

Dream comes true

Travel and businesses bloom, thanks to desert railway loop

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California, China set pace on climate

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Interest snowballing

Young adventurers' enthusiasm for skiing-related activities increasing

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CHINA DAILY

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Against all odds



Police officers carry out a search operation on Sunday at a gutted market in Wajima, Ishikawa Prefecture, Japan. At least 128 people died and 195 were reported missing after a magnitude 7.6 earthquake hit western Japan on Jan 1 and was followed by hundreds of aftershocks. KYODO NEWS VIA AP See more, page 3

Sanctions imposed on US firms for arming Taiwan

By ZHOU JIN zhoujin@chinadaily.com.cn

China announced sanctions on Sunday against five defense industry companies in the United States for their involvement in weapons sales to Taiwan, as it urged Washington to stop arming the island.

Inside

The five companies are BAE Systems Land & Armament, Alliant Techsystems Operations, AeroVironment,

Viasat and Data Link Solutions, according to a Foreign Ministry statement. The decision was made in accordance with China's Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law.

The measures include freezing the movable and immovable properties of those companies in China, and prohibiting organizations and

individuals in China from transacting and cooperating with them.

The latest response came after the US approved a \$300 million deal with Taiwan to upgrade the island's tactical information system, and after it imposed sanctions on Chinese entities and individuals over the Ukraine crisis.

China deplores and firmly opposes such moves and has made solemn demarches to the US, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said in the statement.

US arms sales to Taiwan violate the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiques, particularly the Aug 17, 1982, communique, the statement said.

The illegal unilateral sanctions on Chinese companies and individuals under false pretexts seriously harm China's sovereignty

and security interests, it said.

The move undermines peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait, and violates the legitimate and lawful rights and interests of Chinese companies and individuals, the spokesperson added.

The spokesperson stressed that the Chinese government remains unwavering in its resolve to safeguard national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity and protect the lawful rights and interests of Chinese companies and citizens.

Beijing urges Washington to stop arming Taiwan and stop targeting China with illegal unilateral sanctions, the spokesperson said.

In the past, Beijing has sanctioned US companies, including Raytheon Missiles & Defense, Northrop Grumman and Lockheed Martin, over arms sales to Taiwan.

Li Haidong, a professor at the Institute of International Relations at China Foreign Affairs University, said that China's targeted response has shown that the country will not stay silent and do nothing when Washington damages its core interests.

He said the US arms sales to Taiwan undermine the most important foundation for China-US cooperation.

The move is typical interference in China's internal affairs, Li said, adding that it also sent a wrong signal to "Taiwan independence" forces, especially ahead of the region's leadership election.

The US attempt to arm Taiwan and embolden "Taiwan independence" forces has exposed the hypocrisy of its policy toward China, he said, adding that the US can't say one thing and do another.

China remains crucial link in supply chain

Expanded opening-up adds resilience to appeal to foreign investors, expert says

By LIU ZHIHUA liuzhihua@chinadaily.com.cn

China will retain its position as a key global manufacturing hub, as the supply chain diversification moves by certain multinational companies are gradual and limited only to low-end sectors, according to senior analysts and business leaders.

They also emphasized that the country's continuous efforts to promote industrial upgrade and deepen opening-up will further cement its status in the global supply chains.

However, they suggested that the country should make more efforts to strengthen international cooperation and create a level playing field for market entities, while leveraging the advantages of a huge domestic market and manufacturing capability to attract more foreign investors, especially in advanced manufacturing, consumer products and services industries.

Their comments echoed a recent report by Fitch Ratings, which said the move by global and Chinese companies to relocate production away from China amid rising trade barriers and geopolitical tensions remains limited to sectors involving low-skill assembly and mass production, such as textiles, apparel and footwear, with manufacturers persisting with higher value-added production in China.

"We believe the supply-chain shift is likely to be gradual, as China's competitive advantages of a large and relatively high-skilled workforce, well-developed infrastructure, industrial expertise and efficient and complete manufacturing value chain are unlikely to be overtaken by other countries in the near term," the report said.

Besides, thanks to its increasing production of higher value-added products underpinned by the government's continued efforts to encourage manufacturing upgrades and movements up global value chains, China's share of global manufacturing output has continued to grow despite the supply-chain shift, the report said. It cited data that showed the country's share of global manufacturing output reached around 30 percent in 2022, compared with 28.5 percent in 2018 and 22.3 percent in 2012.

Zhao Zhongxiu, president of the

University of International Business and Economics, said: "Some manufacturing companies are moving factories out of China, implementing the so-called China-plus strategy. But that is just part of the picture."

"China is strengthening efforts to move up global value chains while further stabilizing foreign direct investment. No global company can ignore a market as big as China," Zhao said.

Despite some developed economies leaning toward protectionism, China has unwaveringly expanded high-standard institutional opening-up, and is seeking to integrate deeper into global industrial and supply chains through proactive opening-up measures. That will add resilience to its appeal to foreign investors, he said.

Ge Shunqi, a professor at Nankai University's Institute of International Economics, said he believes it is natural that some companies in labor-intensive industries are relocating production away from China as the country upgrades industry structure and moves up global value chains, just like they came to China decades ago to produce and then export those products.

Currently, it is important for China to maintain a stable and consistent approach of proactively expanding opening-up to deepen international cooperation, with bold opening-up measures, Ge said.

He also said the country can encourage Chinese enterprises, private ones in particular, to take the "going global" approach, because their increased presence overseas will strengthen China's ties with global markets, therefore building up the country's strength in global industrial and value chains.

Zhao, from UIBE, suggested that the country should further lower tariffs on intermediate goods — probably on a large scale — to reinforce willingness of companies to retain production capacity in China.

He said he expects the country to treat all types of enterprises more equally, ensure policy stability and transparency, and most importantly, encourage innovations and fair competition to boost confidence of market entities, especially those in the private economy.

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Chinese wisdom can play part in resolving conflict

WORLD WATCH By Zulkafli Hassan Khan

immediate, lasting and comprehensive cease-fire. China recognizes the unprecedented destruction that this conflict has caused and the huge number of civilian casualties that have occurred.

China has called on the parties to the conflict to act responsibly and to truly and completely implement the UN General Assembly and UN Security Council resolutions to reach a durable, lasting and permanent humanitarian cease-fire.

Beijing has also called for the international community, especially the UN, to build on UN Resolution 2712 and work for de-escalation of the conflict, and to ensure the realization of a lasting cease-fire.

Ever since the start of the conflict, China has always emphasized that the only way for a just and permanent solution to be reached and peace to be achieved in the Middle East is through implementation of a two-state solution. It should be noted that China pleads in the paper for the establishment of an independent State of Palestine that enjoys full sovereignty based on the 1967 border.

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POST-FLOODING WORK ENSURES RESIDENTS LIVE IN COMFORT

Reconstruction efforts pay off after devastating summer rainstorms

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang, DU JUAN in Beijing and YANG CHENG in Tianjin



Continuous efforts have been made in reconstruction work in Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei province after severe rainstorms and flooding affected the area in late July and early August.

The work is aimed at ensuring that local residents live in comfort and that their homes remain heated during the winter.

In Zhaoxiang, a village in Zhuozhou, Hebei, Zhao Jie used a feather duster on a painting newly hung on a wall in her living room. The work depicts a flock of birds flying over a boat floating on a stretch of water against a backdrop of mountains and trees.

"This painting, *Wealthy Water and Golden Mountain*, symbolizes

the hope we have here for life in the future," Zhao said.

The village is one of many in Zhuozhou that were severely affected in the summer, when rainstorms battered northern China and the Yellow and Huaihe river valleys, causing flooding and natural disasters.

At around 9 am on Dec 6, Zhang Shubin, team leader of a work group from the city's healthcare security bureau stationed in the village, visited Zhao's home and asked, "What is the temperature inside the house?"

Zhao said, "It is around 21 degrees, so it's quite warm."

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Friendship match



Table tennis players from China and the United States participate in a match during a youth exchange event in Beijing on Saturday. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY See story, page 3

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PAGE TWO

Floods: Homes repaired and reinforced



From page 1

Zhang's team arrived in the village immediately after the floodwaters receded, with a mission to help villagers recover their livelihoods as soon as possible.

Zhuozhou, which is situated just under 60 kilometers from Beijing, occupies 751 square km, and has a population of about 700,000. The county-level city is administered by Baoding city.

In the summer, rivers in Zhuozhou flooded more than 200 villages and 150 residential areas, affecting over 490,000 people and 1,685 businesses, the local government said, adding that the direct economic losses were 19.48 billion yuan (\$2.74 billion).

In Zhaowang, more than 130 households experienced flooding that caused significant damage to properties throughout the village. Zhao's house was classified as a level-C dangerous home, meaning that her family could remain in the property, but some repair work was needed.

After the floodwaters receded, the family began repairing and reinforcing the house. "The reinforcement work was successfully completed with the help of the local government and the work group," she said. "We then bought some new furniture and moved back into the house in early November."

Statistics from the Zhuozhou bureau of housing and urban-rural development show that some 18,000 rural houses in the city have been repaired, 29,000 such properties reinforced, and 124 new rural homes built. All the recovery and reconstruction work scheduled for the area last year has been completed.

Work on the remaining 6,000 rural houses that need to be rebuilt will start in the spring, said the local government, which has also provided free construction materials for those in need.

On a bitterly cold day last month in Diaowosi, another flood-affected village in Zhuozhou, the streets were clean and tidy, with a number of wall paintings appearing on the roadsides, including one depicting relief work after the flooding.

"We showed the rescue work in the form of cartoons on the walls to remind us of the importance of working together in the face of disaster," said Zhang Kewei, 44, the village's Party chief, who took office immediately after the floods receded.

Abundant harvest

In Tianjin, Hao Xiangfeng, 46, a farmer from Diliufu village, Xinkou town, Xiqing district, is expecting a bumper harvest from the vegetables he planted in newly renovated greenhouses.

"Thanks to solid flood drainage efforts, the floodwaters receded in mid-September. During that month, I received a loan of 100,000 yuan, and later I was paid 500,000 yuan in compensation by the insurance company. These funds enabled me to renovate all 17 greenhouses and plant vegetables in October," he said.

Hao, who operates the largest farm in the village and also runs agritainment homestays, which are designed to draw locals with various attractions, said the crown daisies he planted in October have already flowered. The celery he planted in November will be ready for harvest in time for the Spring



The book trade has recovered, houses have been repaired, and river dams rebuilt in Zhuozhou, Hebei province.

PHOTOS BY WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

“After the flooding, we conducted on-site inspections in more than 20 villages ... We then spent three days formulating solutions.”

Wang Baogui, XYZ Storage Technology Corp manager

Festival next month.

Hao's story is just one of many that illustrate the agricultural sector's recovery in flood-affected areas of Tianjin.

The Diliufu Party chief, Hao Qingshui, said, "This autumn, we changed the crop variety. Instead of planting rice, we took advantage of the season to grow winter wheat."

Some 2,000 greenhouses in the village were inundated by floodwaters.

In addition to assisting residents, local governments helped companies resume production.

In Zhuozhou, financial institutions have granted 3,300 loans totaling nearly 2.03 billion yuan to businesses and farmers affected by the floods. All 1,685 enterprises and 9,294 individual businesses have resumed production, the local government said.

Last month, at a warehouse owned by BooksChina, one of the country's biggest online booksellers, staff members scanned the barcodes of titles ordered by buyers.

BooksChina, which has two publishing warehouses that occupy about 10,000 sq m in Zhuozhou, lost nearly 4 million books in the flooding, along with tools, vehicles, and sealing equipment.

After the floodwaters receded, Zhuozhou, which is home to more than 200 publishing houses, was left with warehouses full of ruined books.

Now, the three-story-high shelves at one of the BooksChina warehouses



are full of new books. Workers search for titles ordered online, scan barcodes, and efficiently package customers' orders.

Huang Ping, founder of the company, said, "With help from the local government, we resumed operations in early September."

The company received support from all sectors of society after the flooding. With local government help, it has been granted rent reductions, three years of subsidized loans, and favorable insurance policies, Huang said.

Nearly 1 million books are now in stock at the company's warehouses.

"In future, we will be protected against property losses caused by disasters such as this," Huang said, adding that Baoding has established a joint insurance system for the book warehousing industry, with the local government sharing risks with insurance companies.

Cabins set up

To protect residents from further disasters, in early November, several 18-sq-m cabins were set up in Shuiyuzui village, Miaofengshan town, Mentougou district, Beijing. Despite their small size and plain appearance, the cabins are designed to safeguard lives when disasters occur suddenly, especially exceptionally heavy rainfall.

On July 29, Mentougou and Fangshan districts in Beijing experienced unprecedented heavy rainfall. The walls of houses in Shuiyuzui still show traces of the water level, which rose to 2.2 meters.

Liu Fuzhi, deputy director of the Mentougou science and information bureau, said, "The district is home to several ravines, making it difficult to relocate villagers at the same time. In

isolated villages surrounded by mountains and valleys, there is an urgent need for such emergency shelters to provide continuous access to the internet, electricity and water during disasters."

In August, with support from government departments, including the Beijing Municipal Science and Technology Commission, and enterprises at Zhongguancun Intelligent Emergency Equipment Industrial Park, technology was used to help disaster-affected populations.

High-tech materials for power generation, heating, communication, and water purification were used in the emergency safety shelters. For example, the roofs of the shelters feature 20-sq-m photovoltaic panels, which Liu said can generate 5 kilowatt-hours of electricity.

"The amount of electricity generated by a photovoltaic panel varies between summer and winter. In summer, with about eight hours of effective sunlight, a panel produces around 40 kilowatt-hours, while in winter, with about four to five hours of sunlight, it can still generate more than 20 kilowatt-hours," he added.

In addition to providing power, the electricity generated by the panels contributes to the grid, producing economic returns.

The shelters also feature complementary energy resources, including diesel and energy storage facilities, to ensure the continuity and stability of power supplies. The complementary multi-energy power generation system guarantees that the equipment in a shelter can operate for 12 days under normal conditions.

Wang Baogui, manager at XYZ Storage Technology Corp, said: "After the flooding, we conducted on-site inspections in more than 20 villages



to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation. We then spent three days formulating solutions."

Shelters are used for emergencies, and they also have their regular uses at other times, he said.

Beijing now has six emergency safety shelters, and more will be introduced based on requirements.

Project progresses

On a section of the Beijuma River, which flows through Zhuozhou, construction of flood control projects is progressing rapidly, with vehicles shuttling back and forth to the construction site.

The Beijuma River (Zhuozhou Section) Emergency Flood Control Project starts in Beitao village and ends at Xiaoying Dyke. The project includes building 8.2 km of new embankments, while 10.1 km of existing embankments will be raised and reinforced.

Wang Xiaoyang, 38, one of those in charge of the project's technological issues, said the work is expected to be completed in June, before the onset of the flood season. The work will not only help improve the flood control system throughout the Haihe River Basin, but will also address urban flood control issues in Zhuozhou.

"We have over 40 pieces of machinery operating on-site simultaneously, and more than 120 employees are working hard to meet the construction schedule, striving for an early completion," Wang said.

Meanwhile, the authorities in Tianjin have begun renovating the city's water facilities and have launched new construction projects since November.

Sources at the Tianjin Water Authority said significant investment has been made in projects, including the expansion of pumping stations

along the Duliujian River, dredging and clearance work in the Yongding River's floodplain areas, and improvements to the drainage network in downtown areas.

Expansion of part of a pumping station on the Duliujian River is expected to increase the water flow from 44 cubic meters per second to 60 cu m. In addition, 9,751 meters of drainage pipelines in downtown Tianjin will be renovated.

Qiao Jianhua, director of the Haihe River Water Conservancy Commission, which reports to the Ministry of Water Resources, emphasized the valuable lessons learned from the flooding in the summer and underlined the crucial role played by water conservation facilities.

The importance of prompt forecasting, prevention work, and action plans to address the challenges posed by flooding was also stressed by Qiao.

Looking ahead, he said the authorities need to address problems related to flooding, improve water catchment facilities, accelerate the construction of reservoirs and work on renovating dams and waterways.

Qiao also acknowledged shortcomings in the forecasting capabilities for the Taihang and Yanshan mountains, and hopes that facilities in these areas will be upgraded.

"To ensure the safety of local residents, increased efforts are needed to implement prevention measures and improve infrastructure in risky mountainous areas, water catchment areas, and regions prone to frequent torrential downpours," he said.

Yang Zishuo contributed to this story.

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Left: Workers build a dam along the Juma River in Zhuozhou. XIONG HUAMING / FOR CHINA DAILY Center: Walls are repainted after floods hit a village in Mentougou district, Beijing. WANG FEI / FOR CHINA DAILY Right: Students attend a sports class at a school affected by flooding in Mentougou. JU HUANZONG / XINHUA

TOP NEWS

Top TV drama turns spotlight on Shanghai dialect's preservation

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
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A long-awaited television series, which was released in both Mandarin and the Shanghai dialect in late December, has sparked discussions among residents, online viewers and experts over the preservation and inheritance of the declining Shanghai dialect.

Adapted from writer Jin Yucheng's award-winning novel, *Fan Hua* (Blossoms), the TV series *Blossoms Shanghai* takes audiences back to Shanghai in the 1990s, when everybody looked forward to opportunities in the new century.

The plot follows the rise of the protagonist A Bao, played by actor Hu Ge, an ambitious young man who seizes the opportunities of the early stock market to become a millionaire.

However, it is the Shanghai dialect version that has many online viewers riveted to the series, produced by legendary Hong Kong director Wong Kar-wai, who was born in Shanghai.

Some viewers are sharing short videos from the series to help others learn the Shanghai dialect, which has been greatly replaced with Mandarin in schools and workplaces.

Chen Zhongmin, a professor from the department of Chinese language and literature at Fudan University in Shanghai, said that most people he knows are interested in the dialect version of *Blossoms Shanghai*, regardless of whether they are from the city or elsewhere.

"They are curious to see how the dialect can convey the unique charm of the city's culture," Chen said, adding that the last time a television drama was made in the Shanghai dialect was probably back in the 1990s.

Some experts said they believe the series could make a big contribution to the inheritance of the Shanghai dialect, as there is a consensus among Shanghai residents that the dialect needs to be protected.

Ding Dimeng, an expert in Shanghai dialect studies at Shang-

hai University, noted that the dialect will become endangered if the government and society do not pay due attention to its preservation.

Many children in Shanghai do not fluently speak the dialect anymore, and for their convenience, their parents don't speak with them in the dialect either, she said.

Some residents echoed Ding's observations.

Sun Huijuan, 65, said her grandson spoke the Shanghai dialect fairly well before he joined school, and could still speak the dialect during his kindergarten years even though it was not taught in class.

