study, he also became proficient in English. Today, Balog Rinpoche teaches others the things he excels at. Every week, he teaches *thangka* painting at a manual arts school and hosts online Tibetan and English classes during weekends for students from Tibetan and Han ethnic backgrounds.

To promote *thangka* art, he established a painting class in 2014, receiving apprentices from diverse ethnic backgrounds, in order to encourage more exchanges and interactions among different ethnic groups.

Managing temple affairs, lecturing at a Buddhism academy, preserving the *Songs of Milarepa*, and teaching *thangka* painting, Balog Rinpoche described his daily life as busy yet fulfilling.

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