"However, after he joined primary school, he lost confidence in his pronunciation. He started replying in Mandarin when we asked him something in the dialect at home," said Sun.

The Shanghai dialect has gained popularity among foreigners living in the city. Many like Belgian musician Tobias Gao Yue share their language skills on social media. Tobias, who has a decent grasp of the Shanghai dialect, has won thousands of followers, indicating that more people are interested in learning the dialect.

Barnaby Nadler, who is from the United States and has lived in Shanghai for more than a decade, said he took special classes in the Shanghai dialect after he moved to the city, because he thought some expressions were "very interesting" and could help him "better integrate" into the local community. However, one hardly hears people talk in the dialect in public spaces these days, he added.

The latest figures from the Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau show that the city was home to nearly 24.76 million permanent residents in 2022, and more than 10 million of them came from other parts of the country.

Municipal authorities have made some efforts in recent years to preserve the local dialect. Some bus routes and a new subway line have added broadcast in the Shanghai dialect, while children's rhymes in the dialect are still part of the syllabus at most local kindergartens.



Calling for peace

Officers of the Metropolitan Police clash with protesters on Saturday in central London in the United Kingdom during a demonstration calling for an immediate cease-fire in the Gaza Strip. The Israeli military signaled on Sunday that it has wrapped up major combat in northern Gaza, saying it has completed dismantling Hamas' military infrastructure there, as the offensive against the militant group entered its fourth month. HENRY NICHOLLS / AFP

Youths revive spirit of Ping-Pong Diplomacy

Competition brings Chinese, US players together, boosts friendship

By MO JINGXI
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Abdullah Aljerjawi clenched his fist and said "yes!" when his table tennis partner, Tao Chang, got the last point of the game with a nice drive.

The mixed doubles players, who had met each other for the first time just half an hour before their game in a stadium at Tsinghua University in Beijing on Saturday morning, won four matches out of five.

Aljerjawi, an undergraduate from the University of Virginia in the United States, and Tao, from Tsinghua University, were participants in a China-US youth table tennis exchange, the first such event held in China between the two countries since 2019.

Liang Geliang, who was in the audience on Saturday and was a witness to the China-US Ping-Pong Diplomacy in 1971, said he was the same age as these students when he practiced table tennis with US table

tennis player Glenn Cowan in Nagoya, Japan.

More than 50 years ago, it was Cowan's chance encounter on a bus with the Chinese table tennis team that set the stage for the eventual establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US on Jan 1, 1979.

"I believe that playing ping-pong is a good opportunity for mutual learning and exchange. Back in the 1970s, the tiny ping-pong ball opened the gate for China and the US. Today, I still hope that young people from both countries can enhance friendship through this sport," Liang said.

Stephen Mull, vice-provost for global affairs at the University of Virginia, is leading a group of 12 undergraduates from the university on a nine-day visit to China, with the purpose of creating opportunities for young people from the US and China to get to know one another through friendly ping-pong competition.

The students started their trip in Hong Kong, where the US table tennis players first landed in 1971 after receiving a surprise invitation from the Chinese government.

From Beijing, the group will take a high-speed train to Shanghai this week.

"When there are so many disagreements between the US and China, we have to find those places where we agree, and people-to-people exchange is absolutely such a field," Mull said.

During their meeting in San Francisco in November, President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden reiterated the importance of people-to-people exchanges between the two countries. Xi told Biden that China hoped to welcome 50,000 young people from the US over the next five years for exchange and study programs.

"We are building these people-to-people relations following in the footsteps of Biden and Xi," said Misa Layne, from the University of

Virginia. As the daughter of a US diplomat, Layne was born in Beijing but, after leaving with her family in 2010 at the age of 5, had not had a chance to return to China until now.

Layne said she didn't know too much about the history of Ping-Pong Diplomacy before going on the exchange trip. "It's really been an enlightening experience, and I hope to influence my UVA peers to start coming to China more for future exchanges."

Aljerjawi said he was the only one in the delegation who had no previous ties to China, since he doesn't speak Chinese or know anyone in the country.

However, being passionate about table tennis, Aljerjawi applied for the program without hesitation, even though his friends had tried to make him think twice, given the tensions between the US and China.

"I told them we cannot make a judgment until we go. And I'm open to the new experience of being in such a beautiful place with ancient culture and buildings," he said.

It has turned out that not knowing the Chinese language hasn't been a problem for Aljerjawi, because he has the language of table tennis to bond with others.

"I think sports in general is a language on its own. But the unique thing about ping-pong is that it quite literally brings people to the table," he said.



A visitor poses for a picture with a poster of Hu Ge, the actor who plays the lead role in the popular TV drama *Blossoms Shanghai*, at Peace Hotel in Huangpu district, Shanghai, on Friday. WANG GANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Market: Foreign companies investing more in China

From page 1

Such efforts will further unleash development potential of enterprises, to help expand the domestic market and shore up economic recovery, and eventually, to further leverage the country's advantages of a huge market to attract more foreign investors, Zhao said.

David Lynne, head of corporate banking at Deutsche Bank, said that China will remain a significant destination for FDI, and a number of large multinationals are planning to or are already expanding their manufacturing capability within the country to supply the China market.

"The (Western) companies are increasing their manufacturing capability and investment in China," said Lynne. "China remains a significant marketplace for a large number of our multinational clients. Consumer wealth will continue to go up over time here, (so will) requirements around automobiles, consumer goods, chemical products and industrial manufacturing."

Market confidence in the Chinese economy has been growing as the authorities have been ramping up efforts to adjust policies to further revive the economy and support financing demands from companies of all categories.

At a work conference in Beijing on Thursday and Friday, the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, vowed to provide strong and effective support for steady economic growth and high-quality development this year.

A variety of monetary policy tools will be used to maintain reasonable and sufficient liquidity, and keep the scale of social financing and money supply in line with expected targets for economic growth and price levels, the PBOC said in a statement.

The central bank will also focus on ensuring a balanced allocation of new credit, enhance the efficiency of existing funds and improve the credit structure, so that social financing can achieve a relatively rapid growth in a sustainable way throughout the year, the statement added.

Oil leak at quake-hit nuclear plant worse than estimated

By CHINA DAILY

In the aftermath of the powerful earthquake that hit Japan's western coast on New Year's Day, oil leakage from the affected equipment at the Shika Nuclear Power Plant in the hardest-hit central Japanese prefecture of Ishikawa was over five times higher than the amount initially disclosed, the plant's operator said.

Earlier last week, Hokuriku Electric Power Co said that due to the earthquake's impact, two external power supply transformers for units 1 and 2 at the Shika plant were damaged. Specifically, one transformer for Unit 2 was reported to have leaked about 3,500 liters of oil, rendering a portion of the external power supply system inoperable.

The powerful temblor, officially

named the 2024 Noto Peninsula Earthquake, is classified as a reverse fault earthquake with a preliminary 7.6 magnitude by a government panel, and intermittent aftershocks are hampering recovery support to the affected areas.

In another development, an incident involving a Japan Coast Guard aircraft occurred at Tokyo's Haneda International Airport, two days after a fatal collision between a Japan Airlines passenger jet and a Coast Guard plane that was due to deliver relief goods to quake-affected residents.

The incident occurred at an aircraft parking apron located between an international terminal and Runway B at around 6 pm on Thursday, when a Japan Airlines high-lift truck for loading cargo

struck the parked Coast Guard aircraft, Japanese newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun reported.

The aircraft was not scheduled to fly at the time and was damaged, which included a crack on the edge of the wing. It was rendered unable to fly, the report said.

On Saturday, heavy machinery continued work to remove debris of the burned Airbus A350, which was involved in Tuesday's fatal collision, to allow the runway to reopen.

Japanese Transport Minister Tetsuo Saito said that officials were aiming to reopen the runway on Monday. The wreckage of the Japan Coast Guard plane has been cleared.

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.

Conflict: Protection of civilians should be ensured

From page 1

China has also demanded that the UN immediately hold a broad-based, coordinated dialogue to cool down the tensions and to formulate a comprehensive road map for the implementation of the two-state solution. Beijing has been clear that the will of the Palestinian people must be respected and any solution shouldn't be imposed on them through force.

Furthermore, the position paper emphasizes that both sides should ensure the protection of civilians.

Not only has it condemned violent attacks upon innocent civilians and against civilian facilities, but it has also asked for complete conformity to international law. China has also shown dissatisfaction about the forced displacement

of the Palestinian population and has called for the release of civilian hostages as soon as possible. It has called for uninterrupted humanitarian assistance to reach the war-torn region so that basic human decency can prevail.

The fact that the meeting was attended by Foreign Minister Wang clearly indicated that China has great sincerity in seeking a solution to the crisis.

It should be noted that while it seems that the conflict will continue, China has been very active in trying to cool down the situation. Beijing has been clear that it stands with humanity and peace and that there shouldn't be a resumption of military confrontation, and both parties should refrain from further harming innocent civilians.

Beijing has been clear that it stands with humanity and peace and that there shouldn't be a resumption of military confrontation, and both parties should refrain from further harming innocent civilians.

Instead of adding more arms and military machines to the region, as Western powers have done so far, the international community should ensure that inter-

national laws are enforced and a road map is laid down for achieving lasting peace.

It seems that the Middle East region is inching toward more conflict through proxy wars that should be averted through pursuing peaceful establishment of the two-state solution for both Israelis and Palestinians. The ongoing war has derailed the caravans of regional peace and stability, which demands that Chinese wisdom and diplomatic efforts be respected and observed.

The author is a researcher at the Institute of Legal Studies in Lahore, Pakistan, and youth ambassador at the Center for South Asia and International Studies in Islamabad. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

WORLDUS

Public's help sought to find jet piece

By AI HEPING in New York
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The US Federal Aviation Administration is asking for the public's help to find a missing piece of an Alaska Airlines Boeing 737 MAX9 aircraft that blew off in midair and resulted in the nationwide grounding of the MAX 9 aircraft.

No passengers were seated directly next to the section of the plane that blew off on Friday, National Transportation Safety Board Chair Jennifer Homendy said during a news conference Saturday night.

The plane had 171 passengers and six crew members on board.

Seats adjacent to the blowout, which occurred when a panel called a door plug detached from the plane, weren't occupied, and the aircraft's altitude of 16,000 feet meant passengers were likely seated with seatbelts in use, she said.

The depressurized cabin caused headrests to detach from two nearby passenger seats and the back of one seat was gone, Homendy said.

Had the Alaska Airlines flight made it to its cruising altitude of more than 30,000, the situation may have been dire, with passengers potentially walking around the cabin, she said.

"We could have ended up with something so much more tragic," Homendy told reporters late Saturday during a news conference.

For people on board, the accident must have been "truly terrifying," she said.

Homendy asked for the public's help locating the plug door and other components from the aircraft that fell off during flight. She said she believed the plug door may have fallen to ground in Cedar Hills, about 7 miles west of central Portland, Oregon.

The Boeing 737 Max 9 flight was about 10 minutes from its departure airport, Portland International, for California, when the panel detached at 6:38 pm, opening a hole in the fuselage next to seat 26A.

"We'd like to get down," the pilot told air traffic control, according to a recording posted on liveatc.net. "We are declaring an emergency. We do need to come down to 10,000."

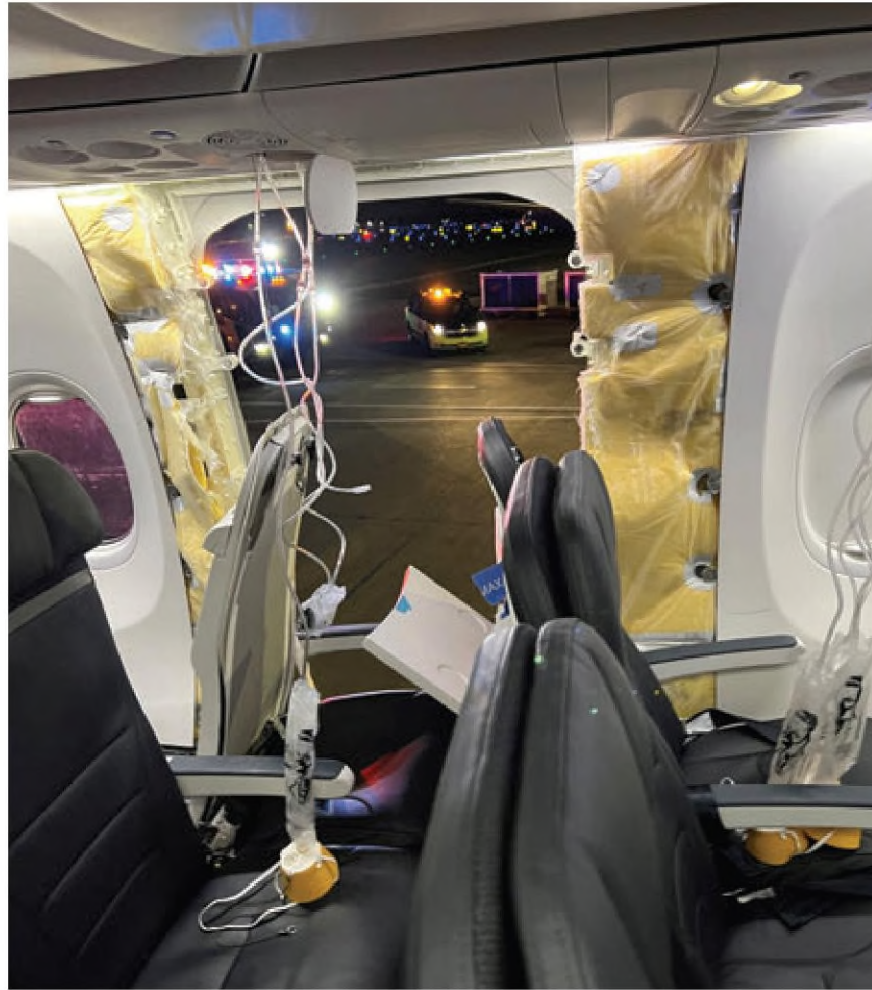
The plane landed safely about 20 minutes later at the airport.

One person was taken to a hospital. The airline said in a statement Saturday that several people on Flight 1282 were injured and required medical attention but have all since been medically cleared.

Shortly after takeoff, the panel, including a window, popped off, passenger Kyle Rinker told CNN. "It was really abrupt. Just got to altitude, and the window/wall just popped off."

Passengers told CNN that they then heard a loud boom and felt a rush of air as a refrigerator-sized hole was left in the side of the 220-passenger plane.

A boy's shirt was ripped off his body and flew out of the hole amid the air pressure loss, CNN reported.



Passenger oxygen masks hang from the roof next to a missing window and a portion of a side wall of an Alaska Airlines Flight 1282, which had been bound for Ontario, California, and suffered depressurization soon after departing, in Portland, Oregon. REUTERS

Some passengers screamed and cried as a rush of air entered the plane, and oxygen masks dropped from the ceiling, according to CNN.

Nick Hoch, a 33-year-old passenger, called the ordeal "traumatic," "tense" and "jarring" in a phone interview with CNN.

"A mist or cloud whooshed past me that kind of hit me in the face," he said. "People's hair was flying all over the place. I was pretty startled and frightened, and I think other folks were pretty distraught as well."

Hoch said he was sitting on the left side of the plane a couple of rows in front of where the panel blew off. "There were people much closer who I spoke with who lost AirPods out of their ears," he said.

Soon after the portion of the plane blew off, Hoch said people became "remarkably calm" as they sat quietly listening to the flight crew.

Hoch told CNN the flight crew and pilot did a magnificent job. He said they were calming and reassuring. "There were a few frantic passengers, but mostly everybody was calm," he said.

Alaska Airlines temporarily

grounded the rest of its Boeing 737-9 MAX fleet and said it was inspecting the plug doors on all of its jets.

The "plug door" refers to a portion of the plane's fuselage that the manufacturer can put in place instead of an emergency exit door, depending on the configuration requested by an airline.

The FAA said earlier Saturday it was temporarily grounding certain Boeing 737 MAX 9 aircraft operated by US airlines or in US territory until they were inspected. The FAA said the pause would affect about 171 planes worldwide.

Alaska Airlines said it operates 65 of the Boeing aircraft and that it initially grounded all of them. On Saturday, it said it inspected and cleared 18 of its Boeing 737 Max 9 aircraft.

But those planes will remain on the ground after the FAA issued an emergency airworthiness directive, ordering an estimated 171 of the planes grounded pending inspections with specific parameters, Alaska Airlines said on Saturday evening.

The groundings prompted the airline to cancel 160 flights,

affecting an estimated 23,000 passengers, Alaska said.

After the FAA's grounding order, carriers from other countries including Turkey, Mexico and Panama followed suit.

The groundings mark the most severe response since Boeing's entire fleet of MAX aircraft was grounded in 2019 following two deadly crashes.

In October that year, Lion Air Flight 610 crashed just minutes after taking off from Jakarta, Indonesia, killing 189 people.

In March 2019, another MAX, Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302, crashed minutes after takeoff; all 157 people on board died.

Passenger Emma Vu said passengers comforted each other during the ordeal.

"The flight attendant came over, too, and told me it was going to be OK," Vu told CNN. "The fact that everyone was kind of freaking out, and she took that time to kind of make me feel like I was the only passenger — honestly, that was really sweet"

Passengers applauded as the plane landed, a passenger's video showed.

China calls for stabilizing ties with US

Collaboration a must, says top diplomat, highlighting managing of differences

By XU WEI
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China reaffirmed its commitment to building a stable, healthy and sustainable relationship with the United States on Friday, with its top diplomat calling on both sides to assume the vision and role befitting major countries to give the world "rock-solid certainty and positive energy".

Addressing a reception commemorating the 45th anniversary of China-US diplomatic relations, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said bilateral cooperation is "not something dispensable or optional". "It is something we must do, and must do well," he told diplomats, business leaders and scholars attending a ceremony held at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing.

The reception was held days after President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden exchanged congratulatory letters on the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations, with both heads of states pledging to keep advancing the bilateral ties, building on the progress made during their San Francisco summit in November.

Speaking at the reception, Wang underlined peace as the "most fundamental bedrock of China-US relations". "The absence of conflict and confrontation between the two major countries is in itself the most important peace dividend for humanity," he said.

He also stressed that win-win cooperation is the most essential feature of China-US interaction. Trade between the world's two largest economies reached about \$760 billion in 2022, with two-way investment exceeding \$260 billion. The number points to the complementarity between the two nations in economic structure, connectivity in global industrial and supply chains, and shared interest in common development, Wang said.

Wang elaborated on the need for both nations to ensure peaceful coexistence with effective management of disagreements as the top priority. Disagreements between the two nations should not lead to confrontation, still less willful sanctions, power politics, hegemonism or zero-sum game, he stressed.

"What is needed is a vision and an unwavering commitment to seeking common ground while shelving differences and allowing no disagreements or differences to dominate or disrupt the bilateral relationship," he said. Wang also made an appeal for both nations to "remove barriers to exchanges, break false information cocoons, forge closer links between

the two peoples, and generate more positive energy for China-US relations".

Shari Bistransky, deputy public affairs officer of the US Embassy in China, said on the sidelines of the event that she is optimistic that the US and China "are on track to work well together in 2024", as both nations are looking to take advantage of the momentum created by the summit in San Francisco.

"The absence of conflict and confrontation between the two major countries is in itself the most important peace dividend for humanity."

Foreign Minister Wang Yi

Meanwhile, China has already started to implement the pledge by Xi in San Francisco to invite 50,000 young US citizens to China on exchange and study programs in the next five years.

Boris Escalona Berbetty, a program manager at the International Studies Office of the University of Virginia, said students from the university are now setting the stage for the exchange and study programs.

"The reciprocal exchange between both nations is essential not only to develop cultural understanding, but to create a solid foundation for both nations to work together and continue building on this existing relationship," he said.

"We hope that we can continue bringing more students in the years ahead so they can actually take advantage and understand more about Chinese culture."

Yuan Zheng, deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of American Studies, said it could require greater efforts for Beijing and Washington to stabilize ties in 2024, with the US general elections expected to deliver more disruptive factors.

"In this context, scaling up people-to-people exchanges is even more important to build up the foundation and garner greater public support for the stability of China-US relations," he said.

California, China set example for climate collaboration

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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Addressing climate change and air pollution simultaneously delivers significant public health benefits, a new study has found, and California and China, with their ambitious policies and innovative approaches, offer exemplary models for the world to follow.

California, a pioneer in integrating public health into its air and climate policies, serves as a model for incorporating measurable public health indicators into policy and establishing robust monitoring networks, according to a report by the California-China Climate Institute.

Meanwhile, China has emerged as a front-runner in mitigating both air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, simultaneously boasting a comprehensive climate policy framework and a large-scale air quality monitoring system.

"Both jurisdictions provide good examples. Case studies from Los Angeles, Beijing, and Shenzhen shed insights into real-world examples of how cities are considering air quality and climate change in tandem," said Rixin Zhu, co-author of the report and a fellow at California-China Climate Institute.

Case studies from Los Angeles, Beijing, and Shenzhen shed insights into real-world examples of how cities are considering air quality and climate change in tandem."

Rixin Zhu, fellow at California-China Climate Institute

The report revealed synergies between tackling climate change and improving air quality by analyzing policies and programs implemented in California and China.

For example, Los Angeles successfully combines scientific research with policymaking and integrates public health indicators in its air and climate policies. Beijing and Shenzhen are actively devising public health indicators and further controlling air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions

by implementing "coordinated control" policies and carbon markets.

For the best practices implemented in California and China, the report highlights Los Angeles for "effective regional and cross-agency coordination" and the inclusion of "explicit public health motivations" as part of air and climate policy actions.

The examples of Beijing and Shenzhen share lessons of coordinated regional action, as well as the "coordinated control" of air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions, said the researchers.

Sarah Rees, assistant deputy executive officer at the South Coast Air Quality Management District, noted that if green gas emissions can be reduced in Southern California, then the reduced air pollution levels would translate into lower rates of respiratory and cardiovascular diseases.

The report highlights specific success stories from both regions. Los Angeles' "SmartAirLA165" program utilizes asthma tracking technology to monitor cases throughout the city, aiming to reduce pollution and its subsequent hospitalizations.

Similarly, the China Meteorological Administration boasts a vast monitoring network that not only

predicts extreme weather events but also assesses the impact of climate change on weather, air quality, and public health.

Additionally, China is developing a big data platform capable of automatically detecting pollution hot spots and delivering real-time information to enforcement officers, further bolstering its air quality management, according to the report.

Beyond technology, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange between regions is crucial. Researchers emphasized the need for regular exchanges and training programs between California and China to share best practices and lessons learned.

Yifang Zhu, a professor in the environmental health sciences department at the University of California, Los Angeles, underscored the co-benefits of addressing these issues, particularly for vulnerable populations.

She stressed that effective air and climate policies can significantly reduce global mortality and morbidity rates, leading not only to improved health outcomes but also tangible economic gains through reduced healthcare costs and increased productivity.

California's focus on integrating public health into its policies, particularly in disadvantaged communities, has led to more equitable and effective solutions; similarly, China's aggressive pursuit of air pollution and greenhouse gas mitigation is "very commendable," said Zhu.

Looking ahead, prioritizing public health and ensuring equity in climate and air policymaking is essential as both regions undergo unprecedented energy transitions, she said.

Strategically planning infrastructure, like making EV charging stations accessible to all, can guarantee that the benefits of clean energy reach everyone, she added.

"There are tremendous opportunities for California and China to collaborate and share the best practices, technological advancements and policy frameworks to enhance their efforts in improving our ecology and protecting public health," said Zhu.

"By learning from each other's experiences and continuously refining our approach, I think we can cultivate healthier communities and a more resilient population in both countries," she said.

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BUSINESS

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The great 2024 travel rush set to unfold soon

Tourism demand surge around longer festival in Feb seen spurring market recovery

By ZHU WENQIAN
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The Feb 10-17 Spring Festival break in this Year of the Dragon, being longer by a day, will unleash the full potential of China's dynamic travel and consumption markets, given that the Chinese have already indicated their great enthusiasm for holiday journeys in the post-COVID-19 era, experts said.

Anticipating the travel rush, the State Council, China's Cabinet, released holiday arrangements in late October. Since then, online searches for train tickets and domestic and international flight tickets have surged, market sources said.

A longer Spring Festival is expected to have a huge positive impact on the recovery of the tourism market. The holiday will mark the first winter vacation and the first Spring Festival since China resumed group outbound tourism after the pandemic subsided.

Outbound tourism will surpass the levels seen during the summer holiday and the National Day holiday in 2023, industry experts forecast.

"A longer holiday provides enough time for consumers for family reunion, visits to relatives and friends, and travel," said Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy.

"During the holiday, people's budgets for dining, shopping, buying gifts and other expenses are usually relatively high, and this is foreseen to have a significant impact on tourism growth," he said.

In the first three quarters of 2023, Chinese consumers spent 3.69 trillion yuan (\$515 billion) on domestic travel, up more than 114 percent year-on-year, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Some places in China have emerged as popular destinations for the Spring Festival holiday. Sanya and Haikou of the southern island province of Hainan lead the pack, followed by Dali and Xishuang Banna Dai autonomous prefecture in Yunnan province, said Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency.

For outbound travel, Chinese travelers have frequently searched for European destinations such as Spain, Switzerland and France, as well as Australia and New Zealand. The number of inquiries about visa applications to those destinations has climbed, Qunar said.

"For tailored trips, ideas would vary for different spans. On a seven- or eight-day trip, consumers can visit two or three destinations. If it's more than nine days, we will help plan a longer route for travelers," said Yang Guanghui, director of vacation business at Qunar.

Winter in China means demand for ice- and snow-themed trips will be high. At the same time, places where it is summer now, such as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, have caught the attention of Chinese travelers. They are the hot spots for so-called counter-season travel.

Eying demand surge, tourism promotion agencies of different countries have increased efforts to attract Chinese travelers.

South African Tourism said



China's first domestically made large cruise ship, the *Adora Magic City*, carrying 3,023 tourists, embarks on its inaugural commercial voyage at Shanghai Wusongkou International Cruise Terminal on Jan 1. JI HAIXIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Tourists wearing traditional Chinese costumes take pictures at Poyang Ancient Street in Jinhua, Zhejiang province, on Dec 30. SHI BUFA / FOR CHINA DAILY

“During the holiday, people's budgets for dining, shopping, buying gifts and other expenses are usually relatively high, and this is foreseen to have a significant impact on tourism growth.”

Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy

South Africa has one of the largest young populations and tailor-made travel packages for young people in China. Chinese tourists tend to spend more days and travel with groups in South Africa, and the agency would like to engage and cooperate with more tour operators in China.

After the pandemic, the tourism industry has recovered fast in South Africa. In 2023, the country welcomed more than 16 million visitors, of whom 4.2 million came from Africa, and many others came from Europe and the United States. In late 2022, Air China resumed flights connecting Beijing and Johannesburg.

From January to September 2023, about 93,000 Chinese travelers visited South Africa, up 248 percent year-on-year. Besides, Chi-



Tourists in a boat watch an iron flower show across a lake in Hefei, East China's Anhui province, on Dec 30. RUAN XUEFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

nese tourists' average per capita expenditure in South Africa reached 18,518 yuan during the period, according to the China Tourism Academy.

"We also promote traveling in the continent of Africa. We are now promoting package tours to small towns, villages and townships, not just the Table Mountain. We have also got a beer industry that is growing substantially," Patricia de Lille, South Africa's tourism minister, said at a recent event in Beijing.

Meanwhile, the New Zealand Tourism Board has held various activities in China recently to attract more Chinese travelers. New Zealand was among the first group of 20 overseas destinations that China resumed group tours to, and the number of Chinese tourists

visiting New Zealand steadily increased in 2023.

In the first eight months of 2023, some 76,000 Chinese visited New Zealand, and more than half of them went to New Zealand for vacationing. In August last year, New Zealand welcomed about 16,000 Chinese tourists, or 53 percent of the volume seen in the same period of 2019, the last pre-pandemic year, according to the tourism board.

Since December, the direct flights that connect China and New Zealand have fully resumed compared with the pre-COVID-19 period. Six airlines now operate flights connecting key cities in New Zealand and eight cities in China.

Since Dec 1, Malaysia started visa-free policy for Chinese travelers for up to 30 days, as this year

marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and Malaysia. Online searches for Malaysia-related travel products surged in China after the announcement.

In 2019, before the pandemic, more than 3 million Chinese tourists visited Malaysia, accounting for nearly 12 percent of global travelers visiting the country, and contributing nearly 18 percent of total tourism revenues of the country, according to Malaysian government data.

"Malaysia has long been a hot overseas destination for Chinese travelers. The visa-free policy is expected to effectively shorten the decision-making period of tourists and the sales cycle of related travel products," said Fan Dongxiao, director of short-haul outbound tours at Tuniu Corp, a Nanjing, Jiangsu province-based online travel agency.

"The visa-free policy is foreseen to significantly help promote Malaysia's tourism market. Malaysia boasts good island resources and reasonable prices. Compared with domestic island tours, it is cost-effective, hence an advantage," Fan said.

Multiple direct flights connecting Kuala Lumpur and several Chinese cities have either resumed or been launched. Prominent among them are Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, Chengdu in Sichuan province, and Xiamen in Fujian province.

For the upcoming Spring Festival holiday, Malaysia is expected to be a dark horse among Chinese travelers' outbound tourism destinations. The number of Chinese tourists who visit Malaysia may exceed the level of 2019, as long as there are enough number of flights, said Xu Xiaolei, chief brand officer of CYTS Tours Holding Co in Beijing.

Duty-free shops, FTP, luxury boom make Hainan irresistible

REPORTER'S LOG

By Zhu Wenqian

I have visited Hainan province many times for either leisure travel or work. On every occasion, I made it a point to visit the local duty-free shopping malls. Such is the allure of their lower prices (relative to other Chinese mainland cities) that I invariably end up buy-

ing something or another. Else, I'd be overcome with a sense of loss.

A confession like that comes without the fear of being perceived as a shopaholic as I know for certain I'm not alone in this context. Many others, especially young female consumers, have admitted that Hainan's duty-free shops are irresistible.

This trend has spurred the vitality of the offshore duty-free shopping business in Hainan, which has become a golden signboard of local tourism consumption. Affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the

market experienced a slight downturn in 2022. But, since then, it has seen a rapid recovery after China optimized its pandemic response measures in late 2022.

In the January-November period of 2023, total sales revenue of duty-free products in Hainan reached nearly 41 billion yuan (\$5.7 billion), up 26 percent year-on-year. During the period, 6.23 million shoppers made purchases, growing 60 percent year-on-year, according to Hainan Customs.

Last year, the provincial capital Haikou and tropical city Sanya

repeatedly issued duty-free shopping vouchers to stimulate the shopping enthusiasm of tourists visiting the island.

The year-end and various other holidays that follow are traditionally a busy season for shopping in Hainan. Duty-free stores recently launched a range of promotional activities, including new products, experiences, discounts and lucky draws.

By 2025, Hainan is expected to be built into a free trade port. That has already helped the province to attract more businesses. With more

high-quality goods on offer, luxury consumption is expected to grow rapidly in Hainan, said a research report of Guotai Junan Securities.

Louis Vuitton launched its new boutique at the second phase of the duty-free shopping complex in Haitang Bay, Sanya, in late October. The store, which uses the taxable business model, attracted droves of consumers on its opening day.

Meanwhile, two key construction projects in Hainan — the expansion of the third phase of Sanya Phoenix International Airport and the expansion of Qionghai Boao Airport

— started in late November. The projects are foreseen to help guarantee the rapid growth of the island's air travel market.

As Hainan is set to become an entire duty-free island by 2025, it is poised to grow as a bright luxury hub, and Chinese consumers have fueled the Asian luxury ecosystem, said consultancy Bain & Co.

"Looking ahead to 2030, solid fundamentals are poised to continue to drive market growth, despite possible bumps along the route. Chinese customers will account for 35 percent to 40 percent of the personal luxury goods market, while Europeans and Americans together will represent 40 percent," said Claudia D'Arpizio, a Bain & Co partner.

BUSINESS



A ski instructor (right) teaches youngsters at a ski resort in Xiangyang, Hubei province, on Dec 20. YANG TAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Snow-themed travel proves big draw among tourists

Young adventurers show increasing enthusiasm for skiing-related activities

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Revenues from snow-themed travel are forecast to witness rapid growth this winter, as operators offer improved services and consumers indicate increased enthusiasm for hitting the slopes following the country's optimized COVID-19 response measures.

Since the holding of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympic Games, teenagers and young children have shown a greater interest in skiing-related activities.

Chinese people born in the 1990s and after the year 2000 are the main groups of skiers, according to Nanjing, Jiangsu province-based online travel agency Tuniu.

The number of bookings for skiing-related services made by these two age groups put together accounts for 60 percent of the total such bookings, and the number of children who have gone skiing with their parents is on the rise, Tuniu said.

Eyeing the trend of Chinese consumers' higher enthusiasm for ski-

ing, Swiss luxury watchmaker IWC Schaffhausen organized a day on the slopes for young skiers in early December.

The company's brand ambassador, freestyle skier Eileen Gu, showed children how to improve their skiing skills at the Genting Snow Park in Zhangjiakou, Hebei province, during the event.

IWC said it was the second skiing class it had held with Gu in 2023, after hosting one in Colorado, the United States, earlier in the year.

This reflects the company's commitment to helping children believe in themselves through sports, it said.

"We strongly believe sport is important for the integration of children. It unites them, gives them confidence and can help them feel good about themselves. So, it means a lot to us to be able to create environments where children can experience the fun and joy of sport," said Franziska Gsell, chief marketing officer of IWC.

China is one of the most dynamic luxury markets for the company and IWC is confident about its

operations in the country, it said.

During the ongoing skiing season, there has been high demand for skiing-related activity from residents in Shanghai, Beijing, Nanjing, and Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, Tuniu found.

The widespread popularity of ice and snow sports and the emergence of indoor ski resorts and snow parks have enabled people from the southern regions of China to experience skiing-related activities at any time of the year, it said.

Popular domestic destinations for snowboarders include Northeast China, Yunnan province, Guizhou province and the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Overseas destinations for ice and snow trips have also caught the attention of Chinese travelers.

Some sought-after destinations include Finland, Switzerland, Denmark, Norway and Iceland.

Tuniu said all of its group tours to Finland in November and December were sold out, and some travelers have even booked trips for March.

In addition, young Chinese consumers have been attracted to high-end hot springs in the winter season.

In designing its domestic group-tour products, Tuniu said it combines the preferences of travelers and the advantages of destinations, while also adding hot spring resorts or hot spring-themed hotels in its itineraries.

"An increasing number of Chinese consumers are no longer satisfied with traditional hot spring experiences, and they are seeking more diversified, personalized and high-quality hot spring vacation products," said Qi Chunguang, vice-president of Tuniu.

Moreover, the accelerated recovery of the outbound tourism market and supply of increasingly premium products has meant that bookings of overseas hot spring tours by Chinese travelers are also climbing.

In November, the number of bookings for outbound hot spring tours accounted for 15 percent of the total orders for overseas tours, Tuniu found.

Hot springs in a number of Japanese cities such as Nagoya and Hakone have received good bookings, while some unique hot spring experiences in Iceland, Switzerland, Thailand and Türkiye have also seen significant increases in bookings, said the travel agency.

Key meeting outlines tasks for 2024 rural development

BEIJING — In a tone-setting meeting that concluded on Dec 20, China specified moves and tasks to advance rural revitalization across the board and boost the modernization of the countryside in 2024.

High on the agenda of the Central Rural Work Conference were the issues of food security, the livelihoods of rural residents and technological development of the agricultural sector.

Securing rice bowls

With safe and stable food supply being a major concern of the country's rural work, the annual conference highlighted the production of grain and key agricultural products, vowing to stabilize farmland acreage and increase grain yields per unit.

Grain output of more than 650 billion kilograms continues to be a target this year, together with strengthened efforts in farmland protection, according to the meeting.

It was no easy task for China to achieve the 650 billion kg goal in 2023 and to guarantee the supply of key agricultural products, as the country had been confronted with adverse weather conditions including floods, drought and prolonged rain in parts of the country.

"The foundation of food security must be consolidated, as the consumption upgrade momentum of China's large population has driven up food demand, and the global trade in agricultural products still faces uncertainties," said Qian Qian, an academician with the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

The meeting has underscored concrete measures such as prioritizing high-standard farmland construction in areas with black soil, plain fields and irrigation systems, and raising investment subsidies.

Zhong Yu, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, said the measures outlined by the annual meeting will steadily improve the country's food production capacity, citing the role of agricultural infrastructure in countering disasters.

Revitalizing sector

Since fully implementing rural

revitalization is vital to the country's agricultural sector, the rural work meeting stressed enhanced and more targeted efforts to revitalize the rural sector, said Li Guoxiang, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The country should continue with quality and green development, and promote relevant industries to boost the rural sector, the meeting noted.

Diversified rural industries are also conducive to consolidating the country's poverty alleviation achievements and avoiding a large-scale relapse into poverty.

Mao Xuefeng, vice-dean of the School of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development, Renmin University of China, said more funds must be channeled into less-developed regions to boost local pillar industries and upgrade traditional industry.

Official data showed that in the first three quarters of 2023, the per capita disposable income of rural residents reached 15,705 yuan (\$2,193), up 7.3 percent in real terms after deducting price factors, 2.6 percentage points higher than that of urban residents.

"Underdeveloped areas should create more employment opportunities locally, increase the training of the labor force, and transform unskilled labor into skilled labor to meet the needs of industrial upgrading," Mao said.

Sci-tech breakthroughs

In recent years, China has steadily improved its sci-tech innovation ability in the agricultural sector, with the contribution rate of science and technology to the sector's development reaching 62.4 percent.

The meeting outlined key measures including building a sci-tech innovation platform for the sector, and launching a series of actions to enhance the seed industry.

Regarding the seed industry, Qian urged improvements in the sharing and cooperation of innovative resources, and stepping up the integration of innovation, industry, funds and talent.

XINHUA



Rice is harvested in Daoxian county, Hunan province, on Oct 14. JIANG KEQING / XINHUA

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PRESERVE BIODIVERSITY.**

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BUSINESSINSIGHT

Policy can drive 2024 economic transformation

EAGLE EYE

By E Zhihuan

The global economic landscape is projected to witness low growth, moderate inflation and high US interest rates this year.

This is set to accelerate the restructuring of global industrial chains.

In response to external uncertainties, China should be better prepared by expediting economic transformation and elevating the role of consumption in driving growth.

A long-term vision involves a gradual shift from commodity exports to capital output, increasing the scale and efficiency of the country's foreign investments to elevate the gross national product and gross domestic product, which will lead to an enhanced perception of economic growth among the people.

External demand

Witnessing significant changes in export structures, external demand faced pressure in 2023.

Against a pronounced transition in the old and new drivers within the foreign trade sector, China should attach more importance to three key aspects this year.

In terms of global economic and financial trends, the world is expected to witness an impending shift from higher interest rates this year.

Projections from financial institutions across the world suggest that the US Federal Reserve might initiate interest rate cuts in the latter half of 2024 — ranging between 80 and 120 basis points.

The primary triggers for rate reductions are economic deceleration and controlled inflation, potentially resulting in weaker external demand from the United States and Europe.

In addition, ongoing geopolitical tensions and major-power competitions will continue to steer structural adjustments in China's foreign trade.

Following the Russia-Ukraine conflict, China's major export destinations are shifting away from the US and Europe toward the Association of Southeast Asian Nations member states and other emerging economies.

Partners involved in the Belt and Road Initiative and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership are also witnessing increased prominence in China's export landscape.

Advancements in global green and low-carbon transformation have also posed challenges to export performance.

Considering China's current export structure, the imminent introduction of carbon tariffs by the European Union may increase tariff burdens on China's exports to Europe.

Consequently, this year will see certain external pressures on Chi-



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

na's foreign trade, where more policy measures to alleviate those will be quickly needed.

Infrastructure investment

Investment in infrastructure plays a pivotal role in driving China's economic recovery.

As the current fiscal policy has shown effectiveness in stimulating and expanding overall social investment, fiscal policy will continue to be a vital force in propelling high single-digit growth in infrastructure investment this year, further bolstering the nation's economic recovery.

During that process, structural challenges in real estate investment cannot be overlooked. Real estate investment constitutes a significant part of fixed-asset investment, and challenges arising from the bubble in the real estate sector call for urgent resolution.

Currently, policies supporting urban-village renovation and the construction of affordable housing have been introduced to mitigate risks. These will help drive investments in the real estate sector to a certain degree.

What's more, the effect of industrial chain relocation on investments and foreign capital flows into China also merits attention.

Since the beginning of the US-China trade conflicts in 2018, the global industrial chain has witnessed fragmentation and relocation, which was also accelerated to some extent by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Developed economies, including the US and Europe, also encourage reinvestment within their borders and diversification of industrial chains. As a result, this year, these factors will remain challenges for China in drawing in foreign investments, which will influence global industrial chain adjustments.

The ongoing shifts in the global industrial chain, accelerated by the US-China trade conflicts and the pandemic, continue to affect China's investments and foreign capital utilization.

Multinational corporations are restructuring supply chains globally, and China's response should involve not only strategic considerations to attract and optimize foreign investments, but also increasing investments in overseas markets, especially those involved in the BRI.

Consumption factor

Compared to investment and net exports, consumption's contribu-

tion to China's GDP growth has become increasingly pronounced.

In the first three quarters of 2023, GDP grew 5.2 percent year-on-year, with final consumption expenditure accounting for a significant contribution rate of 94.8 percent in the third quarter.

Policy dividends such as income growth and tax reductions have expanded the space for consumption upgrade, providing a favorable environment for the rise of emerging consumer groups.

The rapid rise of emerging consumer groups and accelerated pace of new urbanization are also accumulating strength in the consumer market. Sustained efforts to increase resident incomes and nurture consumption capabilities remain crucial to expanding domestic demand.

Macro policy

The annual tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference, which was held in December, emphasized the need to intensify fiscal policies for increased efficacy, calling for the maintenance of strong fiscal expenditure while optimizing the combination of deficits, special bonds and interest subsidies.

The meeting called for efforts to pursue progress while ensuring sta-

bility, consolidate stability through progress and establish the new before abolishing the old.

Driving economic growth through fiscal policies usually requires a consideration of various factors.

Before 2014, the narrow fiscal deficit ratio and the broad deficit ratio remained essentially consistent.

However, the gap between the two indicators has widened since 2015. The broad deficit ratio almost doubled that of the other in 2020.

Although the gap has since narrowed, there is potential for a significant increase in the broad deficit ratio this year. Therefore, alongside monitoring the narrow deficit ratio, attention must be paid to the constraints posed by the broad deficit ratio, which may to some extent limit the space for fiscal policies to drive economic growth.

In terms of monetary policy, it is anticipated that there is still ample room for reducing the reserve requirement ratio this year, enabling the release of more liquidity to support economic growth.

However, it is crucial to note that interest rate adjustments must consider the issue of the inverted China-

US interest rate spread.

Although China's nominal interest rates are currently lower than those of the US, its real interest rate level, adjusted for inflation, is higher than that of the US.

The inverted spread has exerted significant pressure on the renminbi's exchange rate.

If the Fed reduces interest rates by 80 to 100 basis points in the second half this year, there may be a larger policy space for nominal interest rate adjustments.

Therefore, coherence and logical consistency between different macro policies are crucial to enhancing policy effectiveness.

To avoid conflicting policies, policymakers should push forward coordination and mutual cooperation while introducing policies, and bring new dynamics to the Chinese economy.

It is also essential to pay close attention to market responses to these policies.

The writer is chief economist at Bank of China (Hong Kong).

The article is a translation of the writer's speech at a monthly seminar of the China Macroeconomy Forum, a think tank in Beijing. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Ruling in Oppo vs Nokia addresses patent royalties row

MAIN STREET

By John Gong

In a recent landmark ruling, the Chongqing Intermediate People's Court established a set of global FRAND (fair, reasonable and nondiscriminatory) royalty rates for SEP (standard essential patent) licensing for cellular handsets in Oppo vs Nokia. Regarding the 5G standard, \$0.707 per unit was designated for Nokia SEPs for China and other developing economies, and \$1.151 per unit for developed economies.

This ruling has a profound impact in that this is the first time for a Chinese court to make an SEP ruling on royalty rates in the cellular communications industry, imparting global implications, and particularly so in the wake of wide applications of 5G technologies in internet of things, autos and other industries, that can potentially provide a much expand-

ed royalty base for 5G SEP licensing.

While most analysts hail this professionally delivered ruling, there has been some criticism from abroad, particularly regarding the superficial observation of a discounted rate in China. For example, a patent lawyer in New York, Mark Cohen, wrote recently: "Establishing a lower royalty rate for one set of countries as compared to another without a basis in patent law violates China's obligations to provide most favored nation treatment to the party asserting the patents, by providing lower damages in certain countries. Chinese courts should not treat one country more favorably than any other in its courts."

As an economic expert retained by Oppo throughout this lawsuit, I would like to address this territory-based discount issue in this article. First, the court's ruling is over royalties and royalty rates; they are not "damages". There is no negligence claim, nor damage claim in this suit. If Cohen bothers to read the verdict carefully, he should understand that. Second, the assertion that the royalty discount vio-

lates China's WTO MFN commitment is totally absurd in that the royalty discount is not about paying a foreign licensor less compared to a domestic licensor, nor about a lesser amount to be paid by a domestic licensee compared to a foreign licensee. It is about differential treatment of countries, economies and territories where the royalty base originates. In fact, this ruling of differentiated royalty rates could also equally apply to, say Huawei as a licensor, collecting royalties here in China and, say, Apple as a licensee, that stands to pay royalties here in China. Nokia and Huawei are not treated differently, and nor are Oppo and Apple. So the whole discount issue has nothing to do with the WTO's MFN doctrine.

Now the practice of the territory-based discount provisions is not a Chinese court invention at all. In fact, this is a widely accepted practice in the industry that can be traced back to Western court rulings, such as TCL vs Ericsson in the United States and Unwired Planet vs Huawei in the

United Kingdom. In Huawei vs Conversant in Nanjing, China, the court also accepted royalty discount based on territories. And further, in an administrative ruling regarding Qualcomm by China's competition authority, there also exists the territory-based discount. Based on my calculations, these four precedents average an approximate 60 percent discount for developing economies, certainly including China, which is in line with the discount rate prescribed by the Chongqing Intermediate People's Court this time.

Providing territory-based discounts is also a widely observed industry practice. As far as I know, Nokia's own rounds of offerings to Oppo during the royalty negotiation stage before they eventually see each other in court also contain provisions of territory-based discounts, as witnessed in the judge's verdict (page 57), citing a report submitted by Nokia's own expert witness.

From an economic perspective, there is a fundamental reason why territory-based discounts are justi-

fied and have been recognized by previous judicial and administrative rulings. This has to do with the widely accepted affordability argument that developing countries' lower income levels deserve to be taken into consideration when it comes to sharing the costs of investment returns for developing technologies reflected in SEP filings. More importantly, this also has to do with the patent intensity variation argument that hinges on the fact that more of the same SEP patents are filed in developed countries vis-a-vis developing countries. Royalties are usually collected in a country for the simple fact that a licensor has registered patents in that country. For example, Nokia files patents simultaneously in the US, in the EU, in China and presumably in some other less-developed economies as well, in order to collect royalties in these territories. But it is a well-established empirical observation that the number of patents filed in China and other developing economies is smaller than that in the EU, which provides the legal foundation for a discounted rate in China and other less-developed territories.

However, the actual ruling pro-

vides a more nuanced and balanced picture that actually works in Nokia's favor. The court's ruling, as a common practice, divides the global market into three rate territories, in which not all countries have relevant Nokia patents, or a significant number of patents comparable to China, but nevertheless Oppo still has to pay. That means it is quite likely that Nokia is actually collecting royalties in countries where it doesn't have any relevant 5G SEPs. For example, Oppo realizes some sales, maybe a few thousand handset sales per year in a small country in Africa, where Nokia has no patents at all. Nevertheless, Oppo is still paying royalties for these sales.

In conclusion, the Chongqing Intermediate People's Court's ruling is a well-thought, professionally delivered ruling. In particular, the territory-based discount aspect of the ruling adheres to common industry practices and will stand the test of time.

The writer is a professor at the University of International Business and Economics and VP — research and strategy at UIBE-Israel. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA MARVELS

The Hotan-Ruoqiang railway, which was put into operation on June 16, 2022 stretches eastward from Hotan prefecture to Ruoqiang county in Bayingolin Mongol autonomous prefecture along the southern edge of the Taklimakan, the world's second-largest shifting sand desert, with 65 percent of its length within the desert.



ENGINEERING CHALLENGE: TRAVERSING THE DUNES

GREEN SHIELD

The barrier of shrubs and trees not only helps guarantee the safe passage of the trains, but also improves the ecological system.

Sand barriers made of wooden planks have been built and taller trees have been planted along the outer areas of the green belt to reduce wind speeds.

Shrubs have been planted along the inner areas of the railway to fix the sand problem.

TWO SOLUTIONS

GREEN CORRIDOR

To offer protection to the sections deemed most at harm from sand, nearly 50 million square meters of grass grids and 13 million shrubs and tree seedlings were planted.

RAILWAY BRIDGE

Bridges were built over areas prone to sandstorms, allowing the sand to pass underneath and minimizing the sand impact on the trains and tracks.

The train has one 25K type engine and 17 wagons.

SAND BARRIER

Barriers arranged in zigzagging patterns help prevent sand carried by the wind from getting near the green belt and railway.



IRRIGATION SYSTEM

Drip-irrigation taps are placed in the sand. They regularly irrigate the plants with underground water, thanks to an automatic, intelligent water-saving irrigation system.

THE TREES

Saxaul, red willow and calligonum were planted to try and prevent the sand from shifting.



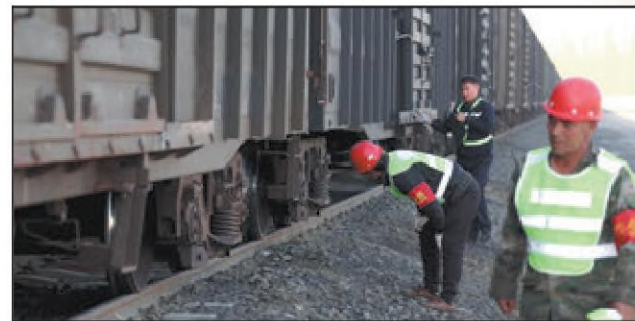
Elevated ideas overcome sand and wind problems

By CUI JIA in Hotan, Xinjiang

With 65 percent of its length located within Taklimakan — the world's second-largest shifting-sand desert in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region — sand control became the greatest challenge to construction and maintenance of the Hotan-Ruoqiang railway, workers said. "We had to come up with innovative solutions to overcome those difficulties and such experiences have become great assets for us to build railways in even harsher natural environments," said Pu Rulin, manager of the Hotan-Ruoqiang Railway Company, which is responsible for construction of the railway. "Taklimakan is a shifting desert. It is estimated that low sand dunes can move up to 20 meters each year. Frequent sandstorms have also posed a serious threat to the railway since its construction started in December 2018. "We decided to build green belts simultaneously with railway construction, which has proved successful in preventing sands reaching the railway since it was put into operation more than a year ago," Pu said, adding that train services

have so far been running smoothly. A total of 50 million square meters of straw grids have been laid and 13 million trees, including red willow and calligonum desert scrub, have been planted along the 825-kilometer line, according to China Railway. Li Delun, a member of the team maintaining the green belts who is based at Qiemo station in Bayingolin Mongol autonomous prefecture, said the trees have survived and are growing well. "If we had planted them after the railway was built, they wouldn't have been strong enough to protect the railway tracks," he said. Wooden sand barriers have also been built while taller trees planted along the outer areas of the green belt to reduce wind speeds. Shrubs have been planted along the inner areas of the railway line to address the sand problem, Li said. He Baoqing, head of the railway maintenance team at Qiemo station, said the rail track will lose its elasticity if too much sand gets underneath it. "The problem can make the railway unsafe, so sand control measures are crucial for the Hotan-Ruoqiang railway." In areas where there are bigger sand dunes and stronger winds, five bridges

with a total length of 49.7 km have been built to allow the desert to move underneath and keep the elevated track safe. Instead of making the bridge piers on site, they were prefabricated and later assembled. It was the first time that this technique was used to build railway bridges. A total of 434 such bridge piers were built, Pu said. "Prefabricating the concrete piers saved the construction team the trouble of transporting water into the remote desert to mix concrete, and also reduced the impact of sandstorms on their construction," Pu said. "We have done many experiments to finalize the procedure, which has now been standardized and can be used in other rail projects." More than a year on, the sand control measures have helped to ensure the safe operation of the railway and the safety of the passengers, Pu said. "More railways will be built in Xinjiang, and we are now busy preparing for our next project, which can be even tougher. But the Hotan-Ruoqiang railway has made us confident in taking on more challenging tasks." Mao Weihua contributed to this story.



From top: Railway workers prepare to unload freight at Hotan station in Xinjiang. Workers conduct their daily patrol of green belts in Qiemo, Xinjiang. PHOTOS BY FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Editor's note: Improved infrastructure, policy support and funding in areas with large populations of different ethnic groups have transformed people's lives. China Daily presents a series of stories about how China is determined to leave no ethnic group behind in the country's development, while inspiring them to embark on a new journey and make achievements in the new era. This article is the first installment, focusing on transportation in Xinjiang. It is also the ninth installment in a series of visual stories that highlight the important points on China's path to modernization.

Travel, business bloom from desert railway

By CUI JIA in Hotan, Xinjiang
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Gulbar Herem enjoyed sitting by the window while taking the train back to her home in Qira county, Hotan prefecture, because she found the passing view of huge sand dunes breathtaking and surreal. Outside the window, the Taklimakan Desert in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region flashed by as the train made its way along the railway tracks. "We are actually traveling through the desert that is literally called 'the place with no return.' I still cannot believe it's even possible," Gulbar said, while taking her cellphone out to capture the moment the train passed a stretch of poplar trees brightening the desert with their golden leaves and creating a picturesque autumn landscape against the blue sky. It was only when a crew member of the 5817 train service operating from the regional capital of Urumqi to Hotan reminded her that the train would soon arrive at her destination, that she realized the Qira people's dream of having a train service at their doorstep was now a reality. Their lives immediately changed when the railway opened on June 16, 2022. The Hotan-Ruoqiang railway stretches eastward from Hotan to Ruoqiang county in the Bayingolin Mongol autonomous prefecture along the southern edge of the Taklimakan, the world's second-largest shifting sand desert. About 65 percent of the railway is within the desert. The 825-kilometer section also completed the 2,712-km-long Taklimakan Desert rail loop, making it the first desert rail loop in the world. The opening of the line, which is a key national railway project, brought train serv-



Gulbar Herem and her child take the train to Qira county, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

ces to five counties — Qira, Lop, Yutian, Minfeng and Qiemo in southern Xinjiang — and shortened the travel time for locals. Before the new railway opened, to get to Urumqi from Hotan people had to use the train service that travels along the northern edge of the Taklimakan and takes about 34 hours. Now, they don't need to make such lengthy detours. With a designated speed of 120 km per hour, the traveling time has been cut by about 10 hours. For Gulbar, a schoolteacher, her journey to Qira only took about 20 hours. "The Hotan-Ruoqiang railway has been the talk of the town since its construction started in December 2018. And people including me have been closely following the progress of the news. Now, it has become an important part of our lives," she said.

Wider horizons

As Gulbar got on, the train was soon packed again. Many people were wearing colorful traditional Uygur customs and carrying naan bread and roasted mutton. The aroma of the food quickly filled the train car. A lot of the travelers told train conductor Zhao Hong, who was busily helping them find their seats, that they were taking the train to visit relatives in another county. More and more people have started to take short train trips to other counties because it's convenient and cheap, Zhao said. "We didn't expect to see the new service be this popular. Many people are taking the train for the first time in their lives as train services have just become available in their home counties. You can see the excitement in their eyes," she said. "They even bring us gifts such as walnuts and mutton to show how happy they are about the new railway that they've always wanted." Akbar Tunson, a passenger from Lop aged in his 40s, said the new line has cut travel costs for locals and made the journey much safer. Before the train service became available in

Lop, people often chose to take a long-distance bus to Urumqi, which cost about 500 (\$70) to 600 yuan. The cheapest train ticket is only about 170 yuan and, Akbar said, people no longer need to worry about road accidents. "Now, people in Lop can easily travel elsewhere by train to find new opportunities or just go sightseeing in other places. In fact, the new line isn't only about adding a way of traveling, it has made people, especially young people, see China's determination to develop Xinjiang," Akbar said. Abdulret Abdulhabbar, also from Lop, took the train back home after visiting Urumqi for the first time. "I finally decided to travel to Urumqi with my friends because the new train service is fast and comfortable," the 21-year-old said. "I'd love to travel more in the future because I can see more new things."

Language access

Izak Memet joined the railway maintenance team at Qiemo station in December 2022. He said even people like his parents, who aren't fluent in standard Chinese, are confident enough to take the train because a Uygur-language service is available for ticket inquiries and on the train. "My parents, who didn't like to travel before, have now become the train's loyal passengers. They often hop on the train to Korla city and Urumqi on a whim to meet their friends. It's hard to locate them these days," the 24-year-old shrugged and said. As Abdulret got off the train at Lop station, he said he hoped more people would visit the county, which has much to offer including traditional Uygur cuisine and cultural heritage sites. "Getting to Lop has become easier than ever. I am sure people will have a good time there." More travelers have already made trips to the five counties after they were connected by China's railway network. "It's obvious that more people, including tourists, came to Qiemo in the summer. And many of them came by train," Izak said at Qiemo station. In the past, people could only reach Qiemo by road or air, and services were often suspended for days at a time because of sandstorms, Izak said. "In contrast, train services are very stable. There have been a few strong sandstorms since I got here, but no train service was canceled."

Desert attractions

Izak added that he's surprised to see how popular the Hotan-Ruoqiang railway is with tourists. "Many of them just come to see what it feels like to travel through the Taklimakan on a moving train, after many people shared their experiences on social media," he said. A tourist from Guangdong province surnamed Zhang said he made local friends on the train while traveling from Ruoqiang to Yutian. "I may have skipped Yutian if the train service wasn't available there. In fact, my plan is to travel around southern Xinjiang by rail because the Taklimakan rail loop has been completed." Zhang said he didn't expect the train to be full, but it gave him opportunities to connect with the locals during his eight-hour journey. "They are so friendly. And I've learned to



From top: Passengers have their tickets checked as they walk out of the Qiemo station in Xinjiang. Visitors enjoy traditional Uygur dance in Hotan, Xinjiang, after the opening of the railway facilitated the further development of local tourism. PHOTOS BY FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

speak some basic Uygur language from them. I believe I can order lamb skewers in fluent Uygur from now on," he said. According to China Railway Urumqi Group, one year after the Hotan-Ruoqiang railway was put into service, more than 390,000 passengers have traveled on it. Deng Yuhue, deputy manager of Hotan station, said the station has become more crowded, especially during traditional Uygur festivals. "It's a good thing because it's proved that the new railway has been greatly welcomed by the local people and tourists," Deng said. "As the majority of passengers onboard the trains on the Hotan-Ruoqiang railway are local people from the Uygur ethnic group, we've stepped up the Uygur-language service to provide better guidance," he added.

Economic benefits

Besides making traveling on the southern edge of the Taklimakan more convenient, the Hotan-Ruoqiang railway has also boosted the efficiency of logistic services and put local economic development on the fast track. According to the China Railway Urumqi Group, as of mid-June, nearly 900,000 metric tons of goods had been delivered by freight trains via the new railway. By linking with the railway between Ruoqiang and Golmud, Qinghai province, the Hotan-Ruoqiang railway has also created another freight route connecting southern Xinjiang with other parts of China. Gao Mingli, manager of the freight service at Hotan station, said the new railway has greatly boosted the efficiency of shipping goods from other parts of the country to Hotan. "In the past, all freight trains to Hotan had to travel on the southern edge of the Taklimakan. As the route is busy, there are often delays that create uncertainty in the trains' arrival times," said Gao, while inspecting a train that had just arrived at the freight service center carrying chemical fertilizers and photovoltaic panels.

Dream service

Luo Jie, who works in the financial sector in Beijing, took a selfie on the platform after train service 5817 arrived at Hotan station. He placed a journey on the Hotan-Ruoqiang railway on his Xinjiang must-do list after seeing a documentary about the efforts put into building the last section of the Taklimakan rail loop, which was played on screen on the high-speed train from Shanghai to Beijing, he said. "Waking up in the sleeping berth, I am astounded to find the train making its way through the Taklimakan. The sand dunes on both sides are like waves in the ocean, and it almost feels like I am traveling on a ship," Luo said. He added that besides enjoying the unique views, he also talked to some local people on the train, and they all said that the railway had brought hope and prosperity to the southern edge of the Taklimakan. "I suddenly realize that although the top speed of the train on the Hotan-Ruoqiang railway is only about a third of the high-speed train from Shanghai to Beijing, they are equally remarkable," Luo said.

PIER INSTALLATION

Piers less than 12 meters tall were made in designated manufacturing areas near the railway link and then shipped to the construction site.

Piers taller than 12 meters were assembled from two separate sections, which were connected by reinforced iron bars running through holes.

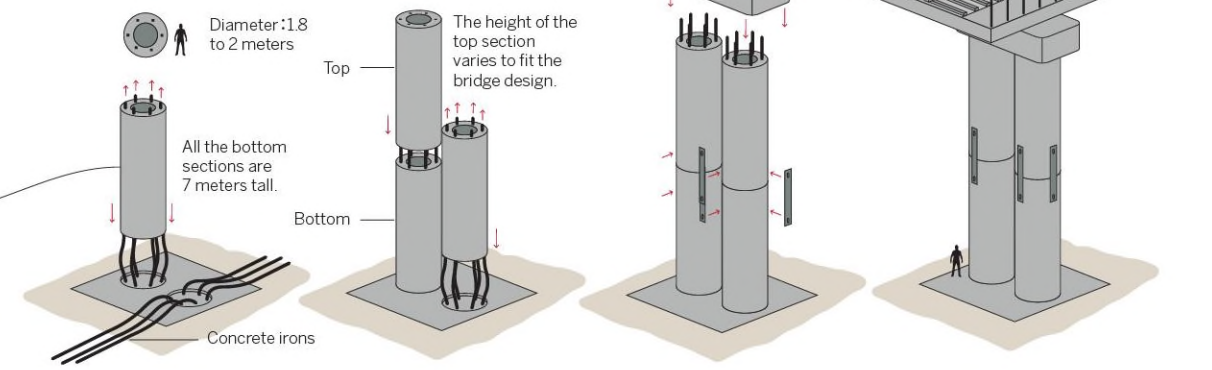
A total of 434 bridge piers were assembled on site.

THE BRIDGE

To avoid the risk of sand, engineers designed five long railway bridges. The bridge piers can reach up to 35 meters.

Prefabricated bridge piers

It's the first time that this technique has been used to build railway bridges in China.



Online See more by scanning the code. TEXT BY CUI JIA / GRAPHIC BY JORGE CORTEZ LUNA/LEI HAO ZHANG CHENGJIANG / CHINA DAILY

CHINA

Former Liaoning police leaders admit corrupt behavior in TV series

By YANG ZEKUN
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In a television series that began airing over the weekend, three consecutive heads of the Liaoning Provincial Public Security Department discussed how they had engaged in corruption from 2002 to 2022, accepting bribes collectively exceeding 1.2 billion yuan (\$170 million).

The three abused their authority, interfered with judicial and law enforcement proceedings, colluded with unscrupulous business owners and, in one case, even sold official job positions.

The four-episode anti-corruption special began airing on CCTV-1 on Saturday night, with the first episode titled *Resolving Unique Challenges*, and will conclude on Tuesday.

Jointly produced by the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the National Commission of Supervision and China Central Television, the series aims to strengthen political supervision, uphold strict Party governance, enhance the Party's discipline and deepen the fight against corruption.

In a jaw-dropping account during the first episode, Wang Dawei, former deputy governor of Liaoning and former head of the province's public security department, vividly recounted accepting a single bribe amounting to 40 million yuan and \$4 million in cash.

Wang, who led the Liaoning police department between 2013 and 2022, was placed under investigation in March 2022. He recalled telling investigators that he struggled to drive his car up the slope of a parking garage because he was hauling 22 cardboard boxes filled with cash at the time.

He ultimately accepted over 555 million yuan during his term.

"Looking back, I was truly insane at that time," Wang said. "I caused serious damage to the political ecosystem of the local public security system and bear the main responsibility. I should receive legal punishment, the most severe punishment. I deserve the blame."

Wang pleaded guilty in court in October and is awaiting sentencing.

His two predecessors, Li Wenxi and Xue Heng, were also placed under investigations in 2021.

Li served in the province's police departments at various levels for over 40 years and ultimately served as the provincial department chief from 2002 to 2011.

He accepted bribes of over 541 million yuan, with the majority coming from the owner of an iron ore mine asked Li to help him avoid serious punishment for his involvement in illegal mining. In return, the owner gave Li 30 percent of the shares of another iron ore mine, and Li arranged for his brother-in-law to be the nominal shareholder.

"It's a sort of betrayal, because I was in charge of fighting crime and punishing criminals. I deeply regret this," Li said.

In January last year, Li was sentenced to death with a two-year reprieve, deprived of his political rights for life and had all his personal property confiscated. After the two-year suspension, his sentence will be commuted to life

imprisonment with no possibility of parole or commutation.

Li also set a bad example for Xue, his successor.

In 2005, while serving as head of the Liaoning Provincial Civil Affairs Department, Xue approached Li to seek leniency for a business owner involved in an extortion case.

"I was worried that Li might not want to help me, but Li was quite cooperative and helped resolve the matter," Xue said.

Xue took over Li's position in 2011. During his two years in office, he received money and property totaling 135 million yuan.

Xue also abused his position and helped business owners resolve their legal matters, set up business operations and obtain projects. He was found guilty of accepting bribes and engaging in corruption and was sentenced last month to 17 years in prison.

Wang replaced Xue in 2013. Though Wang had once been involved in corruption before, he said he was still shocked to discover just how pervasive it was in the department upon assuming office.

Wang recalled that even deputy department heads in the same building would send him money during Chinese New Year.

Nearly half of the over 555 million yuan in bribes that Wang accepted was gifted by Liu Zhongtian, the actual controller of Liaoning Zhongwang Group. Once the largest aluminum extrusion producer in Asia, Zhongwang is now seeking bankruptcy protection.

In 2017, the company's illegal capital outflows were uncovered, and Liu sought Wang's assistance. Having heard of Liu's extravagant behavior, Wang handled the case lightly. After closing the case, he met Liu and implied that Liu should bribe him.

"I intentionally made him appreciate me, because I helped him get out of a huge amount of trouble," Wang said.

Liu initially offered Wang 40 million yuan and \$4 million in cash. Later, Liu gifted Wang an additional HK\$200 million in four installments in Macao.

In 2019, the Ministry of Public Security transferred tip-offs about Zhongwang's wrongdoings to the Liaoning Provincial Public Security Department for investigation. However, Wang promptly informed Liu about the investigation and instructed investigative agencies to hold off.

By 2020, the company's huge debt had caused major financial risks in the region, but Wang was still trying to shield Liu and help him stave off the company's collapse.

Li, Xue and Wang also helped others procure jobs. Wang even openly sold official positions, promoting individuals recommended by business owners.

"It made people feel that they needed to rely on relationships with these business owners to advance their careers. The impact is very serious," Wang said.

In 2021 alone, six members of the Party Committee of the Liaoning Provincial Public Security Department, who worked alongside Wang, faced investigations. In total, 43 senior public security and legal-related officials in the province were investigated.



Festival gifts

Two migrant worker couples receive framed photographs of themselves at the construction site they work at in Hefei, Anhui province, on Saturday. The construction company also presented them with Spring Festival couplets and festive gadgets.

LIU BINGSHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Key sectors to remain targets of nation's anti-graft efforts

Progress seen, but more needs to be done to ensure China's well-being, security

By YANG ZEKUN
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Sectors with a high concentration of power, funds and resources will continue to be the focal point of anti-corruption efforts, even as significant progress has been made in effectively curbing industrial and systemic corruption risks in the past year, experts said.

Last year, the website of the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection and the National Commission of Supervision disclosed that 45 officials under the management of the Organization Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee were placed under disciplinary review and supervisory investigation. Among them were leaders at State-owned enterprises and in various sectors, including finance.

Chen Xuequan, a law professor at the University of International Business and Economics, stressed that the focus on key sectors is crucial in the nation's ongoing efforts to fight corruption and ensure strict governance over the Party.

Sectors such as finance, political and legal affairs, grain procurement and sales, and healthcare are vital for the nation's well-being and security, and require decisive action due to the concentration of funds and resources, making them prone to corruption, he said.

The goal of anti-graft in these fields is not only to uncover corruption and punish individuals but to identify and address the deep-rooted issues leading to corruption, including eliminating systemic loopholes, strengthening anti-corruption measures and promoting a culture of integrity to safeguard the high-quality development of these sectors, he said.

A communique issued after the second plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Commu-

nist Party of China in January last year provided clear directives on the key issues and targets of the anti-corruption work.

It announced a resolute crackdown on corruption combining political and economic issues. It emphasized intensified efforts to combat corruption in key areas and deepen rectification in State-owned enterprises and sectors with concentrated power, intensive capital and abundant resources such as finance, political and legal affairs, and grain procurement and sales.

The third plenary session of the CCDI is scheduled to be held from Monday to Wednesday in Beijing.

In addition, the CCDI and NCS assisted the CPC Central Committee in formulating the Central Anti-Corruption Coordination Group Work Plan (2023-27), which was released in September, further clarifying the key problems and targets of anti-corruption, aiming to expand the depth and breadth of the work.

An article on the CCDI and NCS website said that, starting with the investigation and handling of key cases, discipline inspection and supervision authorities should focus on exploring the common characteristics and causes of systemic corruption within the aforementioned industries.

The authorities should adhere to the integrated approach of ensuring officials don't dare to, are unable to and have no desire to engage in corruption. Simultaneously, they should exert efforts in striving to transition from clearing individual cases and punishing key offenders to systematic rectification and overall industry governance improvement, the article said.

Taking the finance sector as an example, the first round of inspection launched by the 20th CPC Central Committee in March included a thorough review of selected financial institutions. There was an

increase in both the number and frequency of anti-corruption efforts in the financial sector in 2023.

Last year, eight senior officials in the financial sector and under the management of the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee were investigated, including Liu Liange, the former chairman of the Bank of China.

Liu became the first senior executive of a centrally administered financial enterprise to be investigated since the 20th National Congress of the CPC in October 2022. He was arrested on charges of taking bribes and illegal issuance of loans in October last year.

The number of financial professionals undergoing disciplinary review and supervisory investigation last year exceeded the previous year. Officials from all five State-owned banks — Bank of China, Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, Agricultural Bank of China, Bank of Communications and China Construction Bank — were investigated last year.

Furthermore, investigations extended to officials from insurers, securities institutions, financial groups, banking regulatory bodies, the central bank, the securities regulatory system and local financial management departments.

Chen, the law professor, highlighted that corruption issues in key areas are characterized by strong professionalism, heightened concealment and the high intelligence and education levels of offenders.

The offenders also have complex social relationships and strong anti-detection capabilities. These factors are behind the frequent occurrences of new and covert forms of corruption, he said.

"To address corruption within specific industries, it is crucial to respect industry norms, identify vulnerable points, enhance existing systems and strengthen the barriers that prevent corruption. Furthermore, there is a need to vigorously promote a culture of integrity within the industry, fostering an envi-

ronment where individuals neither desire nor dare to engage in corrupt practices," he said.

Ji Yaping, head of the School of Administrative Law at the Northwest University of Political Science and Law, said that deepening anti-corruption efforts requires a comprehensive yet focused approach. Such work should consider the impact and the cost and benefit to the nation, and anti-corruption efforts in key sectors could yield the highest returns, he added.

Ji noted that it is crucial to ensure that anti-corruption measures in these sectors do not adversely affect industry and societal development.

"Corruption in key sectors, particularly at the management level, ultimately stems from systemic vulnerabilities in the industries. Therefore, while combating corruption is important, prevention is even more critical. Identifying and addressing all potential points of corruption and systematically improving existing structures are essential to both curb corruption and plug these systemic loopholes," he said.

For instance, in the healthcare industry, anti-corruption efforts primarily target management levels rather than front-line medical professionals, he said. This approach has been widely welcomed by ordinary doctors, contributing positively to the industry's smooth development.

In a case revealed by the CCDI, a linear accelerator medical device with an import price of 15 million yuan (\$2.1 million) was purchased by a hospital for 35.2 million yuan, with the hospital's director pocketing kickbacks amounting to 16 million yuan.

To further regulate the health sector, 14 central departments jointly issued a notice in May to rectify the irregularities in the procurement and sales of pharmaceuticals and medical services.

In July, 10 central departments launched a nationwide one-year operation targeting corruption issues in the health sector.

Devices used for illegal flight data collection seized

By ZHANG YI
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Chinese security agencies have cracked down on foreign organizations that have been recruiting aviation enthusiasts in China as "volunteers" to illegally collect and transmit flight data, the Ministry of State Security said.

The organizations used international courier services to send portable signal-receiving devices, similar in size to regular smartphones, to newly recruited volunteers. They then remotely guided them to deploy the devices near aviation hubs within China.

The devices enabled the automated collection of aircraft information, including aircraft models, altitude, longitude, latitude and speed. The collected data was

transmitted in real-time to servers designated by the organizations.

Security agencies have discovered that these organizations have extensively deployed such devices in provinces surrounding the Bohai Sea, East China Sea and South China Sea. The devices have the potential to gather information related to military aircraft.

The devices were found to possess powerful capabilities, supporting remote online programming and customizable functions.

They were equipped with satellite navigation chips for targeted aircraft positioning. The collected data was rapidly transmitted to foreign servers through encrypted channels, the ministry said.

It was estimated that each device could transmit flight data

from approximately 1,000 aircraft and around 130,000 location data points per day. With a coverage radius of 300 to 400 kilometers, about 300 devices would be enough to cover the whole country, according to the ministry.

The operation of a large number of such devices could cause signal interference in both civilian and military air traffic control systems, posing a significant threat to aviation safety.

The ministry also warned that the theft, espionage, bribery or illegal provision of data related to national security and interests by foreign organizations, institutions or individuals, or collusion with domestic organizations, institutions or individuals constitute espionage under Chinese law.

Snow bros



A 6-month-old panda named Mang Cancan plays with a snowman as he meets the public for the first time at the Chongqing Zoo on Saturday. The name "Mang" refers to its mother, Mang Zai, while "Cancan" means brightness of light or stars. LI HONGBO / FOR CHINA DAILY

COMMENT

Editorials

Manila had better act responsibly and give wide berth to Washington's efforts to sabotage stability

The People's Liberation Army was obliged to respond to the provocation of the joint military patrol conducted by the Philippines and the United States on China's doorstep on Jan 3 and 4, as this was their second such military maneuver since November.

Signaling China's determination to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity and deter troublemaking in the waters, the Southern Theater Command of the PLA extended a two-day naval and air force patrol in the South China Sea into a third day on Friday.

As a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman said, the US and the Philippines' muscle-flexing, provocative military activities are not conducive to upholding peace and stability in the South China Sea.

Manila has staged one farce after another in the South China Sea, seemingly at the instigation of the US, especially in the waters near China's Ren'ai Reef and Huangyan Island. These moves have only served to raise tensions with Beijing by infringing upon China's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Manila has even built a new coastal station to consolidate its illegal control of China's Zhongye Island in the waters.

Viewing the Philippines as an important part of its "Indo-Pacific" strategy, the Joe Biden administration has thrown the weight of the US military behind the Philippines' strategic brinkmanship by frequently sending its own warships to the waters near the disputed islands and reefs in the South China Sea.

To fish for its own strategic gains and contain

China's rise and development, Washington has deliberately turned a blind eye to the fact that the maritime disputes between China and the Philippines are purely bilateral issues.

The collusion between the US and the Philippines has worsened the regional security environment. But China has been left with no choice but to respond to the provocations. It is only natural that the PLA should act in such a decisive and timely manner by demonstrating its combat preparedness and readiness in the waters. China has repeatedly said it firmly opposes the Philippines' infringements on its territorial integrity and provocative actions with the US, and made it clear that it will take all necessary measures to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity. No one should underestimate Beijing's resolution and capability to do so.

What Manila has done gravely violates international law and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea. Its unilateral and irresponsible provocations pose a severe threat to peace and stability in the region as they undercut regional efforts to build lasting peace and stability in the waters.

In a dialogue on the phone between the top diplomats of China and the Philippines on Dec 20, the two sides agreed to hold a meeting of the Bilateral Consultation Mechanism on the South China Sea at an early date and actively create favorable conditions for it. Now is time for Manila to act on that agreement and match its words with deeds.

Lid must be kept on Korean Peninsula tensions

Both Pyongyang and Seoul have good reasons to be pessimistic about the prospect of inter-Korea relations in 2024. The present state of affairs on the peninsula does not allow for the kind of optimistic anticipations that generally accompany the start of a new year.

The exchange of artillery fire near the disputed maritime border of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the Republic of Korea on Friday and Saturday marked the return of heightened mutual animosity and may portend a further escalation of frictions. It is tempting to disregard the exchange of fire as being like similar previous incidents, with the expectation that the situation will soon cool down. But considering the latest changes in Pyongyang and Seoul's respective approach to bilateral ties, that may well be wishful thinking.

In a break from the Workers' Party of Korea's longstanding policy position, DPRK leader Kim Jong-un declared at the party's high-profile plenary session at the end of 2023 that the ROK would no longer be considered a counterpart of reconciliation and unification. The ROK was to be henceforth regarded as an enemy state. The ROK has already revived that perception of the DPRK having dropped it for a while under the previous administration. And ROK President Yoon Suk-yeol announced in his New Year's message Seoul's plan to finish the establish-

ment of "extended deterrence" against the threat from the DPRK under the framework of the United States-Japan-ROK alliance. Prior to that, he had ordered frontline ROK troops to return fire before reporting in the event of any DPRK provocation.

The latest exchange of artillery fire was the first since Pyongyang unilaterally nullified the military agreement the two sides inked on Sept 19, 2018, on preventing armed conflict at sea. With Pyongyang openly renouncing the long-standing goal of reunification and reiterating the reality that the two Koreas are in a state of war, the situation on the peninsula is becoming increasingly fragile and perilous. Since both parties have sworn to take a tougher approach toward the other, the escalation of frictions is worrisome.

Given the historical complexity of inter-Korea relations, it won't be easy to do away with the spiral of escalation without all stakeholding parties working in concert, which seems unlikely at this point. But Beijing's call for all parties to exercise restraint will always apply. "Meaningful dialogue" between Pyongyang and Seoul may not occur any time soon with the current level of hostility. But other stakeholders in peninsula peace should urge them to refrain from further escalating tensions.

The present pattern of peninsula relations, characterized by mutual animosity and growing hostility, is a formula for disaster if the current trend continues.

US should not mistake restraint for weakness

Although the sanctions the United States has imposed on Chinese entities citing baseless "national security" concerns have had a substantial impact on China's high-tech research and industry, Beijing has shown restraint with its countermeasures, both in terms of their number and the damage they can do the US.

On Sunday, Beijing announced sanctions on five US defense-related companies — BAE Systems Land and Armaments, Alliant Techsystems Operations, AeroVironment, Viasat, and Data Link Solutions — in response to the US' recent unwarranted sanctions on several Chinese companies and individuals and its \$300-million arms sales to the Taiwan island in December.

The US' arms sales to the Chinese island are in blatant violation of the one-China principle and the stipulations of the three China-US joint communiques that are the foundation for Sino-US ties, and the illegal unilateral sanctions the US has imposed on Chinese entities under various false pretexts seriously harm China's sovereignty and security interests.

China's sanction measures consist of freezing the properties of the five companies in China, including their movable and immovable property, and prohibiting organizations and individuals in China from having transactions and cooperation with them, according to a statement of the Foreign Ministry.

However, like those it has announced before, the Chinese sanctions are mostly symbolic, as the US defense contractors have few deals related to or partnership with the Chinese mainland. But this should not be misunderstood as China not having the capa-

bility to inflict damage on the US side, it does. However, in responding to the US' provocations, Beijing always bears the bigger picture in mind.

As Foreign Minister Wang Yi stressed on Friday at a ceremony in Beijing marking the 45th anniversary of the founding of Sino-US relations, the most essential feature of China-US exchanges is they are mutually beneficial. That means that if China responded to the US' sanctions and provocations by adopting an equivalence approach, the two countries would be swiftly dragged into a dog-eat-dog regression of history. The rest of the world would soon follow.

The US' long-term "strategic ambiguity" on the Taiwan question does not give it an upper hand in playing the so-called Taiwan card with Beijing. Instead, it puts the US at grave risk of an open conflict with China.

Taiwan is a dispensable piece on Washington's board but an inalienable part of the country to Beijing, whose resolve to realize national reunification, at all cost, should never be underestimated. That is something the secessionist-minded Democratic Progressive Party politicians of Taiwan taking part in the local election on the island later this month should bear in mind. They should not harbor the illusion that the US will "protect" Taiwan in case of an "emergency".

The mutual benefits reaped over the past 45 years show that disagreements and differences should not be allowed to dominate or interfere with Sino-US ties. The potential of their cooperative relations continues to expand and their differences were even more prominent 45 years ago than they are today.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Block-buster plan to leverage data to drive real economy

The National Data Administration and 17 other departments have jointly issued a three-year action plan on improving the high-level application of data elements so that they can play a bigger role in boosting cross-sector innovation.

In 2022, the scale of China's digital economy reached 50.2 trillion yuan (\$7.03 trillion), accounting for 41.5 percent of its GDP. The digital economy is a focus of major country competition. The United States tries to control the formulation of international rules for the digital trade. The competition between countries on key issues such as cross-border digital taxation, digital privacy protection, cross-border data flows, intellectual property rights and digital algorithms has become intense.

As a key element, data enters the production, circulation, exchange and consumption. In this process, modern digital technology has enabled an unprecedented increase in information density, which has promoted a deep reshaping of the original organizational structure.

China should further promote the integration of data elements with the real economy, which has promoted the transformation and upgrading of its traditional industries. The value of data elements in diminishing marginal costs and increasing marginal returns has gradually been recognized by various parties. The action plan just aims to give full play to the multiplier effect of data elements.

The action plan calls for reforms in 12 sectors, including manufactur-

ing, commerce and green industry. The document has provided forward-looking guidance on how to promote the application of data elements in these industries. These measures are targeted and operable.

Implementing the action plan requires governments at all levels to accelerate the coordinated integration of data elements with technology, capital, talent and other economic factors, and break through the institutional constraints against the flow of resource elements. This also entails promoting the construction of data infrastructure, focusing on data confirmation and pricing, accelerating the construction of a data element circulation and transaction system, designing diversified data development and utilization mechanisms.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

Openness core spirit of a modern university

The Education Ministry has issued a statement in response to a motion put forward by members of the country's top political advisory body urging universities to reopen their campus to the public after closing them during the COVID-19 pandemic. While recognizing the importance of building open campuses, the ministry has kicked the ball to the universities by instructing them to adjust their measures to suit their own conditions, stressing that a prerequisite for opening campuses again is that the teachers and students should not be disturbed.

Even before the pandemic, there was a debate over whether and to what extent university campuses should be open to the public. For example, if the fast-and-furious couriers riding electric scooters are allowed to enter campuses, they will immediately become racetracks for the around-the-clock deliveries of kung pao chicken with rice or Big Macs. The tranquility that the teaching faculty and students have become accustomed to over the past four years will be lost in an instant.

There is no doubt that a campus not open to visitors is much easier to manage. However, the universities are also duty-bound to provide certain public cultural services to the

society by acting as a platform for knowledge and talent exchanges, and actively being part of the socio-economic life of the nation. Instead of turning a deaf ear to society's call for the reopening of campuses, the universities can demarcate certain areas open to visitors for a specific period of time according to their actual conditions. Openness and inclusiveness are the core spirit of modern universities. Many prestigious universities around the world, including the University of Oxford and Harvard University, merge with the towns where they are located having no bounding walls at all.

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

Harbin's tourism boom flash in social media pan

To boost the city's post-pandemic economic recovery, the government of Harbin, capital of Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, has made special efforts to take advantage of the winter months to attract visitors from the south of the country. During the three-day New Year's Day holiday from Dec 30 to Jan 1, the city received 3.05 million visits, with the revenue from tourism reaching 5.91 billion yuan (\$828 million), both historical records.

It is worth mentioning that the city authorities have promptly and effectively addressed complaints of tourists about the organization and services of Harbin Ice-Snow World, the largest theme park of its kind in the world, and overcharging by local restaurants, which is regarded as being successful crisis management. Harbin's swift response to the complaints gave people a good impression of the city.

Moreover, it has also taken the initiative to provide thoughtful services to tourists. For instance many free warm and cozy rest stations

have been set up at its major tourist attractions, which have proved popular with tourists, especially those not fully prepared for the bitter-cold reality of the fairy tale world of snow and ice.

As such, thanks to the snowball effect of social media, Harbin appears to have become the most popular tourist destination in the country in a short space of time, overshadowing such subtropical winter resorts as Sanya in Hainan island. That seems to have stirred the long-dormant pride of the more than 9 million residents in Harbin, which was once seen as a key hub of Northeast Asia.

While many have marveled at the growth potential Harbin has demonstrated in a short time, saying that they see hope for the revitalization of the country's largest Rust Belt in Northeast China, a strategy the central government has carried out for about 20 years, it must be pointed out, as the short-lived tourism boom of Zibo, Shandong province, following largely the same

path last summer indicates, what Harbin has reaped is nothing but a flash-in-the-pan moment of popularity created by social media attention.

Over the past 20 years, Harbin's population has contracted by about 2 million, and the city, which was once one of the top 10 city economies in the country, now ranks lower than 50th, and it shows no sign of regaining that higher status. Its withering economy is dominated by State-owned enterprises, whose technology and management lag behind the market demand. The depletion of oil and coal in adjacent regions has also contributed to its economy running out of steam.

Once Harbin's fast-gained appeal fades away, a major challenge confronting the local government remains how to improve the city's business environment to attract investment and boost the growth of private enterprises, breathe life back into its huge SOE system, and enhance its own performance.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Chinese Culture

Editor's note: Chinese culture has a long history and is different from the cultures of other countries. In recent years, with rapid economic development and increasing trade and people-to-people exchanges, Chinese culture has caught the imagination of people in Western countries. Four experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Gao Hongcun

Cultural industry can better tell China story

China's cultural industry has unprecedented opportunities to advance its development thanks to the country's high-quality economic development, the evolution of the principal contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life, and the gradual advancement of reform and opening-up.

To begin with, the quality and competitiveness of China's cultural industry have improved, developing from spontaneous movement to proactive promotion to make remarkable achievements over the past decades.

Also, the scale of the cultural industry has been expanding. National Bureau of Statistics data show that the added value of China's national cultural and related industries in 2022 was 5.37 trillion yuan (\$753.5 billion), accounting for 4.46 percent of GDP — the figure was only 1.10 trillion yuan in 2010. According to a nationwide survey, the operating revenue of 69,000 cultural and related industrial enterprises above designated size in 2022 was 12.18 trillion yuan, up 0.9 percent year-on-year. The quality of the cultural sector, too, has been improving.



The author is a professor of culture at the National Academy of Governance.

Besides, new types of cultural industries including digital publishing, entertainment drones and wearable devices have seen double-digit growth. Plus, the country is increasing cultural exports and adopting a more open approach to culture to promote cultural trade and investment.

It is clear therefore that the cultural industry has new development opportunities, with booming consumption having the potential to drive the supply of high-quality cultural products. The evolved principal contradiction in Chinese society also reflects the people's demand for better cultural products and services. High-quality development has boosted consumption demand as people are spending more on education, and cultural and entertainment products and services.

In particular, people's demand for cultural and tourism products are increasing significantly. As such, industries need to undergo structural



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

reform to be able to meet people's new demands for cultural and tourism products and services.

As an economy achieves higher-quality development, it tends to shift its focus from primary to secondary and tertiary sectors. Accordingly, the industrial structure, too, shifts its focus to the service sector.

According to statistical bulletins of the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, at the end of 2022, the number of people employed in China was 733.51 million. With 459.31 million employed people, urban areas accounted for 62.6 percent of the total. Notably, 24.1 percent of the people were employed in the primary sector, 28.8 percent in the secondary sector and 47.1 percent in the tertiary sector. In 2012, the secondary and tertiary sectors accounted for 30.3 percent and 36.1 percent, respectively, of the total workforce, reflecting the country's shifting emphasis from the primary and secondary sectors to the tertiary sector, which is becoming a major driver of economic growth.

And as part of the tertiary sector, the cultural industry can promote

common prosperity and the well-being of the people. In fact, the development of the cultural industry can meet the intellectual and cultural needs of the people, as well as provide flexible employment opportunities for the people, with the digital transformation prompting young people to start their own business.

As a matter of fact, China's cultural industry can now act as a bridge for cultural exchanges. Normally, a country with a higher-quality and unique cultural industry has stronger cultural influence and competitiveness in the global markets.

It should be mentioned here that China's cultural industry has been helping boost cultural exports in recent years, with Chinese cultural products becoming an important part of the country's cultural trade, which in 2022 reached \$220 billion, up about 11 percent year-on-year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

China's export of TV dramas, internet literature, audio and video clips, and other creative products are growing at a fast pace, with high-quality cultural products and services better

meeting society's diversified demands. According to the China Game Industry Report, the country's actual sales revenue from self-developed games in the overseas market in 2022 totaled \$17.3 billion.

Besides, China Writers Association report showed that more than 10,000 Chinese internet literature works had been released overseas by 2020, becoming the biggest source of intellectual property for Chinese cultural works introduced abroad. The works included more than 4,000 authorized and printed books and over 3,000 online translation works, while related websites and apps have attracted more than 100 million subscribers from across the world, according to the report.

And China-based new media platforms, along with competitive cultural enterprises and products, can better spread Chinese culture and stories abroad, as their tailor-made contents can meet the demand of foreign users, and make China's voice heard on the global stage.

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

Yu Jiang and Jia Ding

Civilizations do not necessarily clash

Civilizations today are more interconnected than ever before, the destiny of the people around the world is more closely linked and the international community agrees that civilizations should be inclusive and jointly promote development. Yet the "clash of civilizations" theory, which claims "principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations", had been in vogue until recently.

With the end of the Cold War, international relations are no longer confined to the study and interpretation of a single event or delimited by ideology, and more attention is being paid to global trends. While new ideas and theories are emerging to guide the world in the right direction, certain people are working their fingers to the bone to label some countries as opponents and rivals of the United States, which, incidentally, seeks unipolar domination.

It is in this context that Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington developed the "clash of civilizations" theory, which has three main characteristic features. First, in the new era, the leading cause of human disputes and conflicts will be the difference between civilizations and cultures. Second, the differences between civilizations and cultures are not only real but also fundamental. And third, economic globalization and regionalization have prompted civilizations to play a greater role in international relations and increased the possibility of conflicts among civilizations.

The different views on inter-civilization relations reflect Huntington's personal global view and civilizational views. According to Huntington, the non-Western challenge to the West at the peak of power is growing, and the probability of a "clash of civilizations" has greatly increased, concluding that the major global conflicts in the future will be between countries and groups with different civilizational backgrounds. "In this new world the most pervasive, important, and dangerous conflicts will not be between social classes, rich and poor, or other economically defined groups, but between peoples belonging to different cultural entities," Huntington claimed.

Based on a fallacious assumption, Huntington emphasized that the main line of political conflicts in the post-Cold War world would be "clash of civilizations", a claim that is far removed from constructive theory and policy practice.

The introduction of civilization as an important variable to the study of international relations was originally an academic matter; it has helped deepen and broaden the international political theory. However, there is no basis for elevating "civilization" to a position more important than national and economic interests. History shows the "clash of civilizations" theory is wrong, and it is foolish to assume one's own civilization is superior to others.

The international academic community has made no secret of its doubts over the "clash of civilizations" theory. Academics have questioned Huntington's one-sided emphasis on the conflict and antagonism between different societies and civilizations.

For example, how do we evaluate the roles of economic globalization and modernization of communication in increasing exchanges and integrating interests among countries? Should a country face the important common global challenges alone or should all countries join hands to cope with them?

Neither Huntington nor the proponents of his theory have provided convincing answers to such questions.

Since Huntington firmly holds the Western position, his theory is rooted in Western-centrism and dictated by the hegemonic power politics and zero-sum game thinking of some people in the US and other Western countries. More important, it has been made part of the strategic scheme of containing the development of emerging economies and developing countries such as China, and making non-Western countries weak.

There are more than 200 countries and regions, diversified ethnic groups and many religions in the world. These countries have different histories, cultures and social systems, which are the inherent features of a civilization. There can be no civilization without diversity, and diversity will continue to exist for as long as humans exist.

There is a need for countries to follow the global development trends, promote civilizational concepts that emphasize equality, mutual learning, dialogue, and inclusiveness. They need to respect each other and treat each other as equals, accept the civilizational diversities, respect the differences in political systems, and draw on each other's strengths to explore new grounds in development, so as to contribute to the progress of civilization.

In March 2023, China proposed the Global Civilization Initiative, stressing that we respect the diversity of civilizations and the common values of humanity, understand the importance of inheritance and innovation of civilizations, and promote people-to-people exchanges and cooperation globally.

The GCI has contributed Chinese wisdom to promote inclusive coexistence, carry out exchanges and facilitate mutual learning among different civilizations. The absurdity of the "clash of civilizations" theory demonstrates the great significance of the GCI and the correctness of its theoretical basis.

Therefore, all countries should promote global peace and development, strengthen civilizations, boost international exchanges and cooperation, explore innovative measures to establish a global network of dialogue and cooperation among civilizations, foster mutual understanding and amity among peoples, break down the spiritual barriers that hinder human exchanges, and work together to ensure the harmonious coexistence of different civilizations and the continuous progress of civilizations toward a bright future.

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

Mourad Alami

Chinese philosophy distinct from the West

Chinese culture has a rich history of 5,000 years. It is closely linked to the Chinese language, and facilitated the emergence of Chinese literature, and documentation in the form of written records and printed books. Books are closely linked to the rise and fall of a culture. Even in the downfall of a society, the historical facts are recorded in writing in order to provide posterity with the evidence of the achievements, failures and the reasons for the downfall of that society.

Chinese culture is unthinkable without these written testimonies, which are not only cultural expressions of self-assurance and representation but also artifacts of self-reflection. Literature and culture therefore have a relationship of reference.

Chinese culture owes its raison d'être primarily to three main philosophies, Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, all of which could be considered to have gone through five phases.

The earliest phase can be traced to before the unification of China and was primarily concerned with social issues. In the second phase, the worldview was primarily to make projections for consideration, while the third phase had an ontological approach that dealt with the being, the I. The fourth phase was concerned with idealism, which is

the diametrically opposite of materialism, realism and empiricism. In the European context, Plato and Descartes are worth mentioning, because they accord fullness to the being to ideas.

The fifth and last phase is characterized by gnoseology, which deals with questions about the prerequisites for knowledge, and how knowledge is acquired. In addition, the truthfulness of certainty and justification are questioned and doubts raised about certain desirable beliefs. This still continues, although Confucianism is placed alongside it because it is constitutive of China's identity and culture today.

The duality of learning according to Confucius' concept is still valid today, because it means "learning for others" and "learning for yourself", meaning one cannot do without the other. Only through learning can *ren*, which means something like "thoughtfulness" and the difference between humans and animals, be determined.

No wonder many countries have agreed to set up Confucius Institutes whose main task is to promote the concept of learning from each other and create space for fruitful cultural exchanges, which, first of all, requires overcoming foreignness by transferring what is foreign into what is familiar so that one can enrich oneself by what is foreign.



The author is a professor at Hainan College of Foreign Studies.

Unfortunately, there still exists a tendency in many to trivialize the foreignness of other cultures, including Chinese ones, so that the foreign is subsumed under an universalistic model of humans in general, making it quite difficult to deny a Euro-American-centric perspective.

The philosophy of alterity is of crucial importance in this context, as one must assume that the fundamental "givenness" of human existence and the response to the other is a prerequisite for the constitution of one's own, the I.

Palestinian academic and literary critic Edward Said made an important contribution to the understanding of post-colonial culture with his book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. The orient here includes China. Said sparked an important discussion by criticizing the perspective of culture and images of the other in the Euro-American cultural space. He was against the binary opposition: positive/negative, which Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel also advocated in

the case of China. In his eyes, this is an unacceptable, distorted perception of others and their cultures that needs to be changed.

An equal dialogue among all cultures, especially the extremely demanding Chinese culture, is not only important but also necessary, because we have to realize that European-American culture, together with the cultures of other industrialized countries, still dominate the global discourse.

The history of humanity shows that the flowering of one culture sometimes went hand in hand with the rejection of other cultures, especially as a separation of one from the others, as was the case with the Greeks and Romans. This culture was often forced upon others through open colonization to prove the superiority of one set of people and culture over other peoples and cultures, leading to economic and military oppression of peoples of what today can be called the Global South.

Cultural exchanges can help promote harmony and peace between peoples, because regardless of the ethnicity, language, culture, history, customs and social conditions, the mere existence of a person is constitutive of self. As Aristotle said: "A unity must derive from a multitude."

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

GLOBAL VIEWS



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

YANG FUQIANG

Navigating the path to a just transition

It will help if China establishes a task force to oversee it, supports affected groups, strengthens social protection, accelerates economic diversification and ensures adequate funding support

The COP28 climate summit hosted in the United Arab Emirates adopted outcomes of the first global stock-taking since the Paris Agreement in 2016, emphasizing a transition away from fossil fuels rather than phasing down or phasing out coal consumption, noting that a shift away from fossil fuel energy should happen "in a just, orderly, and equitable manner". Under the United Nations' new "Just Transition Work Program", just transition pathways to achieve the Paris Agreement climate goals are also highlighted.

To maximize the positive impacts and minimize the negative impacts caused by the energy transition on the economy and society, several pathways, such as creating new jobs for the labor force impacted by the energy transition, slowing down the economic downturn in fossil-energy-rich regions, and promoting economic diversification, are being broadly implemented. Increasingly, countries are accelerating their just transition efforts, adapting to their own circumstances.

For tipping the goals of the Paris Agreement and China's dual-carbon goals — peaking carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and going carbon neutral before 2060 — it is important to advance a low-carbon transition in China's economic structure, energy mix, production methods and lifestyles. With the implementation of these policies and measures, it is certain that the labor market will face significant impacts.

According to the International Energy Agency, more than 3.6 million jobs will be created in China's energy sector during the energy transition phase. However, the transition may also have a disproportionate impact on certain sectors, regions and groups. Crucially, not all of them will have equal access to those new jobs.

China's coal industry is going to be directly affected by the energy transition. A study by the Peking University's Institute of Energy and the United Nations Development Programme indicates that, based on China's current policy trajectory, about 52 percent of jobs in the coal industry could disappear by 2030, and approximately 90-94 percent by 2050. In terms of total numbers, China may see a direct loss of more than 1 million jobs in the coal sector by 2030. While the scale of employment change is still smaller than that experienced during China's supply-side structural reform, the study also found that for every job lost in the coal industry, there will

be a corresponding 1.08 jobs lost in related industries. Additionally, this ratio has been decreasing since 2010, suggesting that the negative employment effects of the energy transition are expected to be mostly limited to the coal industry itself.

As the downstream of the coal industry and a focal area for carbon reduction in the power sector, jobs in the electric power sector are also gradually declining as the energy transition deepens. A study indicates that employment in the coal power sector is projected to decrease, and by 2060 the workforce will be reduced by about 30,000, a 95 percent decrease compared to 2020 levels. However, overall employment in the electric power industry is expected to see an increase due to new jobs created in renewable energy. The study maintains that employment in wind and solar power generation is expected to double and quadruple respectively within 50 years. Employment numbers in the electric power industry are expected to increase, up to 68 percent by 2060 compared to 2020 levels.

More evidence shows that women are more vulnerable in the energy transition. The share of female employees in the coal industry has declined from 21.9 percent in 2003 to 13.3 percent in 2020, while men's share has climbed from 78.1 percent to 86.7 percent, suggesting women are at a higher risk of unemployment when the industry shrinks. Particular attention needs to be paid to those more vulnerable groups during a just transition.

The Proposal of the People's Republic of China on the Reform and Development of Global Governance, launched in September 2023, stated that China supports the pursuit of green and low-carbon development. In the course of a just energy transition, the different national realities and capabilities of countries should be fully respected, and traditional energy should be phased out for ensuring safe and reliable alternative energy sources.

To ensure the outcomes of the transition can benefit everyone. A just energy transition may be promoted in five areas, including establishing a task force to oversee the just transition, supporting affected groups, strengthening social protection, accelerating economic diversification and ensuring adequate funding support.

A task force should be established to enhance inter-agency coordination and stakeholder engagement. China could consider either establishing a new task force for its just transition or expanding

the scope of an existing coordination mechanism, such as the State Council's leading group on employment.

Workers in need can be supported by strengthening China's existing employment policy, including by continuously evaluating and adapting policies to ensure their effectiveness in a fast-changing environment. Revising the eligibility criteria for employment stabilization subsidies and specifying the proportion of financial assistance that needs to be set aside for supporting affected workers are two ways to ensure that such support reaches the companies and workers that need it most. Additionally, China should formulate medium- and long-term national plans for green employment, setting clear targets and establishing key priorities to guide efforts in this area.

Social protection and employment policies should be mutually reinforcing. To effectively assist laid-off workers, targeted measures should also be designed based on their willingness to work, age, gender and skill level. A tailored combination of social protection and employment policy tools should be employed to address the needs of diverse groups.

The economy should be upgraded through industrial restructuring and coordination between economic transitions and job creation should be enhanced. To achieve balanced progress in environmental protection, economic development and employment generation, policies must be implemented in a more synchronized manner. This proposes that any new industrial policy should be accompanied by complementary environmental and employment policies to mitigate potential environmental or social impacts that it might cause.

China should pool funds from diverse sources and guard against financial risks. It is vital to leverage private capital, along with public finance, to support the energy transition. This involves promoting transition finance and incorporating social considerations in lending decisions. China could draw on the experience of the European Union and create transition funds that direct resources toward vulnerable and negatively affected areas and companies.

The author is a guest research fellow at the Institute of Energy at Peking University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

YU HONGYUAN AND WANG XINYU

By invitation only

The US is seeking to form an exclusive energy club based on its alliances and partnerships which will impact on the global transition

In the transformation of the United States' energy security strategy, the Joe Biden administration is trying to form a by-invitation-only energy club to reconcile a range of diverse and conflicting policy objectives, including economic growth, national security, low-carbon environmental protection and alliance strengthening. This serves the US' network extension to maintain its energy hegemony, exclude major competitors and achieve standardized leadership. The hegemonic intention and "domestic priority" orientation of the US policy poses multiple risks for global energy governance.

China and the US, as the world's largest carbon-based economies and energy consumers, are well-positioned to lead the global energy transition. But as the competition between China and the US in the field of energy and resources intensifies, the space for climate cooperation between the two sides is being significantly squeezed.

The Biden administration is intent on building a hub-and-spoke energy club, with the US as the hub and the US' allies and partners as the spokes. It is thus committed to forming a set of specific, enforceable, plurilateral and easily modifiable green supply chain normative regimes. The US green industry policy, which focuses on transforming and securing its supply chain, will continue to shape a network of allies and partners.

The US is committed to integrating the North American clean energy supply chain, creating a near-shore club with its own supply chain configuration as the core, promoting friendshoring based on the North American market, and using Canada's resource advantages and Mexico's manufacturing potential to fill the US' domestic production capacity gap. The US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) specifically mandates the percentage of battery components and critical minerals in North American manufacturing and recycling to strengthen North America's leading position in supporting friendshoring.

Within the G7 framework, the US has promoted synergy between its Build Back Better World initiative and the European Union's Global Gateway strategy, Japan's Partnership for Quality Infrastructure, and the United Kingdom's International Investment Initiative. With the G7 finally establishing the G7 Partnership for

Infrastructure and Investment (PII, G7) as a framework for the cooperation of developed countries as a whole with the aim of narrowing the infrastructure investment gap in partner countries, the G7 Environment, Climate and Energy Ministers Meeting in 2022 formally endorsed the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs) launched at the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as a new form of national partnership to be adopted by the "PII, G7". France, Germany, the UK, the US, the EU and South Africa formed the International Partners Group and announced the launch of the JETPs. The G7 has also established JETPs with India, Indonesia, Senegal and Vietnam.

Global climate action and clean energy developments are gradually altering the existing geopolitical structure. Club-style energy partnerships are viewed by the US as an important tool for it to regain its strategic dominance. The Biden administration acknowledges that the US cannot produce, mine, or manufacture everything on its own and must collaborate with allies and partners to enhance and strengthen collective supply chain resilience. To secure access to key minerals critical to the clean energy transition, the US must collaborate with allies and partners to ensure sufficient and resilient supplies. In this regard, it is important both to secure supplies from overseas and to work with the companies of allies to expand sustainable mining onshore.

China should be aware of the strategic risks posed by the US energy policy. It is important for China to strengthen its own energy security and prevent the US energy club from undermining the integrity of global energy governance under multilateral frameworks, such as the UN institutions.

In the field of new energy, China has a greater production capacity and market potential than the US, while the US leads in certain technological fields. In the field of governance, developed economies such as the US, the EU and Japan still dominate trade norms, pricing power, industrial standards and information data related to global energy resources. These developed economies have also established pricing mechanisms, production standards and information collection systems centered on New York and London.

When it comes to the rules and norms of global energy governance, China has long been at a disadvantage.

China has made significant progress in its energy transition. China's renewable energy market has progressed from the government-supported stage to the market-oriented stage. China is developing a market-oriented green financial system, while also deepening the supply-side structural reform of renewable energy. Additionally, a market-oriented low-carbon technology innovation system with enterprises as the main focus is being established. With nearly one-third of the world's renewable energy patents, China is emerging as a leader in international renewable energy investment and an active promoter of low-carbon technological progress.

The acceleration of China's energy transition will benefit its development and provide opportunities for the green transformation of other developing countries and the reform of the global energy governance system. China's position in the global green economy industry chain, supply and value chains will be enhanced, amplifying its voice in the international energy rule-making process. Additionally, China's technology, infrastructure building capacity, and value chain formed during the energy transformation process will become global public goods. By collaborating with other developing countries to establish international R&D centers and cooperation platforms for renewable energy and low-carbon technologies, China can enhance the economic and social benefits of its overseas investment and assistance.

China's energy transition has the potential to promote a more open, inclusive and stable international order, providing significant opportunities for the recovery of the world economy and the reconstruction of the global governance system.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE

Pulling together to stage a classic

New play, adapted from Lao She's *Rickshaw Boy*, takes a different route to previous versions, **Chen Nan** reports.



A man of simple needs whose greatest ambition is to one day own a rickshaw, Xiangzi is probably one of the best-known characters portrayed by Lao She (1899-1966). In the decades since it was first published in 1937, the novel *Rickshaw Boy* has been adapted into movies, TV dramas and Chinese operas.

Now, a new version of the classic story has been adapted by Fang Xu into a Chinese play, which premiered at Beijing's Tianqiao Performing Arts Center on Dec 29. On Friday and Saturday, it will be staged at the Shanghai Oriental Art Center.

"The novel was published about 90 years ago. However, what intrigues me most is how it relates to today's young people, who call themselves 'Xiangzi,'" says Fang, the play's director.

"Xiangzi is kind, determined and a man of a few words. He shares lots of similarities with today's young people, who move to bigger cities to make a living and want to fulfill their dreams by working very hard.

"For Xiangzi, he hoped to own his rickshaw. For today's young people, they may want to buy their own cars and apartments," Fang adds. "The rickshaw is more than just a vehicle, but Xiangzi's whole life, offering him spiritual support. I believe that many people share that feeling."

Born Shu Qingchun in Beijing, the Chinese writer Lao She is best known for his vivid descriptions of the lives of grassroots people that reflect the social realities of the time, and for his precise depictions of local culture in Beijing, especially through his unique sense of humor and use of the city's dialect. His novels, including *Rickshaw Boy* and *Four Generations Under One Roof*, and his plays, such as *Dragon Beard Ditch* and *Teahouse*, have earned him a stellar reputation worldwide as a linguistic and literary master.

Fang, like Lao She, was born and raised in Beijing. He graduated from the directing department of the Central Academy of Drama. He has been devoted to adapting Lao She's works into theatrical productions since 2011. He says that he feels close to the characters created by the great writer.

"I was intimidated by the idea of adapting *Rickshaw Boy* because it's so popular and a classic," says Fang. "The novel has over 100,000 characters, which was challenging for us to turn into a play."

Unlike most other adaptations, which focus on the relationship between Xiangzi and his wife Huniu, who is the daughter of Xiangzi's boss — a rickshaw company owner — and later dies during childbirth. Fang and his creative team decided to highlight the life changes of Xiangzi.

Like many of Fang's plays, an all-male cast features in the play, with three actors playing



From top: Scenes from the latest adaptation of Lao She's classic novel *Rickshaw Boy*, which premiered in Beijing with an all-male cast led by director Fang Xu (above right). The wedding of Xiangzi and his wife Huniu. Zhao Zhen (left) as Huniu with Liu Xinran, one of the three actors who portrays Xiangzi.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Xiangzi at different stages of his life, from the young man who heads to Beijing from the countryside and a man of ambition with the hope of owning his own rickshaw, to the tragic and hopeless figure he eventually becomes.

"I like the idea of blurring the lines between actors and actresses. Audiences will ignore the gender and concentrate on understanding the inner struggle of the characters," says Fang, when asked about his choice of cast.

"The director has a clear idea about Xiangzi, who is tall, strong, shy, inexperienced and hardworking. When he first saw me, he was sure that I had the look of Xiangzi," says young actor Xu Xingbo, who plays the young version of the protagonist. He tried to get as close to the character as possible by shaving his head and learning to pull a rickshaw.

Actor Liu Xinran plays Xiangzi after his money to buy a rickshaw is stolen.

"He is devastated, but still has the hope of making enough money again to buy his rickshaw. The man is very lovely, but also very tragic. His life is full of struggles but he still has hope," Liu says.

When it comes to the final part of the play, Fang plays Xiangzi as a totally changed man who has lost all hope.

Actor Zhao Zhen plays the role of Huniu, a woman he describes as "tough, hot-tempered, crafty, but good-hearted and unconditionally loving Xiangzi!"

In 2019, Zhao played a female role in a Chinese play directed by Fang, titled *The Story of Niu Tianci*, adapted from Lao She's 1934 novel of the same title. The feedback from the audience inspired Zhao to take a swing at *Rickshaw Boy*.

"I can still remember that when I went to Tianjin with Fang Xu for a collaboration with a local theater in February 2023, we saw a woman on the street. The way she talked and her body language made both of us believe that she was exactly how Huniu looked like in real life," says Zhao. "That woman was my main inspiration in playing Huniu."

One of the best-known actresses in China who has successfully played Huniu is Siqin Gaowa, who is a consultant for Fang's play.

"Fang Xu and I have discussed the idea of turning *Rickshaw Boy* into a play for many years and now, it's happening," said Siqin Gaowa, who's 73 years old, at the announcement of the play in Beijing in October.

The actress has been out of the limelight for many years, but describes the role as one of the highlights of her acting career.

The play marked the end of the 7th Lao She Theater Festival, which pays tribute to the great writer and gathers theatrical productions from around the world.

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I like the idea of blurring the lines between actors and actresses. Audiences will ignore the gender and concentrate on understanding the inner struggle of the characters."

Fang Xu, director

What's on

Beyond the rules



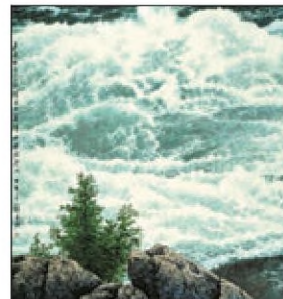
Late French sculptor Jean Cardot once said that it was difficult for him to talk about his work, and the relationship between him and his art was "not in the realm of words". He enjoyed that silent, intimate process interacting with the materials he worked with — marble, bronze and plaster, among others — letting the resonance being created between him and the work direct him to an

unknown destination. Cardot's sculptures are located in public places around the world, including *Ox in the Sun*, on display in the garden of the National Art Museum of China, which he donated to in 2020, the year he passed on. He had donated 10 works to the National Art Museum of China the year before. These works are now on show at a retrospective exhibition of Cardot, *Power Beyond the Rules*, being held at the art museum through to Jan 15. It shows some 70 sculptures and over 20 drawings that reflect the artist's lifelong exploration of the freedom of form being revealed through the hands of artists and their materials, which is beyond words. Cardot expressed emptiness and fullness, as well as his doubts as he shaped his artistic materials. His

works show majesty and solemnity. 9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 1 Wusi Dajie, Dongcheng district, Beijing. 010-6400-1476.

Overseas stories

Through the Riptide as a Canoe is the sixth global exhibition focusing on overseas Chinese now on at the He Xiangning Art Museum in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. This year, the exhibition zooms in on artists living and working in the Americas through whose works the audience are offered new perspectives of the experiences and spiritual world of overseas Chinese communities. It shows how the ink-art tradition spread through the travels of Chinese immigrants, and evolved to be as strong as ever. The exhibition



also displays the diversity of artistic expressions by overseas Chinese, blended with the cultures and customs of the countries and regions in which they reside. It reveals their varied journeys to tap into their respective cultural identities. The exhibition will end on March 24.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 9013 Shennan Dadao, Nanshan district, Shenzhen, Guangdong province. 0755-2660-4540.

Her vision

From the Other Hill, an ongoing exhibition at the Guardian Art Center, brings together more than 50 female artists who show paintings, sculptures, installations, photos and digital works that ask the viewer to look for "more links to connect the past, present and future". The exhibition not only examines issues that have often been seen as the preserve of women, such as juggling home, children and a career. More importantly, the exhibition goes beyond the female perspective to discuss issues of meaning to everyone, for example, the mount-



ing pressure of the workplace and the future coexistence of people and robots. Running through to Jan 24, it is a display of women's inner power and the thriving creative scene of women artists, as well as an invitation for people to envisage the world and the art of the future. 10 am-6 pm, closed on Mondays. 1 Wangfujing Dajie, Dongcheng district, Beijing.

LIFE



Chinese-American musician Chelsea Guo (right) performs during her debut tour of Chinese cities in December, both as a pianist and vocalist, featuring works by Johannes Brahms, Robert and Clara Schumann. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A musical triangle

Young pianist's recitals highlight unique friendship between the composers Johannes Brahms and Robert and Clara Schumann, **Chen Nan** reports.

What do you expect to hear from a young musician's recital? For Chinese-American pianist and soprano Chelsea Guo, whose Chinese name is Guo Ziyao, she offered audiences something rare.

During her first tour in China, which ran from Dec 22 to 31 and visited cities, such as Chengdu in Sichuan province, Wuhan in Hubei province, and Changsha in Hunan province, the 22-year-old musician presented programs centering on the relationship between Johannes Brahms, Robert and Clara Schumann.

The Schumann couple were famous musicians during the Romantic period of classical music. In 1853, when Robert Schumann met the promising young composer, Brahms, it marked the establishment of a famous love triangle in classical music history.

Guo explored this story through music, performing the many compositions they dedicated to one other in her recitals.

"The program I put together is truly about the human experience. I have always felt a strong connection to the relationship between Johannes Brahms, Robert Schumann and Clara Schumann. Somehow, the love, friendship, and loyalty among these three artists tells an honest story of being human," said Guo, following her recital in Beijing, which was

staged on Dec 28. "Many know the famous story of Brahms' unrequited romantic love for Clara, and while the music very possibly reflects that, this set of pieces is really focused on the trio's friendship, specifically how Brahms supported the Schumanns during Robert's mental decline."

The recital's first half was all piano. According to Guo, Brahms' *Variations on an Original Theme, Op 21 No 1 in D Major* is one of the most warm and affectionate pieces of music, which is evidence of his deep care for the Schumanns, written shortly after the death of Robert.

The piece that followed, Clara Schumann's *Three Romances, Op 21*, is thought to have been dedicated to Brahms as an expression of her gratitude for his unwavering presence during Robert Schumann's time in psychiatric care, during which the young composer helped look after her and the Schumanns' many children.

Guo wrapped up the first half of her recital by playing Rachmaninoff's selection from *Morceaux de Fantaisie Op 3* (a collection of five piano solo pieces), and though this composer may seem irrelevant to the theme of the recital, the piece offers a different musical perspective of very similar experiences: grief, love, and a clown that cunningly mocks the tragedy of life.

The second half was all vocal. After the intermission, Guo took the



"Life is often tragic, but beauty, friendship and love are what bring us through."

Chelsea Guo, Chinese-American pianist and soprano

audience into a world of love songs by Rachmaninoff, followed by Brahms' art songs, and the audience were taken back to the main story.

Robert Schumann's art song cycle, *Frauenliebe und Leben* (Woman's Love and Life), Op 42, brought the recital to an end. For female voice and piano, the song cycle was inspired by eight poems by a friend and deals with the trauma of a wom-

an, from losing the man who was her first love to the eventual death of her husband.

The recital closed with Robert Schumann's *Widmung* (Dedication), which was written for Clara as a wedding gift.

"Life is often tragic, but beauty, friendship and love are what bring us through," notes Guo.

Despite her young age, Guo has stood out as both a classical pianist and a soprano. As she sees it, being a pianist allows her to express herself in a much quieter way while singing is very different, "which is about being extroverted".

"They represent different sides of me, both my ways of expression," says Guo, who won at the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in 2022 as both pianist and vocalist. The double award was a first in the history of the nonprofit organization, which was founded by Susan Wadsworth in 1961 and has been dedicated to discovering and launching the careers of exceptional, but lesser known, young musicians from all over the world.

Born to Chinese parents in New York, Guo learned to play the piano at about 4 years old. Her mother, He Jing, an art enthusiast who learned to play the violin and danced as a child, supported Guo's decision to become a musician.

"We told her lots of stories when she practiced the instrument, hoping for her to be creative and express

the music with imagination," He explains.

As for singing, Guo says that she didn't take it seriously and only sang for fun at choirs during her childhood. Her talent for singing was recognized by her music teachers. When she studied in the Juilliard School's Pre-College program, Guo was trained with a double major in piano and classical voice. Since then, she has been developing a career both as a pianist and a soprano.

She recently graduated from the Juilliard School with a Bachelor of Music in piano.

"A very fine pianist with a beguiling voice. Here is a rare talent," said BBC Music Magazine upon the 2021 release of Guo's debut recording *Chopin: In My Voice*, featuring interpretations of a range of Chopin's piano compositions augmented by performances of several of the composer's art songs, plus an aria by Italian composer Gioachino Rossini in which Guo accompanies herself.

"Chopin's music is always close to my heart. In the album's name, the 'voice' means both the voice of the piano and my own," says Guo. She made the album when she was preparing for the National Chopin Piano Competition in the United States in 2020, at which Guo won a top prize.

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New TV series sheds light on life in China's cities after dark

By XING WEN

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Vincent van Gogh once provided a poetic insight into the essence of the night, describing it as "more alive and more richly colored than the day".

This perspective, viewed through a unique lens, continues to resonate in various forms of artistic expression.

A recently aired TV program titled *Night Dreamer* aims to not only explore the vibrant nightlife of different cities, but also delve into the personal and intimate moments that unfold when most of the world is asleep, by inviting celebrities to embark on nocturnal city tours.

"The night unlocks inner forces usually restrained by reason in the daytime, fostering a more pronounced release of emotions," says Wang Shengzhi, the program's director.

In the seven-episode program, notable personalities, namely, writer Xu Zhiyuan, actress Gao Yuanyun, singer Hu Xia, anchorwoman

Fang Qi, scriptwriter Wang Xiaoshuai and singer-songwriter Lao Lang guide viewers through the intriguing nooks and crannies of cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Changsha in Hunan province, along with Fuzhou and Xiamen in Fujian province.

The first episode follows Xu's exploration of Changsha, a city blending deep historical roots with modern, trendy vibes.

In the ancient lanes of the city, he visits drummer Wen Feng, who resides amid historical landmarks, and listens to his original compositions. At a quaint bookstore tucked away in an alley, Xu encounters its young owner, Hu Huan, a former teacher who left her job to open the store. Hu enjoys the lively atmosphere of Changsha while finding solace in the tranquility of her bookstore. She has made friends with many interesting individuals, and Xu has the chance to meet some of them. Together, they play mahjong, take a leisurely stroll with a dog and delve into the poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley.

"Such scenes are deeply moving.



From left: Writer Xu Zhiyuan (right) meets Hu Huan, a bookshop owner in Changsha, Hunan province, in the program *Night Dreamers*; Xu talks with Wen Feng, a local musician in Changsha, about their impressions of the city; Xu plays music with musicians in Changsha. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

They get together to create a small yet powerful spiritual community where members recognize and uplift each other. Such connections empower each of them to continue



their respective life journeys," says Xu.

"These communities contribute to the city's richness and diversity, making it a more vibrant and inter-



connected place," he adds.

Along the banks of the Xiangjiang River, a crucial tributary of the Yangtze River that runs through Changsha, Xu met Dong Shuntao, a 66-

year-old woman who sells deep-fried stinky tofu during the daytime. As night falls, she takes to the streets as a DJ, providing music for square dance enthusiasts.

During their conversation, Xu discovers that for Dong, who lost her husband, her passion for working as a DJ served as a lifeline, pulling her out of her grief and enabling her to recapture a love for life.

Xu says that wandering through the city and connecting with different people makes him feel at ease. And he hopes to create a program that captures a grander narrative by taking a glimpse into the lives of ordinary individuals.

"A lot of people I know exhibit a distinct shift in their mindset during the night, compared with their daytime demeanor," says Wang, the director. "During the day, there seems to be a certain restraint among people, as if there's a wall surrounding them. However, come nightfall, many are eager for that barrier to vanish, craving understanding. I aim to film individuals who resonate with this experience."

CULTURE

Guzheng for the globe

Young musician entertains foreign audiences with her traditional Chinese zither playing, **Cai Hong** reports.

Guzheng player Peng Jingxuan performs on stage during a show in October 2019.

When Peng Jingxuan began playing the *guzheng*, a Chinese plucked zither, on the streets of France in 2018, she did not expect the traditional instrument to change her life.

Peng, 28, has become a social media sensation for her online video performances in French cities. She has shared more than 200 original videos on YouTube tagged under “@jingxuanGuzheng”, with the most popular clip viewed over 16.61 million times.

The square outside the Grand Theatre of Bordeaux, France, is one of the places where Peng performs. The mesmerizing melodies from her zither always draw huge applause from listeners.

“I love how she’s representing her culture in a setting where people are not familiar with it. You can tell she’s proud of her background and her music,” one YouTube user under the moniker “mariaacosta8920” commented about Peng’s video.

The *guzheng* is an ancient, major musical instrument, tracing back more than 2,500 years. There are 21–26 strings on the modern *guzheng*. The length of a traditional Chinese *guzheng* is 1.63 meters and it is usually played by a female musician sitting on a chair in front of the instrument. Players, who often perform solo, always wear finger-picks made from materials such as plastic, resin and tortoiseshell on one or both hands. Modern *guzheng* instruments are often

played by pinching the strings to play heptatonic notes and chords.

Peng began to study the *guzheng* when she was 7. After graduating from the Wuhan Conservatory of Music in Central China’s Hubei province in June 2017, she went to the Université Michel de Montaigne-Bordeaux 3 of France where she received her master’s degree in musicology.

In 2017, her first year in France, Peng was deeply drawn to the romantic and free artistic atmosphere on the streets, enjoying the various performances by artists playing music instruments like the piano, violin, saxophone and harp.

But Peng found that she seldom saw Chinese instruments played on the streets. So, in the summer of 2018, Peng took along her *guzheng* and began her street performances. She was surprised to find that very few people in France knew about the Chinese zither, though her teachers and classmates at the conservatory had some knowledge of it.

“I wanted to make this instrument known to more people,” Peng said.

She began her street performances to sharpen her skills. The more Peng busked on the streets, the more she felt a greater sense of responsibility to spread Chinese music and culture.

“Many Western instruments are already well-accepted in China, like the piano. But Westerners’ understanding of Chinese music can be rather shallow,” Peng said.



I love how she’s representing her culture in a setting where people are not familiar with it.”

A fan from YouTube said of Peng Jingxuan’s *guzheng* playing

To make this traditional Chinese instrument better known and accepted by people in the West, Peng carefully selected and arranged each repertoire.

She chose traditional *guzheng* pieces and a number of pop songs with strong Chinese influences every time.

Considering that her audience’s unfamiliarity with Chinese songs may create barriers to better understanding of her performances, Peng made ingenious adaptations of the songs and received positive responses from her audiences.

In *Da Yu* (“Big Fish”), from the soundtrack of a Chinese animated film, Peng added two French narrations, briefly introducing the movie plot.

“A lot of people would come up to me and ask me what the name of the song was, and show their great interest in the film,” Peng said.

She also played Western pop songs that local people could relate to. “Because they may have heard these songs before, they will be more interested and easily immersed in my performance,” Peng said.

The musical pieces were refreshingly played in a more Chinese style by adding some unique techniques of playing the *guzheng*, such as strumming. One YouTube user commented, “Never in a million years I would’ve thought that *Smooth Criminal* (a song by the late US pop star Michael Jackson) could be played by a Chinese traditional instrument, but she did it cleverly and beautifully.”

Peng also always prepared small booklets in French, introducing her audience to the *guzheng* and its history.

“This is the *guzheng*, do you know? The Chinese *guzheng*,” a little boy said proudly to his friends beside Peng, when she played the instrument on the street one day.

The encounter made her feel that what she was doing was very meaningful, Peng said. She was able to get people, including children, to know the name *guzheng* “just by busking”.

After each performance, people were always amazed at the beauty of the instrument and the music, Peng said. They came to her and asked her the name of the instrument and the country it came from. “I am very happy to tell them it comes from China,” she said.

Her audiences also appreciated her for bringing beautiful Chinese music to them since they rarely had access to it, Peng said.

Playing for all

One day, an elderly man sitting next to Peng told her after her performance, “You should take the *guzheng* to more European cities and share the beauty of Chinese music with more people because a lot of them, myself included, don’t know about this.”

It was exactly one of her major plans, Peng said, to take her *guzheng* on a “global journey”.

To that effect, she has visited four countries so far — Italy, Switzerland, Spain and France. Peng said she hopes to perform in more cities in Europe so that more Westerners will have the chance to know about the charm of the *guzheng* and Chinese music.

To improve her performance and make it more understandable, Peng would also like to make more attempts to fuse Chinese music with Western music.

In addition to some improvised collaborative performances with local street artists, Peng tries to combine traditional *guzheng* music with avant-garde electronic music originating from France.

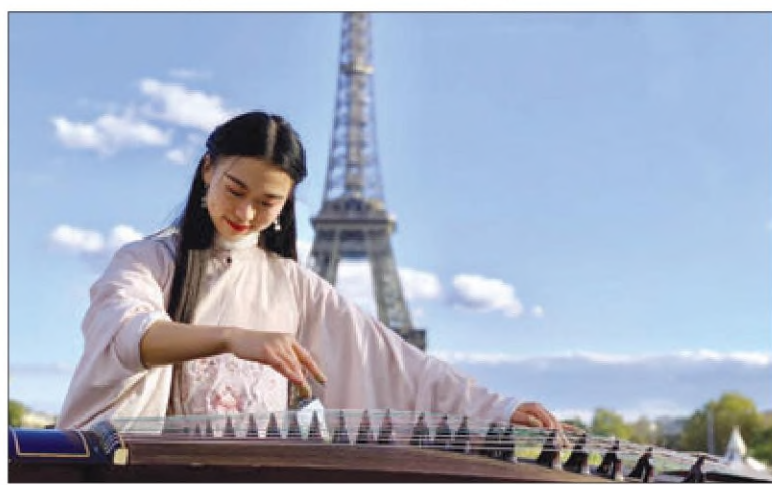
“Nowadays, many *guzheng* techniques are being innovated, and a lot of contemporary compositions are also making great breakthroughs,” Peng said.

“To see the *guzheng* go global and get more people to know of it, understand it, and love it, I think this is our biggest wish of Chinese artists playing traditional musical instruments,” Peng she said.

Renowned Chinese pianist Lang Lang also encouraged Peng when she performed with him in a TV show in 2019.

He said to her, “What you are doing now is a very meaningful thing, to promote and spread our Chinese national instruments to the world.”

Cao Chenyuan and Yan Yuqing contributed to this story. Contact the writers at caihong@chinadaily.com.cn



Clockwise from top left: Peng Jingxuan plays a *guzheng* near the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France. Peng talks about *guzheng* with a teacher at a French university. Peng teaches a girl to play the instrument on the streets of France. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY