

WORLD USA

Ambassadors back China-US relations at 45th anniversary

PAGE 7



Research begins on cultivation of space potatoes

CHINA, PAGE 4



CES opens

Big Chinese companies brighten world's premier tech show in US

BUSINESS, PAGE 8

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China's agenda for diplomacy set for 2024

Nation to enhance friendship, mutual trust, integration with neighbors, FM Wang says

By ZHANG YUNBI zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

When previewing China's diplomacy for the new year, many officials and scholars have voiced hopes that Beijing will play a greater part in fulfilling its due role by expanding its global partnership network, advancing the world's multipolarity and facilitating economic globalization.

In the year ahead, China will "enhance friendship, mutual trust and integration of interests with neighboring countries", and will "walk hand in hand with developing countries and unite and revitalize with BRICS countries", Foreign Minister Wang Yi said in Beijing on Tuesday at a symposium on the global situation and China's diplomacy.

The nation's diplomats will also "firmly safeguard China's sovereignty, security and development interests" and work for an enabling external environment, Wang said in a speech that shed light on Beijing's foreign policy in 2024.

According to its detailed plan, China will tap into the strategic role of head-of-state diplomacy, host four key regional and international events and present the unique charm of major-country diplomacy with

Chinese characteristics, Wang said. The four events will be the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the annual Boao Forum for Asia, the annual China International Import Expo and the Forum on Global Action for Shared Development.

Analysts said the four events will touch on the four themes of seeking common prosperity with the vast number of developing countries, especially those in Africa; getting along well with neighbors; boosting trade and globalization; and spurring global growth by implementing the China-proposed Global Development Initiative.

Such events help cover many of the priorities of China's foreign policy, and President Xi Jinping has noted the value of and paid attention to these events over the years, they noted.

"What impressed me most over the past year is the leading role played by head-of-state diplomacy, and I'm very much looking forward to the homegrown diplomatic events to be held by China in the new year, such as FOCAC," said Wang Yiwei, a professor at the School of International Studies and director of the Institute of International Affairs at Renmin University of China.

See *Diplomacy*, page 4



Foreign Minister Wang Yi gives a speech on Tuesday in Beijing during the opening ceremony of a symposium on the international situation and China's diplomacy. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

WINTER VISITORS GIVE HEILONGJIANG WARM PRAISE

Numerous attractions draw tourists to northeastern province, despite bitterly cold conditions

By ZHOU HUIYING and TIAN XUEFEI in Harbin

Despite arriving in Harbin, the capital of Heilongjiang province, at midnight on Friday, Tianjian rose early the next day and spent the entire morning taking photos on the square in front of Saint Sophia Cathedral.

"This is my most important task during my trip to the city," said the 32-year-old from Nanjing in East China's Jiangsu province, who uses a nickname. "Wearing European-style royal attire and holding a scepter, I enjoy the experience of dressing up as a princess."

The cathedral, one of the best-known landmarks in Harbin and a well-preserved example of Byzantine architecture in China, is open to



the public as an architectural art gallery.

Tiantian said: "As such photos are quite popular on social media platforms, I booked my assignment with a travel photography shop in Harbin several days in advance. I have never seen such magnificent Russian-style architecture before, and I am really looking forward to receiving my photos."

The Harbin branch of Daka Travel Photography has received 40 to 50 customers each day since it opened last month.

See *Harbin*, page 2

Hot wheels



Visitors are checking BOE's latest technology — a 45-inch, 8K borderless smart cockpit screen in Geely's all-electric model Galaxy E8 at CES, which runs from Tuesday to Friday in Las Vegas. The screen, billed as the world's first of its kind, was developed by BOE and launched globally just ahead of CES. LIA ZHU / CHINA DAILY See more story, page 7

Economy on track for solid recovery, more relaxation of policy expected

By ZHOU LANXU and LIU ZHIHUA

China's economy is on track for a solid year with strengthening recovery momentum, fueled by reviving consumer spending, services activity and export growth, said global financial institutions and senior experts.

However, the outlook could be vulnerable to the significant challenges of a lingering property downturn and lagging demand, they warned, underscoring the pressing need for and the rising possibility of more easing in macroeconomic policies.

Anticipated measures include interest rate cuts possibly as early as this month, fiscal expansion of the central government and fresh funding support for real estate developers, they added.

Wang Tao, chief China economist at UBS Investment Bank, said on Tuesday that China's economic momentum is expected to further stabilize and recover this year, thanks to reviving consumer spending as the services sector

and labor market further recover from the impact of COVID-19.

Exports are also likely to pick up amid improving global demand for electronics and technology products, Wang said, adding that the weak property sector's drag on the economy may narrow as real estate development investment may stabilize and pick up in the second half of the year.

"If the property sector cannot be stabilized and it further slides, housing prices will see deeper corrections, which will worsen household confidence. This could be the biggest economic downside risk this year," she said.

China's economic activity picked up in November as export growth turned positive, while retail sales, services activity and industrial output accelerated. However, the property sector remained weak, with real estate development investment down 9.4 percent year-on-year in the first 11 months of 2023.

Yao Wei, chief economist and head of research for Asia Pacific at Societe Generale, said that policymakers

should provide real estate developers with more funding support to help address their debt stress.

Assuming more policy relaxations in the housing sector, stepped-up fiscal support and further monetary easing moves, the Chinese economy could achieve a stable growth of 4.5 percent this year, Yao said.

The tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference, held in December, decided to ensure stable and sound development of the real estate market, and strengthen macroeconomic adjustments as part of the efforts to consolidate and promote the positive momentum of economic recovery.

Lu Ting, chief China economist at Nomura, said the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, is quite likely to cut benchmark lending rates on Monday, when the PBOC injects liquidity via the medium-term lending facility.

Zou Lan, head of the PBOC's monetary policy department, told Xinhua News Agency that the central bank will use a comprehensive set of tools, including the medium-

term lending facility and banks' required reserves, to provide solid support for social financing and credit expansion.

Li Daokui, head of the Academic Center for Chinese Economic Practice and Thinking at Tsinghua University, said that China is expected to achieve around 5 percent growth in 2024 and reverse the economic slowdown seen in more than 10 years, "under the premise that the government adjusts and implements policies in a timely manner".

It is time for policymakers to adopt a more proactive stance, so that macroeconomic policies effectively prevent noneconomic policies, such as social governance, from causing any restrictions on economic activity, Li said at the 46th Tsinghua University Forum of China and the World Economy, hosted by the think tank.

At the same forum, Xu Gao, chief economist at BOC International, said that tepid demand remains the biggest challenge for the Chinese economy amid the lingering property downturn, suggesting that the central government should take on more debt to fund infrastructure investment and shore up demand.

Shi Jing in Shanghai contributed to this story.

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Japan, US defense budgets don't bode well

For obvious reasons, the recent decisions by Japan and the United States to hike their defense budgets for 2024 have sparked concerns. With Japan unveiling a 16 percent surge and the US allocating \$886 billion, surpassing its 2023 budget by \$28 billion, the Asia-Pacific region is bracing for potential tremors.

Not surprisingly, the US, in justifying its hefty defense expenditure, explicitly anchored its fiscal 2024 request in the context of its competition with China. Such an acknowledgment underscores Washington's strategic priorities. Yet the sheer magnitude of US defense spending, dwarfing the combined budgets of the subsequent 10 nations, raises serious questions.

Critics of the administration of US President Joe Biden have been warning against the implications of this unchecked militarization, advocating for a more judicious allocation of resources that could address pressing domestic concerns. Many dissenting voices in the US are also asking the Biden administration to pay attention to critical national issues such as climate change and healthcare rather than competition with China. This underscores a broader debate within the US about its global posture. The US' consistent alignment with strategic interests, sometimes at the expense of global peace, remains contentious.



In a troubling parallel development, Japan also unveiled its defense budget for the coming fiscal year, marking a significant departure from its post-World War II

defense stance. The \$55.76 billion budget, a 16 percent increase over last year, accompanied by eased restrictions on arms exports, signals Japan's aggressive military posture in the Asia-Pacific.

This move, ostensibly to toe the US line to counter China's influence, has raised concerns about regional stability and the delicate balance that has held since World War II. The budget allocates substantial funds to bolstering military infrastructure, enhancing operational capabilities and developing advanced weaponry — paving the way for a potential arms race in the region.

Central to this policy revamp is the authorization to export domestically developed missiles and artillery. Notably, this includes the prospective shipment of Patriot air

See *Defense budgets*, page 3



INSIDE China a model for South-South cooperation Global Views, page 13

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PAGE TWO

Harbin: Scenic spots see brisk trade

Visitors experience ice and snow, northeastern culture, and pose as princesses. PHOTOS BY LIU YANG AND YUAN YONG / FOR CHINA DAILY AND ZHOU HUIYING / CHINA DAILY



From page 1

Zhao Wenlin, manager of the business, said: "Most of our customers come from southern areas of China, such as Guangdong, Hunan, Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces, as well as Shanghai. Their ages range from eight to about 50."

"Daka Travel Photography, which is based in Beijing, has branches nationwide, but the one in Harbin is by far the company's busiest."

"There are at least 200 photographic shops in surrounding areas, and our staff members usually work from 9 am to midnight. As Spring Festival approaches, I believe we will become even busier."

Although Harbin is now witnessing its coldest season, the city known for its ice and snow has become a hot tourist destination this winter, attracting countless visitors from across the country.

Data from the Harbin bureau of culture, broadcasting, TV and tourism show that during the three-day New Year holiday, the city welcomed nearly 3.05 million visitors, earning 5.91 billion yuan (\$825.62 million) in revenue — a record high for tourism in Harbin during this period.

A report by online travel agency Ctrip said that during the New Year holiday, more than 75 percent of the tourists visiting Harbin were mainly from Shanghai, Beijing, and Shenzhen, Guangdong. Bookings during the holiday rose by 158 percent year-on-year.

Among the city's scenic spots, Harbin Ice and Snow World is the most popular. The venue received 163,200 visitors during the New Year holiday, a year-on-year rise of 435 percent, and earned income of 46.18 million yuan, up by 494 percent year-on-year, data from the provincial department of culture and tourism show.

Park sets record

At the 2024 China Ice and Snow Tourism Development Forum held in Harbin on Friday, Harbin Ice and Snow World was recognized by Guinness World Records as the largest ice and snow park in the world, with an area of 816,682.5 square meters.

The park, which combines ice, snow, sound and lights, is in its 25th consecutive year of operation, and visitors can appreciate more than 1,000 artworks made from over 250,000 cubic meters of ice and snow.

They also enjoy a range of other activities, including a 521-meter ice slide, the longest built at the park to date. A giant Ferris wheel in the shape of a snowflake has also been set up to provide the experience of a dazzling landscape after dark.

Also on Friday, the 40th Harbin International Ice and Snow Festival — the city's annual winter gala — opened at the park, welcoming visitors from around the world.

Liang Huiling, governor of Heilongjiang, said at the opening ceremony: "Heilongjiang has abundant ice and snow resources and is also the birthplace of China's modern ice and snow industry. The province is vigorously developing characteristic cultural tourism and carrying out a series of activities to promote the ice and snow economy."

"Since the start of the winter season, Harbin has received acclaim from home and abroad, which has helped accelerate the development of the entire province's snow and ice economy."

To attract more tourists and improve services, the authorities in Harbin have introduced a series of activities, including live performances on New Year's Eve, firework displays, theme parks, intangible cultural heritage shows, and concerts. Measures have also been taken to enhance the visitor experience in the city, covering sectors such as dining, accommodations, travel, shopping, and entertainment.

At the start of this year, the local government held a symposium aimed at improving service quality at hotels during the winter tourism season. It told hotel operators not to raise charges excessively, to avoid blindly adjusting charges, or to present false prices to customers. They were also told to provide high-quality services.

Officials said departments, including market supervision, culture and tourism, and public security, should further strengthen the supervision of hotel room rates, food safety, fire safety, social security, and service quality. They added that illegal acts that infringe on the legitimate rights and interests of tourists must be tackled firmly.

Delegates to the symposium from different hotels said that to comply with local government requirements, they have improved their services by extending breakfast hours, presenting local snacks to customers, increasing the number of lobby concierges, and providing souvenirs.

This month, more than 75 percent of the rooms have been reserved at Modern Hotel, which is located on Central Avenue, Harbin. Despite its name, the hotel boasts a history of over 100 years.

Liu Lingling, the hotel's general manager, said: "Reservations for the New Year holiday remained above 90 percent. We prepared hot ginger candy drinks, hot drinking water, a first aid box, and warm attire for our customers."

When night falls, residents and tourists can enjoy an evening of music on Central Avenue, as the hotel has launched a series of musical performances and dances on its second-floor balcony.

The transportation department has introduced measures to help tourists visit the city's main scenic spots.

For example, the Harbin Metro has extended its operating hours and issued free ferry tickets for use from the two stations on Sun Island to visit Ice and Snow World, which is hosting the 36th China Harbin Sun Island International Snow Sculpture Art Expo and the 25th Harbin Ice and Snow World.

Train service

In the middle of last month, China Harbin Railway Group launched a train service between Harbin and Mohe, Heilongjiang, the nation's most northerly city, themed on culture from Northeast China.

Some sleeper carriages and the dining car were decorated with elements from northeast folk culture, such as window paper cuttings and colorful bedsheets.

During the trip, passengers enjoyed local snacks and dressed in traditional northeastern clothing such as flower-print cotton-padded jackets. They also sang northeastern folk songs, made dumplings, and performed traditional northeastern dances.

Mu Shanshan, the train's conductor, said, "This service is a good way to spread folk culture from the northeast, which allows tourists from South China to better understand the region."

Liu Yuanqi, who comes from Hangzhou, Zhejiang, said: "My friends and I spent New Year's Eve at Harbin Ice and Snow World. As the dazzling fireworks lit up the night sky and turned the park into a fairytale world, it was one of the most unbelievable things I have ever seen."

"However, as we left the park late, it was difficult to find a taxi. But a private car emblazoned with the words 'Welcome *nanfang xiaotudou*' (southern spuds, an affectionate term for visitors from the south). I'll give you a ride for free' stopped in front of us and the driver said he could take us to our hotel."

"The driver refused payment. He told me he was happy to do something for his home-

town, which also made me feel warm."

Apart from visiting scenic spots, many tourists to Harbin enjoy local delicacies such as *tieguodun*, or stewed meat and vegetables, made in a large iron pot.

Chen Weiwei, who comes from Taizhou, Zhejiang, and five friends went to a *tieguodun* restaurant directly after landing in Harbin in the evening on Jan 3.

"All the ingredients, including the meat, vegetables and steamed twisted rolls were cooked in a large pot. It is quite a different taste compared with food from southern China, but we really loved it," Chen said.

"We also tried the local frozen pear snack, which was carefully sliced into bite-sized pieces and elegantly presented."

Yao Lilong, general manager of a catering enterprise with 22 *tieguodun* restaurants across the city, said some customers spend more than two hours waiting for a table if they don't book in advance.

"However, it takes at least two days to confirm an available table. Most of the visitors come from southern regions, and prefer goose as their first choice," he said, adding, "Because the pot contains many ingredients, our waiters advise customers to order less food to avoid waste."

The tourism industry in Heilongjiang set records during the New Year holiday. The province welcomed nearly 6.62 million visitors, a year-on-year rise of 173.7 percent, and 18.4 percent higher than the national growth rate. It achieved tourism revenue of 6.92 billion yuan, a year-on-year rise of 364.7 percent, and 164 percent higher than the national growth rate.

Letter of thanks

On Dec 31, the authorities in Heilongjiang released a "New Year's Thank-You Letter to Domestic and Overseas Tourists" via local media to express their gratitude to visitors.

"Thanks for your enthusiastic visits to magnificent and beautiful Heilongjiang," the letter said. "Tourists' tracks at Harbin Ice and Snow World, Snow Town, the Yabuli Ski Resort, and Mohe, China's northernmost city, have created a beautiful landscape in the province."

The letter urged travelers to venture beyond the icy attractions of Harbin.

It pointed them to the barbecues of Qiqihar, the hot springs of Daqing, to dawn breaking in China's easternmost city of Fuyuan, and to Heihe on the Russian border, where they can "enjoy the integrated urban customs of Europe and Asia."

Acknowledging the importance of feedback, the letter welcomed tourists' suggestions, and promised to make improvements through the 12345 hotline and social media platforms.

This commitment was mirrored by government departments, which the letter said are strengthening market supervision and problem-solving processes.

The letter also recognized the power of user-generated content.

"All the short videos and travel articles you post online are the best promotion of Heilongjiang. Your likes and comments are also the greatest encouragement to Heilongjiang, as they can increase awareness of the province's unique scenery, high-quality products, and its warmhearted residents," it said.

He Jing, director of the Heilongjiang culture and tourism department, told China Central Television: "The popularity of Harbin is no accident, and since the start of 2023, we have been promoting Heilongjiang in a multidimensional way on new media platforms, establishing numerous destinations dubbed by netizens as must-visit attractions. Moreover, we have made every effort to optimize the tourism market environment."

The department is also paying more attention to comments made in online videos.

"We will do our best to meet tourists' needs," He said. "Some visitors said it would be better if the moon was shining when they took photos at Saint Sophia Cathedral, so we sent a drone to lift an artificial moon over the landmark. Others said it was too cold in Harbin, so we immediately built a number of small prefabricated houses for them to get warm."

"All these details can make tourists feel comfortable and respected, and they post news of them on the internet, receiving a warm response."

Experts said the authorities in Harbin and throughout Heilongjiang need to seriously consider ways to promote the long-term sustainable development of ice and snow tourism.

Wang Lili, a researcher at the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Science and director of its Regional Economic Research Office, said: "Heilongjiang should well-inherit and advance its ice and snow culture, and constantly promote the creative transformation and innovative development of its culture. The province can transform the natural advantages of ice and snow into economic development advantages."

It can also improve its ice and snow smart tourism service platform and digitize services to help launch a personalized ice and snow tourism consumption model for different consumer groups, she said.

"Governments can improve emergency management capabilities, passenger flow statistics, and an early warning system with the application of 5G technology, the internet of things, and other comprehensive monitoring platforms," Wang added.

"The culture and tourism department can integrate tourism resources across the province, such as snowfields, forests, wetlands and hot springs to plan different tourism routes. The improved supply of tourism products can provide visitors with a variety of choices and extend the length of their stay in the province."

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Visitors line up to use the slide at Sun Island in Harbin, Heilongjiang. ZHAO TIANHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Flourishing cooperation



Guo Guangyu (second from left), an expert of the China Aid Agricultural Technical Cooperation Project, and a rice farmer mark bags in Divo, Cote d'Ivoire, on Monday. The area has recently seen the ripening of the rice crop, and local farmers have been busy harvesting rice in their paddy fields. HAN XU / XINHUA

Video blogger aims to bridge gap between China, US

By CHEN YINGQUN
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There was a time when video blogger from the United States Jerry Kowal, like many others who have never visited China and have very little idea about it, only associated the country with pandas, chopsticks and kung fu stars.

However, a three-week trip as an exchange student in 2010 proved to be an eye-opener. Impressed by the cuisine, culture and people, Kowal went on to pursue studies in Chinese culture, driven by a genuine desire to gain a deeper understanding of China, and followed it up with a number of visits to the country.

Today, Kowal is an influencer with over 20 million followers on social media platforms. People from around the world follow him to learn about culture and life in China as well as in the US.

"I think a lot of people in China have misconceptions about the US. I had hoped my videos would clear those up," he said. "For example, a lot of my friends would go to study in the US thinking it all looked like New York, but then they would arrive in a rural university town and life would be quite different."

He then began to share what he experienced and witnessed in China, recording his life as a foreigner in the country and turning the camera toward ordinary Chinese people, highlighting the differences between US and Chinese cuisines, cultures and customs.

So far he has made hundreds of videos focusing on cultures, food and travels in China. He has tasted super spicy local cuisines, traveled through the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, tried new Chinese high-tech products, and compared infrastructure

construction in China and the US.

"I can trace back my interest in China to the fact that we are vastly different cultures. I find it quite interesting to understand the cultural nuances," he said. "However, I have to admit the longer I stay here the more I realize that I have a lot to learn. I adamantly believe from an American's standpoint that it's next to impossible to have an in-depth understanding of China without being here."

Media, whether in China or the US, can only play a limited role in helping people truly and comprehensively understand a country or a culture, he said, adding that one really has to spend a significant amount of time immersing oneself in China to understand it.

He said that in the US, politicians adopt an extremely negative stance on China, which he blames on electoral compulsions.

"It's just a convenient talking point. Any hint of nuance or wanting to establish a better friendship with China from a politician in the US would immediately be taunted and rebuked by the public and the media. Furthermore, a lot of the China 'experts' on US TV haven't been here in years," Kowal said.

Genuine approach

Ning Xiaoxue, a 25-year-old employee at a private company in Shanghai, follows him on social media. She discovered his videos while browsing through Bilibili, a video-sharing platform.

Kowal's portrayal of his experiences of living in China fascinates her. "I appreciate Kowal's genuine and objective approach as he immerses himself in the local lifestyle and offers insightful commentary based on his encounters, rather than resorting to exaggerated

praise without thinking," Ning said.

She cites the example of a video that Kowal made while spending a working day at a courier station in Shanghai. That is how he discovered that China has a highly efficient logistic system and the last-mile delivery services have made lives much easier for consumers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Kowal wasn't able to make his usual videos. Staying in New York at that time, he recorded short videos about life amid the pandemic, in which he conducted interviews on the streets, visited hospitals, and also discussed the causes of the outbreak in the US. He compared the US situation with China's stricter COVID-19 response measures, commenting that the latter was a much more effective strategy.

Biased accusations

However, his videos have caused some heartburn in certain sections of the Western media, which have accused him of being part of "Chinese propaganda, basically trying to help the government make its own points."

"I really just filmed what I saw with my own eyes, I try as best as possible to stay objective, whether about my country or China," he said. "And I really stand by the point that if the US adopted some of China's COVID control measures, more Americans would be alive."

Recently, he faced accusations in a report that he believed "is potentially both biased and exhibits questionable research standards."

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute released a lengthy research report on Nov 24 accusing Kowal of echoing China's official statements, citing his videos about COVID-19.

Kowal said he was not even contacted for the research. He was stigmatized and that smear continues to spread online, as the

report was then cited by certain Western media outlets, and that unfounded accusations against him have been repeated again and again, Kowal added.

Ironically, he found that the policy institute was funded by the Global Engagement Center of the US Department of State and he believes the report has either been directly or indirectly funded by the US State Department. In an open letter to the State Department on Dec 6, he urged it to stop using US money to fund an organization to attack a US citizen.

He Yun, an associate professor at the School of Public Policy of Hunan University, said that over the past few years, the US has regarded China as a strategic competitor and has stepped up efforts to contain China. The US government, coordinating with research centers and media outlets, has created a chilly environment and discouraged those who view China objectively or are friendly with China from speaking freely.

"Even some cultural and tourism influencers have been politicized and stigmatized, which is very unfair to them and not conducive to the development of bilateral relations and people-to-people exchanges," she said.

Kowal said that people who are really informed about China and the US usually have a more balanced view of both countries.

"Some people think a country could be either inherently evil or inherently good. I don't think it's that simple. I think it's imperative that more Americans come to China even if it's just for a 10-day trip," he said.

Liu Jianqiao and Zheng Zheng contributed to this story.

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Parcel delivery sector sees huge growth

Annual conference outlines development strategy, work priorities for the current year

By LUO WANGSHU
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China's parcel delivery sector aims to handle a record 14.25 billion consignments this year, said a senior official with the national agency governing the industry.

In 2023, the sector made remarkable achievements, with the estimated number of parcels handled reaching 13.2 billion, up 19.5 percent year-on-year, Zhao Chongjiu, head of the State Post Bureau of China, said on Tuesday at the sector's annual conference in Beijing.

The conference outlined the sector's development strategy, goals and work priorities for 2024.

Zhao said the country's parcel delivery network and logistics system will be further improved, highlighting the construction of major infrastructure facilities and enhanced cargo transportation capabilities by air and road.

The use of high-speed railways for parcel delivery and the promotion of multimode transportation will be encouraged, he said.

The network and service quality in rural areas will also be improved, with the establishment of charitable posts at parcel delivery stations and the utilization of scheduled passenger buses to solve the "last kilometer" problem in rural areas, he added.

Zhao emphasized that another major goal for the parcel delivery sector this year is green development. Parcel delivery companies will be encouraged to introduce more new energy vehicles for transporting parcels, he said.

Over the past decade, China's parcel delivery sector has experienced rapid development, handling more than 120 billion packages in 2022, a tenfold increase since 2013.

"Last year, the parcel delivery sector improved its ability to

ensure smooth circulation, boosted the efficiency and capability to handle parcels and enhanced the development of intelligent delivery," Zhao said.

To improve logistics efficiency, dedicated freight airports and air hubs were constructed and put into operation last year. For instance, the dedicated cargo airport in Ezhou, Hubei province, mainly invested in by SF Express, is now fully operational. In addition, construction has begun on another freight air hub in Jiaxing, Zhejiang province, mainly invested in by YTO Express.

Last year, parcel delivery services and networks in rural areas were improved, facilitating the transportation of agricultural produce to urban areas and commodities to rural areas. This resulted in increased incomes for rural residents and improved their lives.

In terms of global development, 312 overseas distribution centers and 300 warehouses were established last year to promote the sector's expansion internationally.

The country's booming parcel delivery sector has had a transformative impact on people's lives, said Sun Jijun, head of Yunda Express' distribution center in Dongxing, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. He said that couriers' incomes are among the highest in the city as they earn as much as 6,000 yuan (\$837.5) to 8,000 yuan per month.

After entering the parcel delivery business in 2013, Sun has worked in many positions in the company, including as a courier and a sorter. He owns an apartment in the city not far from his parents' home.

The emerging parcel delivery business has offered him a stable, pleasant and sometimes challenging job for more than 10 years, he said.



Staff at an e-commerce logistics industrial park in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province, sort express parcels on the assembly line of an express transit center. ZHANG LING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Defense budgets: New acrimony injected into region's complex matrix

From page 1

defense missiles abroad. This controversial decision, the most sweeping in nearly a decade, reflects Japan's aggressive stance in bolstering its military power and fostering alliances in the Asia-Pacific theater.

While this move may solidify Japan's ties with the US, it also injects new acrimony into the already complex matrix of the region. Such a shift risks unsettling the delicate equilibrium of regional dynamics. With approximately 2 trillion yen (\$14 billion) allocated to resolving spare-part deficits and enhancing combat preparedness, Tokyo showcases its commitment to military modernization, a far cry from its pacifist Constitution.

This budgetary framework underscores Japan's deliberate attempt to start a new arms race in the region under the pretext of "regional stability and peace". Tokyo's ambitious plans to augment its military arsenal with hypersonic and precision-guided

missiles, alongside the procurement of advanced naval vessels, signal a significant shift in regional dynamics.

The earmarking of 400 billion yen for the introduction of 30 mobile landing craft and transport helicopters, ostensibly for swift deployment in the southwestern islands, adds a layer of complexity to the East Asian security landscape. Furthermore, Japan's move to amalgamate its ground, maritime and air self-defense forces into a unified maritime transport group further raises questions about its strategic intent.

Japan's incremental shift away from its pacifist principles, evidenced by eased restrictions on arms exports and heightened defense spending, suggests Tokyo's recalibrated strategic calculus. Interestingly, Japan's internal discourse also reflects divisions, with many pacifists challenging the constitutional implications of these militaristic strides. Yet Japan's evolving defense posture, when juxtaposed against historical con-

China views its growth and stability as intrinsic to regional and global harmony. Instead of becoming part of an arms race, the nation maintains a focus on comprehensive development, mutual cooperation and upholding multilateral frameworks.

texts, particularly its wartime aggressions, evokes concerns.

Japan's increased defense expenditure aligns with the mammoth US military budget, signaling a formidable alliance that risks escalating tensions in the Asia-Pacific. Considering the US influence on Tokyo's policies, Japan's militarization threatens regional stability, prompting concerns about its fiscal sustainability.

The budget's allocation for joint military ventures and collaborations with the US and the Republic of Korea creates qualms about an emerging "small NATO" in the Asia-Pacific, adding a layer of complexity to regional dynamics. Initiatives like the US-Japan-ROK Trilateral Summit and calls for expanded military alliances necessitate introspection about the broader objectives of regional stability.

Japan's recent decisions, from its defense budget to environmental policies, contribute to an evolving regional narrative that poses challenges to China and members of

the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The discharge of contaminated wastewater from the crippled Fukushima nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean, despite international reservations, amplifies concerns about Tokyo's unilateral decisions and their implications for regional peace and stability.

The Asia-Pacific region stands at a pivotal juncture. The recalibrated defense postures of major players, juxtaposed against historical legacies and contemporary challenges, contribute to an intricate geopolitical mosaic. The unprecedented pivot in Japan's defense strategy risks disrupting long-standing regional relationships and introducing a destabilizing variable into the Asia-Pacific dynamic.

Beijing has adopted a more holistic approach. China views its growth and stability as intrinsic to regional and global harmony. Instead of becoming part of an arms race, the nation maintains a focus on comprehensive development, mutual cooperation and

upholding multilateral frameworks.

Japan's militarization is viewed with apprehension by neighboring countries, as it might escalate East Asian tensions rather than easing them. China may be compelled to take countermeasures to ensure regional stability and its own security. The push by the US for increased military engagement in the region, particularly against China, further fuels concerns about a potential arms race and geopolitical rivalry.

The Asia-Pacific region, which is grappling with transformative shifts, must navigate this evolving situation cautiously. The US role in shaping Japan's defense policies raises questions about its intent in the region and the potential consequences for global peace. The delicate balance that has prevailed since World War II is at risk, and the Asia-Pacific must collectively address this issue to ensure a harmonious and interconnected future.

The author is an international affairs commentator and freelancer based in Karachi, Pakistan. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Cleared for takeoff

Passengers board a C919 aircraft operated by China Eastern Airlines at Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport on Monday destined for Beijing Daxing International Airport. The flight marked the second regular route for the domestically developed large passenger aircraft, following the previously launched Shanghai Hongqiao-Chengdu Tianfu route.

YIN LIQIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Scientists eye space potatoes' growing potential in the field

Seeds' in-orbit exposure hoped to have induced mutations to enhance traits

By YUAN HUI in Hohhot and ZHAO RUIXUE

Scientists have begun the selection and cultivation process of over 60,000 potato seeds that spent five months in space, in the hope of discovering unique qualities that may improve efficiency and yield.

The seeds, delivered to the Shangdu Potato Technology Innovation Center in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, were carried aboard the Shenzhou XVI space mission that returned to Earth on Oct 31.

"The cultivation process for these space potatoes will involve test stages in the laboratory, greenhouse and field," said Zhang Linhai, director of the Shangdu Potato Technology Innovation Center.

The region boasts an excellent potato-growing environment with high altitude, cold climate, few pests and diseases, and ample available land, said Zhang in an interview with China Daily on Tuesday.

The seeds will be germinated in a greenhouse under optimal conditions and then nurtured in pots until tubers develop. Subsequently, they will be transferred to the field for further evaluation of their various characteristics.

"About five percent of the plants will be selected for additional testing, focusing on factors such as yield and disease resistance," said Zhang.

Researchers will employ CRISPR, a precise gene-editing technology used to selectively modify the DNA of living organisms, to cultivate potato varieties with enhanced traits like



Potato seeds that were taken to space in 2022 are cultured at the potato innovation center in Shangdu, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. JIA PENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

high disease resistance and salt-alkali tolerance, said Zhang.

"The space environment has the potential to induce genetic mutations in plant seeds, leading to desirable traits such as early maturity, high quality, high yield and disease

resistance," Hu Baigeng, director of the National Engineering Research Center for Potato, said on Monday.

The center is based in Laoling, Shandong province, where the seeds were collected before being sent into space.

This breeding technique, known as space-induced mutation breeding or space mutagenesis, involves exposing seeds to strong cosmic rays, as well as other conditions such as vacuums, microgravity and low levels of geomagnetic interference.

China has been conducting space breeding experiments since 1987, sending the seeds of various plant species into space on retrievable satellites and Shenzhou spaceships. Space crops, including rice, wheat and tomatoes, have been successfully cultivated across the country.

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Terracotta artist rekindles lost light on ancient skills

By QIN FENG in Xi'an and ZHAO RUINAN

The creator of the world's first life-size Terracotta Warrior replica in 1979 is as passionate as ever about historical sculpture today as she was over 40 years ago.

Wang Qian, 79, talks excitedly about her most recent terracotta replicas and recreations of musical and dancing figurines made real once more from pictures of the originals that have been looted or ruined, after being interpreted from descriptions in ancient texts and partial fragments found in museums.

"Look at this girl on the horse. She's got such an amazing presence and carries herself with such confidence and style," she said, pointing to one particular figurine carved into a spirited posture.

More than 100 different sets of figures were created by Wang and her team from 2015 to 2020, counting more than 350 altogether. They have breathed new life into what was ancient lost art and culture of China.

An exhibition in Xi'an, which opened in November, is displaying about a tenth of the replicas.

Despite Wang being a master of arts and crafts, reproducing terracotta pieces from ancient times is no easy task.

"The process of replicating terracotta figures is complex and challenging. From preparing the clay to shaping, molding, firing, coloring and aging, each step must be executed with precision and care," she said.

Terracotta figures gradually fell out of favor during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and many of the original techniques were lost. It was a significant loss for Chinese culture.

"Replicating musical and dancing figurines is not just about externalizing the physical forms, but also about the continuity and promotion of traditional culture," she said.

Over the past four decades, Wang has developed a complete set of techniques for replicating painted terracotta sculptures — some small, some large — and has duplicated more than 6,000 pieces.

The connection between Wang and the art of painted terracotta is similar to the process of making the figures themselves — it is an art that takes shape through repeated

exploration and contemplation.

Wang was born into a family of artists. Her father, Wang Ziyun, was a renowned painter, sculptor and a pioneer in China's earliest modern fine arts movement. He studied sculpture in France in the 1940s and later returned to China, where he advocated for the establishment of professional teams in art archaeology as part of cultural preservation efforts. Wang's mother also participated in those efforts.

Influenced by her family, Wang nurtured a passion for preserving cultural heritage. She studied at a school of fine art in Xi'an and worked as a researcher at the Xi'an Beilin Museum for more than 20 years before retiring in 2000 — a period during which she produced thousands of terracotta replicas.

In 1979, she produced the world's first life-size Terracotta Warrior replica, creating a sensation at home and abroad. Her works were presented as national gifts to former French president Francois Mitterrand and have won numerous awards.

In 1995, Wang's series of pottery figurines of ancient Chinese dancers won the gold award at the 44th Eureka World Invention Exhibition in Brussels, Belgium, igniting a Chinese culture frenzy.

The musical and dancing figurines provide a visual representation of the social life and aesthetics of ancient China, Wang said. She believes that the figurines are a crucial part of cultural heritage and play a significant role in preserving and promoting traditional Chinese culture.

She has led many students on visits to various museums to observe pieces from different eras, explaining their characteristics and analyzing and comparing their sculptural features and production techniques.

"I am passing on the baton of cultural inheritance and cultural awareness to my students," she said.

"I want to compile my 40 years of experience into a book and interpret the history of ancient Chinese music and dance from the perspective of pottery figurines, ensuring the long-lasting inheritance of these traditional techniques for creating painted terracotta figurines."

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X-ray telescope launched to learn more about black holes

By ZHAO LEI zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

China launched a cutting-edge orbital telescope on Tuesday afternoon to try to capture traces of fleeting phenomena and give scientists more knowledge about black holes.

The Einstein Probe, a space-based X-ray telescope, was launched by a Long March 2C carrier rocket that lifted off at 3:03 pm from the Xichang Satellite Launch Centre in Southwest China's Sichuan province, and then placed in a low-Earth orbit.

It is the latest space science satellite developed by the Chinese Academy

of Sciences, following the Mozi quantum science satellite, the Wukong dark matter particle explorer, the Insight Hard X-ray Modulation Telescope and several other spacecraft.

The Chinese Academy of Sciences' National Astronomical Observatories said the Einstein Probe is dedicated to time-domain high-energy astrophysics and multi-messenger astronomy. The satellite has two payloads: the Wide-field X-ray Telescope and the Follow-up X-ray Telescope.

Its primary goals are to discover and characterize cosmic X-ray transients, particularly faint, distant and

rare X-ray transients, in large numbers; discover and characterize X-ray outbursts from otherwise normally dormant black holes; and search for X-ray sources associated with gravitational-wave events and precisely locate them.

The observatories said the mission will address some of the key questions in astrophysics and cosmology, such as the prevalence of massive black holes in the universe and how they formed and evolved, the astrophysical origins and underlying processes of gravitational wave events, and the progenitors and processes of supernovas.

The European Space Agency and

the Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics in Germany have participated in the project.

The ESA provided support for the testing and calibrating of the detectors and optical elements of the Wide-field X-ray Telescope, and also helped develop and test the mirror assembly and electron diverter of the Follow-up X-ray Telescope.

Its ground stations will be used to help download data from the spacecraft throughout the mission, the European agency said.

The Max Planck Institute for Extraterrestrial Physics contributed some components and test facilities to the project.



Wang Qian examines a figurine in her workshop in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Diplomacy: China to 'promote building of a new type of international relations'

From page 1

Beijing has long been seeking to make the global governance system more reasonable and fairer, and the plan for this year's diplomacy is evidence of China's rejection of anti-globalization impulses and Cold War mentality, he added.

China's great sense of purpose is underpinned by its distinctive role as the world's largest developing country, he said.

"The nation represents one-fifth of the total global population, contributes more than one-third of global economic growth annually, and has a critical vote on the United Nations Security Council representing the interests of the vast number of developing countries," he said.

Over the past year, more than 70 countries have joined the group of friends of the China-led Global Development Initiative, and more than 200 GDI cooperation projects have taken root.

Regarding advancing inclusive economic globalization, Foreign Minister Wang said China will pro-

vide the implementation of the GDI, increase its investment in global development cooperation, and translate into reality the outcomes of the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.

China firmly opposes unilateralism, protectionism and anti-globalization moves of any form, he added.

Dec 31 marked the 70th anniversary of China's proposing the landmark diplomacy philosophy known as the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The principles ask countries for "mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, noninterference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence."

China looks to take this anniversary as an opportunity to "promote the building of a new type of international relations", Wang Yi said.

Speaking on advocating the building of an equal and orderly multipolar world, Wang said Beijing will continue to practice true multilateralism and fully implement the Global Security Initiative.

“Economic and trade relations have been a cornerstone of China's political relations with the rest of the major countries, and none of them should seek economic decoupling.”

Yang Bojiang, director-general of the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

In particular, Beijing will "adhere to fairness and justice, actively promote peace and talks, constructively participate in resolving global and regional hot spots such as the Palestine-Israel conflict and the Ukraine crisis, put forward more Chinese proposals, contribute more Chinese

wisdom, and provide more public goods that are conducive to world peace and development", the foreign minister added.

Wang Huiyao, president of the Beijing-based Center for China and Globalization, said that China, "as the second-largest economy in the world and a responsible major country, has been faithfully fulfilling its principle of peaceful coexistence and its commitment to win-win cooperation".

Over the past few years, China has played an increasingly important role in mediating for peace, such as its success last year in facilitating the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and it hopefully will play a bigger role in this regard, he said.

"It is noteworthy that many countries such as those in the Middle East have long had the willingness to reconcile, but they had failed to find proper platforms or mediators (before looking to China)," he said.

"China has never invaded these countries and is also one of the largest trade partners with Middle East countries, which makes possible its

good relations with all these countries and makes it an ideal partner for reconciliation and making peace," he added.

When elaborating on enhancing China's bilateral relations with specific countries or regions, the foreign minister said Beijing will "always adhere to openness and inclusiveness, and consolidate and expand its global partnership network".

In his speech, Wang Yi mentioned the United States, Russia and the European Union in particular.

On China-US relations, he said China plans to implement the consensus reached at the summit between President Xi and US President Joe Biden in San Francisco in November and "explore forming a proper way for the two major countries to get along".

Beijing will work with Moscow to "deepen China-Russia strategic mutual trust and mutually beneficial cooperation" to strengthen their comprehensive strategic partnership in the new era, he said.

China and the EU will "work closer in high-level exchanges and stra-

tegic communication, and promote the steady and lasting progress of China-EU relations", Wang added.

Yang Bojiang, director-general of the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that one of the top priorities for China's diplomacy this year is "securing the steady growth of its relations with other major countries and the strategic stability of major-country relations".

Washington and Tokyo should work with Beijing to channel efforts for rolling out the leaders' consensus as well as expanding pragmatic cooperation, such as through economic and trade collaboration, Yang said.

"Economic and trade relations have been a cornerstone of China's political relations with the rest of the major countries, and none of them should seek economic decoupling," he added.

Another major task for Chinese diplomats is to deal with uncertainties about how elections that will be held this year in some major countries, such as the US, could affect ties with China, Yang said.

CHINA



Clockwise from left: A worker checks timber that will be used to make a musical instrument in a Hebei Qide Musical Instruments Manufacturing Co warehouse in Baixiang county, Hebei province. A technician works on a violin in the company's factory. A worker makes a component for an instrument in the factory. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Violin-maker orchestrates his dream of bringing music to all

Manufacturer meets growing demand for instruments

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
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Chang Jingqi, a musical instrument maker from Baixiang county in Xingtai, Hebei province, is on the way to realizing his dream of bringing music to as many people as possible.

The 61-year-old is the founder of Hebei Qide Musical Instruments Manufacturing Co, which produces, sells and repairs musical instruments and related products.

"When I was young, I was just a carpenter making furniture. Then one time I went to Beijing and had a chance encounter with handmade violins. I fell in love with making them," Chang said, adding that he also found a teacher to teach him the craft.

In 2005, after years of hard work in the capital, Chang registered his own brand, Qide Musical Instruments, whose main products are stringed instruments such as violins, violas,

cellos and double basses that meet the needs of a wide variety of musicians. "When I first started, the instruments were mainly supplied to foreign countries, while the main customers in our country were from music colleges and performance groups," Chang said.

However, demand for musical instruments in first and second-tier Chinese cities gradually increased as a result of the popularization and development of music education in the country, he said.

In 2018, Chang moved his factory from Beijing to Baixiang, hoping to do something meaningful — both culturally and financially — for his hometown. At his two-story factory, which covers about 2,000 square meters, a wide variety of musical instruments can be seen.

"In the past, processing the wood required a lot of physical strength, but now we have basically switched to cutting machines, although other processes are still mostly done by hand," Chang said.

According to Chang, violin-making is an involved process that includes wood selection, board-scraping, sound post installation, sound control carving and the installation and adjustment of strings.

"Making an instrument requires dozens of procedures, and each step can have an impact on the quality and sound," he said.

Apart from Chang, there are a dozen craftsmen working on various sizes and models of instruments. "Each elegant-looking instrument resembles a work of art, where aesthetics and craftsmanship blend seamlessly," he said.

In a varnishing booth in the factory, a worker surnamed Huang sprays a violin. "The spray I use is specifically made for violins. It is a special formula made with alcohol and plant resin, which is environmentally friendly and safe," Huang said, adding that Chang produced the spray after conducting research.

"He is strict with all aspects of instrument making," Huang said.

Chang's hometown Baixiang is an ancient county with a long history and rich cultural heritage. In 2010, a *taoxian*, or clay flute, dating back approximately 6,000 years ago was excavated from a Yangshao cultural site in Xiaoli village, according to the local government.

The flute was classified as a completely preserved ancient musical instrument. Boasting such deep heritage, the county has continuously

expanded development of the cultural industry in recent years by unearthing examples of craftsmanship from common people and cultivating related cultural industries.

Chang's musical instrument manufacturing business is among those industries. While providing job opportunities, his company has also promoted the development of local culture. The factory can produce about 1,000 handmade violins per year, with sales of about 7 million yuan (\$988,000), Chang said. More than 80 percent of the handmade violins are exported to countries such as the United States, Germany, France and Japan.

"The output is not huge, because most of the products are of medium and high quality and take a lot of time (to produce)," he said.

Chang also plans to establish a music training center.

"I will invite music teachers from first-tier cities like Beijing to provide training and guidance for local children, in order to promote music education in my hometown, letting more local children get in touch with musical instruments," he said.

"I hope that in the future, we can not only produce masterpieces, but also nurture some talent in music."

Ancient tomb accidentally revealed in Chongqing

By LIANG SHUANG
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A tomb that dates back some 2,200 years ago was uncovered inadvertently in Southwest China's Chongqing municipality last year, amazing archaeologists with its extremely well-preserved state and some unique relics that have never been seen before.

The archaeologists announced the discoveries during a seminar last month at the Guankou No 1 Tomb of the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24), saying that it was the earliest tomb nationwide that can be precisely dated (193 BC) after the dynasty was established.

Huang Wei, leader of the excavation team from the Chongqing Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute, told Xinhua News Agency that the discovery of the tomb was somewhat of an accident.

"We were hoping to find tombs from the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) based on fragmented stone building blocks found in this area in the past," Huang said, adding that the discovery of a Western Han Dynasty tomb wasn't expected.

He said that the archaeological investigation that began in March last year was a routine procedure ahead of the construction of an upcoming hydropower project on the Wujiang River.

Several tombs were discovered in the following months in the investigated area, including the Guankou No 1 tomb. When excavators removed the cover of the outer coffin, they found that the tomb was filled with clear water — a rare situation and a first in Chongqing, experts said.

"A clear-water tomb is formed after groundwater seeps through and is filtered by a special type of dirt that was used to seal the tomb, with leftover mud and sand sinking to the bottom of the coffin," Tang Xuefeng, director of Jingmen Museum in Hubei province, explained during a program on China Central Television.

A tomb submerged in clear water often indicates that relics inside are well-preserved, as the water could help keep air out and protect the relics from erosion.

After pumping out the water, experts found a wooden slip that recorded the precise date of the tomb being sealed, which translates to 193 BC, making it the earliest tomb found after the establishment of the Western Han Dynasty.

Some 600 relics were found in

the tomb, and most are relatively intact, experts said, adding that some have not been seen elsewhere.

For example, a whole set of wooden slips indicating time were uncovered, experts said, saying that it was the nation's first such discovery. In the set of 23 slips, one read "today"; the other 22 each featured a character from the Tiangan-Dizhi system, the ancient Chinese way of recording date and time.

In addition, paintings were found on two sides of the inner coffin. The slips in the tomb meant that the paintings were also the earliest in the nation that can be precisely dated.

Other attention-grabbing items included a specially ornamented sword sheath, a 2-meter-long spear, a 1.2-meter-long bow, a game board and residue from grain and fruits such as chestnuts, which archaeologists believed was a favorite when the tomb owner was alive. They added that there were some items that needed to be unpacked and further studied.

The relics showed characteristics of integration among various cultures as the Western Han Dynasty was gaining a foothold and expanding its influence nationwide, experts said.

Archaeologists deduced that with such a large number of buried objects, the owner must have been someone with an eminent status.

Through wooden chips dubbed *gao dishu* — "a letter to the underworld" — that serve as a "reference letter" believed to help the deceased better migrate to the underworld, experts said the tomb owner was likely a high-ranking official in charge of supervising other officials.

"The words *yushichang* were clearly written in the reference letter," excavation team leader Huang told Shangyou News a week after the seminar, citing the latest finding. "We deduced that *yushi* may refer to the position he served, while *chang* may be his name."

Established during the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC) and maintained for centuries, *yushi* was a position set to supervise other high-ranking officials.

"We look forward to finding a personal seal or other texts to validate that theory," Huang said, adding that the team will also seek advice from other senior experts and on-site workers to determine a plan for further excavation and research.



From left: Zhang Jian (right) serves a customer on a trail at the Songhua Lake Resort in Jilin, Jilin province, on Dec 7. Zhang works on the trails at the resort. PHOTOS BY ZHANG NAN / XINHUA



Ski field photography clicks in Jilin

CHANGCHUN — A skier skimmed across the slope before suddenly stopping in a flurry of snowflakes. It happened in seconds, but the images were recorded by a photographer not far away in a succession of shots.

This photographer, Zhang Jian, is the chief of the photography team at the Songhua Lake Resort in Jilin, a city in the northeastern Chinese province of the same name. Since being introduced to the industry, the ski and photography enthusiast said he feels the job is tailor-made for him.

"The thrill of speed and the desire to push one's limits are the charms of skiing, of which photography is the best carrier," he said.

An art major who hails from Jilin province, Zhang landed a job as a ski resort staff member in 2010.

Seeing that more skiers wanted photos on the snow, he saw it as an opportunity and worked hard to improve his skiing and photo skills.

In 2015, Zhang became one of the first contracted photographers on China's Hey Snow app, which offers photography services to skiers. In 2018, he took the lead in setting up a ski photography studio called Snow.

He has witnessed growing demand for ski photography and the popularization of winter sports in China, boosted by the Beijing Winter Olympics in 2022.

During the snow season in 2021-2022, Zhang's team uploaded a total of 3.82 million photos, 23 times more than in 2018-2019, with sales exceeding 1 million yuan (\$140,845). He expects to set

a fresh record this season.

According to its provincial tourism industry development program, Jilin has 75 ski resorts and 319 snow trails. The province plans to raise snow and ice tourism revenue to 500 billion yuan within five years.

Since the beginning of this snow season, his photography team's schedule has been almost fully booked. Apart from local skiers, he has noticed more enthusiasts from other parts of China, for whom the experience is a valuable one that deserves to be recorded photographically.

Ski enthusiast Cheng Yang, from Nanjing in East China's Jiangsu province, told Xinhua News Agency she and her friends go skiing each year. In the past, they used to go to Japan or Europe. But now,

with the rapid development of the winter sports industry and infrastructure at Chinese ski resorts, they have changed their preferred destinations to Jilin or the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

This year, she has ordered a few photos. "In the past, skiers used to take photos for each other, and the quality was not ensured," she said. "Now that we have professional photographers here, taking photos has become a necessary part of my skiing experience, and I am glad to share them on social media."

Satisfied skiers are what Zhang and his colleagues want to see.

"The photographer might have to stand on the slope for hours to capture a perfect moment of a skier," he said. "It is the biggest achievement for photographers to record wonderful memories for skiers through photos."

XINHUA

County using internet tech to improve growth

By QUAN ZHANFU
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Located in the core area of the Sanjiang Plain in Heilongjiang province, Baoqing county is a major rice-producing site with an arable land area of 507,000 hectares.

In recent years, the county has actively embraced internet technology in agricultural production and constructed an "internet plus agriculture" base spanning 8,000 hectares.

Hongqiling Farm, spanning Baoqing and neighboring Raohe county, is at the forefront of this agricultural strategy.

With the aim of achieving sustainable development and increasing its yield, Hongqiling implemented a set of technologies to form an agricultural internet of things platform.

With an investment of over 8 million yuan (\$1.12 million), the IoT platform has seamlessly integrated the entire agricultural production process of over 667 hectares of paddy fields with the internet.

The platform combines various agricultural technologies, providing automated data on the rice growth process. By analyzing and processing the data, the platform generates reports that support management of these paddy fields and ensure safe production, thereby guiding the agricultural production activities.

Through a traceability system,

the entire production process of agricultural products can be monitored, ensuring product safety and reliability, according to a report by China Food News in September.

Besides setting up the internet plus agriculture bases, Baoqing has also sought help from agricultural professionals to tackle the difficulties farmers have encountered during cultivation so as to promote the quality development of agriculture and increase income for farmers.

In early September, the Northern Rice Research Center of the China National Rice Research Institute, a national-level rice technology innovation platform, was established in Baoqing to address major common issues in rice production in northern China, such as rice blast disease, cold damage and lodging, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Wu Kongming, president of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, said that the center is going to be forged into a comprehensive research and innovation institute integrating industry, academia and research in rice to better serve local socioeconomic development, and to fuel rural revitalization.

Moreover, Baoqing has also taken steps to enhance agricultural infrastructure and has picked up the pace in terms of building renowned brands with its agricultural products. The county now has 14,330 hectares dedicated to the building of green food bases.

WORLD

S. Korea
outlaws
dog meat
industry

SEOUL — South Korea's parliament on Tuesday passed a bill banning breeding, slaughtering and selling dogs for their meat, a move that has drawn mixed responses.

Some angry dog farmers said they plan to challenge the bill's constitutionality and hold protest rallies, a sign of continued heated debate over the ban.

The National Assembly passed the bill by a 208-0 vote. It will come into effect after it receives final approval from President Yoon Suk-yeol.

After a three-year grace period, the bill would make slaughtering, breeding and sales of dog meat for human consumption illegal from 2027 and punishable by two to three years in prison or a fine of up to 30 million won (\$23,000). It doesn't provide penalties for eating dog meat.

Dog meat consumption, a centuries-old practice on the Korean Peninsula, is neither explicitly banned nor legalized in South Korea. The Associated Press reported. Recent surveys show over half of South Koreans want dog meat banned and a majority no longer eat it. But one in every three South Koreans still opposes a ban even though they don't consume it.

Activists welcomed the bill, calling it "history in the making."

"We reached a tipping point where most Korean citizens reject eating dogs and want to see this suffering consigned to the history books, and today our policymakers have acted decisively to make that a reality," Chae Jung-ah, executive director of Humane Society International's Korea office, said in a statement.

In a new survey released on Monday by Seoul-based think tank Animal Welfare Awareness, Research and Education, 9 out of 10 people in South Korea said they would not eat dog meat in the future.

Opposition voiced

Previous efforts to ban dog meat have run into fierce opposition from farmers who breed dogs for consumption. The new law will provide compensation so that businesses can move out of the trade.

Around 1,100 dog farms breed hundreds of thousands of dogs each year which are served in restaurants across the country, Agence France-Presse reported citing government figures.

Farmers were extremely upset by the bill's passage.

"This is a clear case of state violence as they are infringing on our freedom to choose our occupation. We can't just sit by idly," said Son Won-hak, a farmer and former leader of a farmers' association.

Son said dog farmers will file a petition with the Constitutional Court of Korea and hold demonstrations. He said farmers will meet on Wednesday to discuss other steps.

The legislation doesn't clearly specify how dog farmers and others in the industry will be supported after the ban, which will likely result in continued animosities, observers say.

"Dogs are different from cows, chickens and pigs," said Kim Myung-ae, a 58-year-old Seoul resident. "Why would you still eat dogs when they are now seen more as family-like pets than food?"

Another Seoul resident, Jeong Yoon Hee, disagreed, saying whether to eat dog meat is a matter of personal choice and dietary culture. "Dogs are dogs, not humans," he said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Liu Jianchao, head of the International Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, speaks at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York on Tuesday. MINLUZHANG / CHINA DAILY

Official: China won't
upend global order

By MINLUZHANG in New York
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A senior Chinese official on Tuesday reiterated China's stance on not engaging in a cold war, emphasizing the value of peace and a commitment to maintaining the current international order.

"People in Asia have our own way of dealing with each other, which values peace above everything else, and seeks peaceful solutions for disputes," said Liu Jianchao, head of the International Department of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Central Committee, who also called for strengthening dialogue and communication between China and the United States.

"China does not seek to change the current international order, much less reinvent the wheel by creating a new international order," Liu said. "We are one of the builders of the current world order and have benefited from it."

"We will continue to uphold the international system with the UN at its core, the international order underpinned by international law, and the basic norms governing international relations," he said.

Liu led a CPC delegation on a visit this week to the US, where he was invited to deliver a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in New York.

Liu's visit took place around two months after President Xi Jinping met with US President Joe Biden in California on Nov 15. This year also marks the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations between China and the United States.

"Looking back, we see that this relationship has brought tremendous benefits to the two peoples and other peoples in the world," said Liu. "What is needed now is not waiting or debating, but to act upon it, which will strengthen dialogue and communication."

The speech also was delivered before the upcoming regional leadership election in Taiwan on Jan 13. Liu stressed that China hopes that the United States will abide by its commitment not to support "Taiwan independence."

"We take seriously the statements of the United States not supporting 'Taiwan independence', and we hope that the US side will honor this commitment, which will expand mutually beneficial cooperation,"

“But China's intention is basically to deliver a better life for the Chinese people. We don't really have any hidden agenda.”

Liu Jianchao, head of the International Department of the CPC Central Committee

Liu emphasized.

"Mutually beneficial cooperation brings benefits to our two peoples and certainty to our relationship. This is what we have learned from the past 45 years of interactions, and something we must continue in the future," he added.

Liu also addressed China's efforts to alleviate the concerns of American businesses, aiming for a more equitable and non-discriminatory business environment.

Going forward, China will continue to expand institutional opening-up with regard to rules, regulations and management to create a market-oriented, law-based business environment that meets the international standard, he said.

China will also try to address the concerns of the American businesses such as market access to the service sector and cross-border flow of data.

"In the same line, we hope that the United States keeps its markets open and provides the Chinese companies with an equitable, just, non-discriminatory business environment as well," he said.

For China's domestic policy, Liu emphasized the need to shift from a growth model focused on speed to one that prioritizes quality.

Despite achievements, China's development "remains imbalanced and insufficient", Liu said. "The extensive growth model that used to be followed that mainly pursued high speed resulted in many problems."

"We therefore have to adjust the growth model, putting more emphasis on quality rather than speed. High quality of the development must be driven by innovation and technological progress," he said. China stands ready to work

together with the United States to truly implement the San Francisco summit visuals and bring China-US scientific and technological exchanges back to the right track, said Liu.

He highlighted the importance of balancing security and development, suggesting that a secure environment is crucial for high-quality development.

"Will China ignore development as it talks more about security?" Liu asked. "Indeed, China has highlighted the importance of security just as other countries. We believe high quality of development can only be achieved in a highly secure environment."

"But what we pursue is a balanced and positive interplay between security and development," he said. China will never ignore development, as it holds the key to solving the problems and challenges in China, Liu said.

"Some people argue, as the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, China should bear more responsibility in addressing climate change," said Liu.

"Climate change is caused by both current and historical emissions as developed countries contribute to over 70 percent of the global total accumulated emissions, they should shoulder greater responsibility," he said.

"Yet, China is trying hard to make the sharpest reduction in carbon intensity in the world and achieve carbon peaking and carbon neutrality in the shortest time span in world history," he said.

Liu on Tuesday also answered questions from the audience at the CFR about China's view of the global order, China-Russia relations, the Ukraine crisis, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the safety of navigation in the Red Sea, nuclear disarmament, Hong Kong, as well as bias in Western media toward China, and the Taiwan question.

As China's strength continues to grow, it will naturally become more powerful in its economy, industry and other areas as well, Liu said.

"But China's intention is basically to deliver a better life for the Chinese people. We don't really have any hidden agenda," he said.

Liu also met with United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres at UN headquarters in New York on Tuesday.

China leads in reversing
biodiversity loss: Expert

GENEVA — China is "the hero of global biodiversity" and plays a fundamental role in the sustainable development agenda, said the head of the newly-launched Nature Positive Initiative.

Speaking ahead of the annual World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Switzerland, next week, Marco Lambertini said China is leading the way in reversing biodiversity loss and combating the global climate crisis.

"China is the hero of the Global Biodiversity Framework, leading almost 200 nations to agree to the most ambitious and comprehensive global plan for nature ever adopted," he said.

In December 2022, China held the presidency of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and spearheaded a series of initiatives, including the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

The adoption of the landmark framework under the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity has been described as the "Paris moment" for nature.

"China has shown leadership, particularly in the energy sector. Honestly, if China was not to invest what they invested in the development of new technologies, of renewable energies, and scale up the production, we wouldn't be where we are now with solar energy being competitive with oil, gas and even coal," Lambertini, former director-general of the World Wildlife Fund, said.

Last September, 27 of the world's largest nature conservation organizations, institutes, business and finance coalitions and sustainability standard-setting agencies came together to launch the Nature Positive Initiative. It is aimed at driving alignment around the definition, integrity and use of the term "nature positive", and supporting broader, longer-term efforts to deliver nature-positive outcomes.

"Nature positive by 2030" refers to halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030 from a 2020 baseline, through measurable gains in the health, abundance, diversity and resilience of species, ecosystems and natural processes. "China has played a funda-

mental role in that phase of the sustainable development agenda," Lambertini told Xinhua News Agency in a recent interview. "The government is discussing right now, through the China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development, the exact recommendations and approaches that will deliver a net positive outcome for nature, while developing the economy."

Sustainability link

Lambertini stressed that a positive economic outlook for any country is closely linked to sustainability.

"China has already demonstrated the ability to do that in the energy sector. Now, it's time to demonstrate the same in agriculture, fishing, forestry infrastructure and all sectors with a high ecological footprint. The only way to achieve a resilient and strong economy is to embrace environmental sustainability," he said.

In the World Economic Outlook in October, the International Monetary Fund forecast global real GDP growth last year at 3.0 percent, but cut its forecast this year to 2.9 percent.

Meanwhile, China's economy is expected to have grown by 5.4 percent last year due to a "strong" post-COVID-19 recovery, the global leader said in November.

"China has a lot to teach and share with the rest of the world in terms of their domestic successes in nature conservation. The whole discussion around the conservation of priority ecosystems and threatened species, the sustainable management of freshwater resources, and the plan around the Yangtze River are great examples," Lambertini said.

"All these are incredible successes at the domestic level that can be shared internationally, and equally, China can learn from the rest of the world."

"The dependence of business on nature has never been more recognized than today. The WEF program this year will feature a lot of nature topics, from the conservation of the oceans, forests, and freshwater, to the link between nature and climate."

XINHUA

Zambians encouraged to
venture into agriculture

LUSAKA — In Nyimba district in eastern Zambia, 60-year-old Maxwell Zulu is a happy man after successfully planting maize and groundnuts on his farm.

Zulu, who had stopped farming following a sharp rise in the price of fertilizer, decided to start farming again after the price of fertilizer dropped and the government made a good offer to purchase maize.

"Farming is the way to go now," Zulu said, expressing his belief that if the rainy season does not disappoint, he will have a good harvest, which will go a long way in improving his standard of living.

Zulu is among smallholder farmers in Zambia who have heeded President Hakainde Hichilema's call for people to venture into agriculture to improve food security and take advantage of not only the government's good policies, but also the huge market in the southern African nation.

Several people have posted photos on various social media platforms of their farms planting different crops.

Elisha Matambo, minister of Copperbelt Province who posted a picture of himself in his maize field, encouraged people in the province to look for land and venture into farming in line with government

policy and the president's vision.

"They will never be disappointed. We have been farming for more than 15 years, and we have seen the benefits of farming," he said in a post on his Facebook page.

Matambo said Zambia is blessed with good rain, soil and weather. Venturing into agriculture will be a game-changer for many families.

'Lucrative business'

Recently, Hichilema encouraged citizens, especially women and young people, to venture into agriculture as it has become a "lucrative business."

"We are extremely happy to note that several of you, our citizens, have this farming season ventured into maize production. As the government, we are extremely impressed because there is no other way out of the food crisis apart from more production," Hichilema said in a post on his Facebook page.

While acknowledging the challenges in the agricultural sector, Hichilema is optimistic that nothing would stop the country from realizing its dream of becoming a "food basket" not only in the southern African region, but also in Africa as a whole.

XINHUA

Ship shortage affects export of EVs

By JULIAN SHEA in London
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China's hopes of expanding sales of its electric vehicles in Europe have been affected by an unlikely traffic jam, as manufacturers struggle to find adequate numbers of car-moving ships to transport the vehicles to market.

The Financial Times reports that during the pandemic, many older vessels were scrapped when the automotive industry was mothballed, but now, an unexpectedly sharp revival of the market, coupled with delays in the introduction of replacement shipping vessels, means transportation demand outstrips supply.

According to Forbes magazine, European manufacturers are around five years behind their Chinese counterparts when it comes to making and selling EVs, with Chinese vehicles also enjoying a considerable price advantage in a market that is only going to get bigger in the coming years.

It quoted investment bank UBS as forecasting that sales of EVs in Europe will go from 2.5 million in 2024 to 3.6 million in 2025, then more than double to 9.6 million in 2030.

According to the paper, Europe is the region with the largest increase in car imports, up by around 40 percent in 2023.

China, Japan, and South Korea

are among the biggest exporters. The China Association of Automobile Manufacturers said the nation exported 1.09 million new energy vehicles in the first 11 months of 2023, up 83.5 percent year-on-year.

But growth could be hamstrung by the limited capacity to shift the hardware, which has also resulted in a hike in shipping prices.

"The market's very tight," said Stephen Gordon, Clarksons Research's managing director. "Partly, lots of cars are being moved around ... and there haven't been many new buildings (of ships) coming into the market."

The increased cost of shipping could also take the edge off Chinese

manufacturers' competitive pricing, warned Matthias Schmidt of Schmidt Automotive Research.

"Due to the lack of supply, the price for chartering vessels has completely exploded, likely wiping out a larger part of the production savings made from manufacturing vehicles in lower-cost countries like China," he said.

The new year began with the announcement that Shenzhen-based EV giant BYD had, for the first time, surpassed Tesla in terms of sales, selling 526,000 fully-electric vehicles in the last three months of 2023, compared to Tesla's 484,000.

"Right now, Europe and the United States aren't even in the game when it comes to rare earths, battery cell manufacturing, rare-earth mining and refining," said Tu Le, managing director of consultancy Sino Auto Insights.

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WORLDUS

Envoys stress wisdom of ties 45 years later

By MAYZHOU
and RENALI in Atlanta

The Chinese and American ambassadors agreed Tuesday that the establishment of the US-China relationship 45 years ago was the right move, and both countries intend to move the relationship forward despite the challenges in the past few years.

Close to 200 people gathered at the Carter Center in Atlanta on Tuesday to participate in a forum in honor of former US president Jimmy Carter and the 45th anniversary of diplomatic relations.

More than 100 connected via video to the event at which five panel discussions explored the complicated relations, focusing on the history and current challenges in trade and business, technology, military, climate change and public health.

The discussion was co-hosted by the National Committee on US-China Relations, the US-China Business Council, and the Center for American Studies at Fudan University.

US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns praised Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping and Carter for establishing the diplomatic relationship in January 1979, saying that "it was correct in every way".

Chinese Ambassador to the US Xie Feng said that the relationship "has boosted the well-being of the two peoples, and also contributed to peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific and the world".

Both ambassadors, who spoke to the event via video, said that the two countries could take inspiration from the history of the relationship.

"We believe that the most important inspiration is that China and the United States stand to gain from cooperation and lose from confrontation, and working together is our only correct choice," Xie said.

"Looking back, we can take some

inspiration as to what we would have to do now in 2024 to stabilize the relationship," said Burns.

Both men said that the November summit between President Xi Jinping and President Joe Biden in California helped to stabilize the relationship.

"We need to embark on a new journey from San Francisco onward, start with concrete steps, and faithfully deliver on the important common understandings reached between our presidents," Xie said.

Burns said he's glad that the California summit saw both sides reaching agreement in fentanyl control; a discussion on cooperation in artificial intelligence; resuming military talks on all levels; and helping facilitate people-to-people exchanges.

"It was really important for both sides to decide that we had to push forward those contacts because COVID had pulled us apart in the last three and a half years," Burns said.

He said that the summit was a culmination of the relationship in 2023, and both sides were convinced that "despite the very real and important differences between us out of competitive nature, we had to make sure we're able to carry continuous discussions at the highest level".

While Burns talked about the competition, Xie said "it is important to reject the Cold War mentality, and develop a right perception toward each other. Policymaking is based on how we perceive each other, which will then lead to actions with results."

"Are we adversaries or partners? This is the fundamental and overarching question we need to answer. If one sees the other side as a primary competitor, a pacing threat and a target for containment, improving and stabilizing bilateral relations would be out of the question," Xie said.

He said competition should be fair, not a zero-sum game and "still less a

pretext for depriving others of their legitimate development rights and interests".

"If we do need to compete, then let's compete to do a better job in running our country and contribute more to the stability and prosperity in the region and the world," Xie said.

Both ambassadors advocated for working together more. Burns said that there are just under 300,000 Chinese students in the US today, and 100,000 new student visas were issued in just the last eight months.

The number of American students in China is still quite low.

"We hope American students will come back to China. With the student population in both countries, we make sure to reinforce the idea that the younger population need to know each other in their 20s and 30s so that when they become leaders in our governments and nonprofit organizations, they will know each other," Burns said.

Xie said China is actively implementing President Xi's initiative to invite 50,000 young Americans to China on exchange and study programs in the next five years. The requirement for tourist visas has been relaxed. New plans for panda conservation are under discussion.

Xie said he recently met a group of American students from Columbia University and the University of Virginia.

"They expressed their admiration for China's time-honored history and splendid culture, marveled at the warm hospitality of the Chinese people, and ranked China as one of the most open and safest countries in the world," Xie said.

"I would encourage all of you to visit our country and see it for yourselves."

Contact the writers at mayzhou@chinadailyusa.com.



A TCL 115" QD-Mini LED TV is displayed at the TCL booth during the CES tech show in Las Vegas on Tuesday. JOHN LOCHER/AP

Chinese EV startups return to CES

By MINGMEILI in Las Vegas
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Chinese startups in the EV industry have returned to CES this year, showcasing new technologies that demonstrate the application of new energy and electric vehicles in various scenarios.

Nearly half the exhibitors at the event in Las Vegas (Jan. 9-12) are international participants, with a notable increase in Chinese companies.

Those companies are featuring artificial intelligence as the main concept in a variety of their EV products, while also making connections with 5G technologies, AR/VR, big data, energy and power, robotics, video and audio technologies.

"We are seeing, especially compared to the last two years, a lot of growth across the pack, and especially from China as well," Jessica Boothe, the director of market research at the Consumer Technology Association (CTA) told China Daily. CTA puts on the multiday CES event.

By combining distinctive characteristics and strengths from China with global innovative concepts, the startups are exploring fresh opportunities in the international market.

"Our skateboard chassis is an application of AI in the execution and control layer, innovating in both technology and business models," Paul Li, founder and CEO of EV startup company U POWER Technology, which has offices in both China and US, told China Daily.

The company's new product is the most energy-efficient in its class globally among electric vehicles, with the highest global energy efficiency, almost double the efficiency of mainstream competitors in the American market, he said.

China's first mass-producible skateboard chassis-by-wire, which allows for smart EV customizations at low

costs with efficiency. The company's Cargo Van product — which originated in China but was developed with technology in the US — has now received 53,000 orders from the US, Japan, EU and the Southeast Asia region.

With collaboration with top chip companies Nvidia and Renesas on the computing platform for scalable computing power, the company's research and design team in China also combines the Chinese EV market's automotive engineering and supply chain strengths to make the product more competitive internationally.

"China is a leader in the electric vehicle industry; we also want to help other global players excel in this industry. Ultimately, our goal in making electric vehicles is to foster technology and sustainability," he said.

"The trade frictions [between the US and China] present significant challenges for all our businesses as startups. Our approach is to adapt from the beginning, seeking opportunities within this context, integrating internal resources, and balancing globalization with localization."

NaaS, the first EV-charging company from China listed on the Nasdaq, aims to expand its influence in the global clean energy sector by leveraging its successful business model in China and aligning with US market dynamics.

"Besides the basic infrastructure of charging piles, we also demonstrate the in-depth operation and maintenance, combining digital scenarios to form a one-stop charging service station for our customers," Zhai Yubo, general manager of NaaS, told China Daily.

The company has connected a total of 73,000 public charging stations in China, and the number of charging piles connected has exceeded 730,000.

An owner of a new EV won't refuel at a roadside station as traditional gasoline vehicles do. New EVs inherently

offer digital service capabilities, he said.

Also, the company is going to launch its new product, a "charging robot", combining AI, big data and the internet.

"We have developed a mobile charging hardware solution, significantly enhancing the flexibility and breadth of future charging options," he said. "We aim to display products that combine China's representative IoT and digital capabilities."

"The potential for collaboration in new energy charging far exceeds competition, as everyone in this field is witnessing rapid technological development and integration," he said.

"During international collaboration, every country is eager to see new models and products. So for Chinese companies, this represents a significant opportunity, especially when we leverage China's unique characteristics and advantages in new energy development to further expand our overseas business," he added.

Established in 2021, AC Future is showcasing the company's electric recreational vehicle product at the exhibition, combining new concepts on travel and lifestyle with intelligence and sustainability, transferring traditional RV into a digital home.

The company's headquarters is in California, and it has a strong team in China, AC Future President Rich Schmidt told China Daily.

"Most of the electric vehicles in the world, most of the supply chain come from China," he said. "It allows us to bring in some high-quality technologies to go into our innovative product."

"The China market is two times the size of the North American market, so as the vehicle production grows, the technology is going to grow quicker," he said. "It allows us to leverage that technology and to help us be innovative."

US defense secretary treated for cancer

WASHINGTON — US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has prostate cancer, and his recent secretive hospitalization was for surgery and later to treat a urinary tract infection related to that operation, his doctors said Tuesday.

The cancer revelation answers the main question about Austin's hospitalization, which has now lasted eight days. But it may only add to questions of accountability, since President Joe Biden only learned about the cancer diagnosis on Tuesday, even though it was made about a month ago.

"Nobody at the White House knew that Secretary Austin had prostate cancer until this morning," said John Kirby, the National Security Council spokesman. "And the president was informed immediately after."

The 70-year-old Austin was admitted to Walter Reed National Military Medical Center on Dec. 22 and underwent surgery to treat the cancer. He developed the infection a week later. Biden and other senior administration officials were not told for days about his hospitalization or his cancer.

According to the doctors, the cancer was detected when Austin had a regular screening in early December. They said he "underwent a minimally invasive surgical procedure" and went home the next day. But on Jan. 1, he reported nausea and severe abdominal, hip and leg pain due to

the infection.

They said his prostate cancer was detected early, and his prognosis is excellent.

The cancer revelation comes after days of persistent questions about Austin's hospitalization and the delays in notifying key leaders. And it raises more questions about the transparency and truthfulness of the Defense Department, which for the past four days said he was initially at Walter Reed for a "minor elective medical procedure", and not prostate surgery.

Asked about that choice of wording, Major General Pat Ryder, Pentagon press secretary, said in a briefing on Tuesday that it was developed in consultation with Austin's doctors.

When pressed on the delays in public notification, Ryder said, "Despite the frequency of prostate cancer, discussions about screening, treatment and support are often deeply personal and private ones."

It was still not clear Tuesday how this will affect Austin's job, travel or other public engagements going forward. Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks is expected to take on some of his day-to-day duties as he recovers.

The lack of transparency about Austin's hospitalization has triggered sharp criticism.

Austin spoke with Biden on Saturday, the same day he issued a public statement saying he recognized he could have done a better job

ensuring the public was informed about his hospitalization, and said, "I commit to doing better." He did not, however, tell the president in that phone call that he had cancer.

Several Republican lawmakers said Austin should be ousted. Earlier Tuesday, the White House chief of staff ordered Cabinet members to notify his office if they ever can't perform their duties.

Dr. John Maddox, trauma medical director, and Dr. Gregory Chesnut, director of the Center for Prostate Disease at Walter Reed, provided the first details of Austin's prognosis in a statement put out by the Pentagon.

They said he was under anesthesia during the initial surgery, and when he went to intensive care on Jan. 2, the infection had caused an intestinal backup, and his stomach had to be drained with a tube in his nose.

"We anticipate a full recovery, although this can be a slow process," the doctors said. They noted that prostate cancer is the most common cancer among American men, and it affects 1 in every 8 — and 1 in every 6 African American men — during their lifetime.

The doctors said Austin underwent a surgical procedure called a prostatectomy. That is a common procedure to remove all or part of the prostate gland and is often used to treat prostate cancer.

AP - XINHUA

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Fujian eyes enhanced cross-Strait biz ties

By WANG KEJU
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China has unveiled a package of policy steps to support building its coastal Fujian province, located opposite Taiwan, into a pilot zone for advancing cross-Strait economic integration — a move which experts said will tap into cooperation potential in new areas and deliver concrete benefits for businesses on both sides.

The guideline highlighted five major areas of focus — supporting Fujian in expanding opening-up toward Taiwan, promoting cross-Strait trade, deepening integration of strategic industries, facilitating integration of Taiwan businesses operating in Fujian into domestic circulation and accelerating the integrated development of key regions.

The guideline was jointly issued by the Ministry of Commerce, the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, the National Development and Reform Commission and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology on Monday.

According to the guideline, Fujian will be supported to take strides toward aligning its pilot free trade zone with international economic and trade rules and promoting institutional opening-up, so as to explore a regulatory framework conducive to cross-Strait economic integration.

Fujian is encouraged to leverage its geographical proximity and advance such key reform initiatives as cross-Strait trade in goods and mutual recognition of professional qualifications on a priority basis.

Moreover, Fujian will be guided to capitalize on the opportunities presented by the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement, in an effort to attract projects from Taiwan in industries such as petrochemicals, textiles, machinery and cosmetics to establish a strong presence in the province, it said.

The year 2022 witnessed significant growth in cross-Strait trade, with the total volume between Fujian and Taiwan registering 103.67 billion yuan (\$14.47 billion). Exports to Taiwan experienced a surge of 22.9 percent, data from the provincial commerce bureau in Fujian showed.

In addition, as of June last year, there were more than 12,000 Taiwan enterprises doing business in Fujian, and the actual utilization of capital from Taiwan has exceeded \$32 billion, according to official data.

The success of cross-Strait economic cooperation can be attributed to the complementary

advantages and shared resources between Fujian and Taiwan, said Yin Cunyi, a professor at Tsinghua University's School of Public Policy and Management.

Both regions possess unique strengths in various industries, including manufacturing, technology and services. Through collaboration and the exchange of expertise, these strengths have been effectively leveraged, contributing to growth and development of both sides, Yin said.

Going forward, the strengths of Fujian in digital economy, integrated circuits, new energy, lithium batteries, petrochemicals and textiles will be fully harnessed to build demonstration bases for new-type industrialization in regions where conditions are ripe, the guideline said, adding that it aims to create industry clusters that pool advantages from both sides and bolster global competitiveness.

In particular, greater support will be channeled to Fujian to promote construction of the experimental zone for cross-Strait cooperation in integrated circuits. Meanwhile, the province will place great emphasis on the development of key functional zones to facilitate the concentrated development of Taiwan's leading sectors, it said.

Proactive steps will be adopted by Fujian authorities to explore new forms of cross-Strait services trade cooperation in areas such as culture, tourism, digital economy, logistics, exhibitions and traditional Chinese medicine, it added.

During the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), the mainland has planned over 1,300 "new infrastructure" projects, with total investment exceeding 10 trillion yuan. This development has brought new opportunities for cross-Strait economic cooperation, particularly in areas such as industrial internet, artificial intelligence and 5G, said Wu Jiaying, executive vice-president of the Beijing-based Association of Taiwan Investment Enterprises on the Mainland.

Taiwan enterprises have demonstrated their excellence in software design and electronic product manufacturing. Their proficiency in these fields positions them to play a significant role in the development of "new infrastructure" projects on the mainland, Wu said.

Additionally, sectors such as semiconductors, circuit boards and machine tools are considered strong areas in Taiwan. This expertise puts them in a better position for integration into the mainland's "new infrastructure" as well as industrial and supply chains, he added.



A visitor tries on Xreal AR glasses, which offer an immersive visual experience, at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, Nevada. AFP

Big Chinese companies brighten 2024 CES

Event lifts the curtain on future of AI, displays, autonomous driving, robots

By FAN FEIFEI and MA SI

Chinese technology companies have made a prominent comeback at the 2024 Consumer Electronics Show (CES).

At the world's premier tech show in Las Vegas in the United States, they are showcasing their latest achievements in cutting-edge technologies. These range from artificial intelligence, next-generation semiconductor display, autonomous driving, robots to augmented reality.

Highlighting that China is playing an increasingly vital role in bolstering technological innovation, experts said intelligent devices powered by generative AI and the internet of things are expected to become a key growth driver for global consumer electronics industry.

According to the US Consumer Technology Association, which organizes the event, more than 4,000 enterprises from across the globe are participating in the CES, which opened on Tuesday and will conclude on Friday. Of these, 1,114 are from China and 1,201 are based in the US.

AI-powered terminal devices are attracting attention this year amid a worldwide frenzy over the ChatGPT chatbot. Chinese consumer electronics maker TCL demonstrated over 120 pieces of intelligent hardware covering quantum dot mini-LED TVs, AI processing chips, smartphones, intelligent AR goggles and vehicle-mounted display products.

The company is accelerating efforts to expand presence in North America by boosting production capacity at its Mexican factory, given that building global competitiveness has always been important for TCL.

Hisense Group, a major Chinese home appliance manufacturer, unveiled its latest ultra light-emitting diode or ULED TV and laser display technology at the CES.

David Gold, vice-president of Hisense International, said at a product launch event that display technology is widely applied in sports, education and medical fields, continuously pushing technological boundaries.

Lenovo Group Ltd, the world's largest personal computer maker, unveiled a full lineup of more than 40 new devices and solutions powered by AI at the CES. It said it believes this year will mark the advent of AI-based PCs.

Xpeng AeroHT, an affiliate of China's Xpeng Motors, showcased its pilotless flying car, an electric vertical takeoff and landing, or eVTOL, aircraft at the CES.

"Chinese tech companies are at the forefront of technological innovation globally, and actively promoting the application of AI in consumer electronics, intelligent devices and electric vehicles," said Hong Yong, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

The latest technological breakthroughs made by Chinese compa-

nies in the fields of virtual reality and autonomous driving also reflect their strengths and innovative capabilities in crucial technologies, which will be conducive to industrial upgrades and boosting their own competitiveness on the global stage, Hong said.

Chinese augmented reality company Xreal showcased its latest AR-enabled innovative products by partnering with companies such as Qualcomm and BMW.

CES attendees can join a Las Vegas tour hosted by BMW, where they will have the opportunity to experience Xreal's AR glasses along the way. They can witness how in-car information, including navigation cues, hazard warnings, entertainment content and charging station details seamlessly integrate into the real environment through Xreal Air 2 glasses.

Jin Peng, co-founder of Xreal, said, "In the future world, whether it's in offices or entertainment, for mobile commuting or personal enjoyment, people will engage in work and experience life in new and creative ways."

Chinese tech companies have shown the potential to lead the industry not only in mature categories such as smartphones, but also in emerging fields such as artificial intelligence of things, AR and VR, said Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School.

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Domestic firms show way to safe, smart cars

By MA SI
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Chinese technology companies are seeking to advance intelligent driving systems to improve the efficiency and safety of global transportation.

To that end, they are showcasing their latest technologies at the Consumer Electronics Show 2024, which opened in Las Vegas in the United States on Tuesday and will run through Friday.

For instance, Hesai Technology unveiled its latest automotive lidar products that allow a smart car to better sense its surroundings, so as to better support advanced driver assistance systems, commonly known as ADAS. Hesai is the world's top supplier of automotive lidar with a 47 percent share of the total global market revenue in 2022.

The Nasdaq-listed company unveiled its new flagship AT512 ultra long-range lidar, which offers a maximum range of over 400 meters.

David Li, co-founder and CEO of Hesai, said the new product represents a breakthrough in lidar technology and provides big performance improvements in all of the key areas such as range, resolution, thermal, power consumption and form factor.

Hesai also announced it has completed construction of a new 740,000 square foot state-of-the-art research and development center in Shanghai, which is expected to strengthen its manufacturing.

The new facility includes the world's most advanced lidar testing lab and will utilize many smart industrial robots, helping automate over 100 production processes, with the automation rate reaching 90 percent, Hesai said.

"Our new Maxwell facility is not a traditional manufacturing facility but an advanced R&D center where we design and build automated lidar production lines, which can then be easily replicated across our global network of manufacturing facilities," said Li. "With Hesai's commercial engine now in full swing, we expect to drive lidar adoption forward for everyone."

Yole Intelligence, a market research provider, had forecast that Hesai would maintain its No.1 position in the automotive lidar market for 2023.

Hesai recently surpassed the milestone of delivering 300,000 accumulative units of lidar, including a new high of 50,000 units in December alone.

Liu Jiansen, an analyst at Canalis, a market research provider, said that with electronics manufacturers vying to showcase the selling points of AI, electric vehicles with ADAS are expected to be a prominent focus at this year's CES.

Chinese carmaker Xpeng is showcasing its flying car at the CES, suggesting it will likely double down on its ambition to mass-produce its model.

To better support the development of smart cars, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, China's top industry regulator, issued a new guideline on Monday to draft national automotive chip standard system.

By 2025, more than 30 key standards for automotive chips will be established to outline foundational requirements such as environmental and reliability considerations, electromagnetic compatibility, functional safety and information security, the guideline said.



Exhibitors from the Chinese mainland and Taiwan province chat during an expo in Xiamen, Fujian province. FU MIN / XINHUA

Briefly

Cainiao enters US freight market

Cainiao Group, the logistics arm of Chinese tech heavyweight Alibaba Group Holding Ltd, announced on Tuesday it has begun offering concentrated freight services in the United States, as part of its broader push to boost its logistics and delivery efficiency in overseas markets. The company said customers who buy products from Chinese e-commerce platforms will enjoy a more convenient delivery experience.

List of foreign firms for CIIE grows

A batch of 23 additional foreign enterprises signed up on Tuesday for the business exhibition of the seventh China International Import Expo in Shanghai, a show of foreign companies' solid confidence in the expo, the Chinese market and economy vitality. Among the 23 newly appearing exhibitors at the November event include big names like PepsiCo, Tesla, 3M, GSK and Bayer.

Self-developed C919 gets new flight route

China's first self-developed narrow-body C919 aircraft began commercial flights between Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport and Beijing Daxing International Airport via China Eastern Airlines on Tuesday, becoming the second regular flight service of the home-grown jet after Shanghai-Chengdu flights were established earlier.

CHINA DAILY

Travel boom lifts tourism sector shares

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Tourism industry stocks have outperformed the broader A-share market, as more tourists flock to winter hot spots like "ice city" Harbin in Heilongjiang province, signaling that the recovery in consumption has had a positive effect on the capital market, according to an expert.

Data from market intelligence provider Tonghuashun showed that an index tracking the ice and snow sector rose by 6.4 percent

from Jan 2 to Tuesday, significantly outperforming the overall stock market.

"The growth of ice and snow tourism consumption shows a strong demand from consumers, and it has driven the demand for transportation, accommodation, catering and other sectors, reflecting the recovery of consumer confidence and their optimistic outlook for the future," said Sean Jia, partner and managing director of consultancy Frost & Sullivan Greater China.

"When consumers are willing to spend big during special holidays,

it shows their confident attitude toward the overall economic environment. The capital market pays more attention to the long-term development trends of the industry and the economy," Jia said.

The momentum of ice and snow-themed travel is forecast to sustain until the Spring Festival holiday period next month, as the number of orders for ice and snow tours on major online travel agencies has been climbing, industry players said.

Shanghai-listed Changbai Mountain Tourism Co Ltd saw shares

surge to their daily limit of 10 percent on six consecutive days. They closed at 26.53 yuan (\$3.7) apiece on Tuesday.

Meanwhile, Shanghai-listed Dalian Sun Asia Tourism saw its shares jump by their daily limit on five straight days, closing at 33.17 yuan per share on Tuesday. Its share price has risen by over 50 percent in the past week.

Both these companies operate tourism businesses in Northeast China.

Share prices of some other companies related to tourism, hotels and outdoor sports have also edged up.

Following the rally, the two companies issued statements warning

of risks in stock trading. They said the short-term increases are significant, but there have been no significant changes in the companies' operations.

The statements served to remind investors of the risks of an overheated market and irrational speculation, and encouraged rational decision-making before investments.

Benefiting from the popularity of ice and snow tourism during the New Year's holiday, Heilongjiang province received a total of 6.62 million tourists, a jump of 173.7 percent year-on-year.

During the period, tourism revenues reached 6.92 billion yuan, surging 364.7 percent year-on-year, according to the local government.

Bookings for bed-and-breakfast stays have also surged.

During the New Year's holiday, the booking volumes of B&B stays in Harbin topped that of all other cities nationwide, soaring 27 times compared with the previous New Year's holiday period, according to Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency.

China's investments in the ice and snow sector, including building or expanding skiing venues and hotels, have increased, and delayed construction projects have gradually been on track for completion, according to Frost & Sullivan.

In 2022, some 12 million Chinese went skiing, and the number is expected to reach nearly 35 million by 2027, the consultancy has forecast.

BUSINESS

Nansha set to play key role in GBA prosperity

Govt unveils measures to build area into strategic hub for tech innovation

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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China is betting on a slew of incentives to help build Nansha district in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, into a strategic hub for technological innovation and advanced industries, making it an attractive destination for international talent and investments, analysts said.

The National Development and Reform Commission, together with the Ministry of Commerce and the State Administration for Market Regulation, on Tuesday unveiled a 15-point document detailing measures for giving better play to Nansha's leading role in bolstering the development of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Nansha, home to a port and spread across more than 800 square kilometers, has been earmarked as a key development zone under the Greater Bay Area, which aims to turn Hong Kong, Macao, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and six other Guangdong cities into a major economic powerhouse fueled by innovation with improved international competitiveness and influence by 2035.

Nansha will implement a 144-hour visa-free transit policy for foreigners and a visa-free policy for cruise travel, as part of the country's ongoing efforts to expand high-standard opening-up and promote the high-quality development of the GBA, according to the document, titled "The guideline for supporting the relaxation of market access and strengthening institutional reform for regulation in Guangzhou's Nansha".

Nansha will be encouraged to participate in the formulation and implementation of technical standards for unmanned systems involving sea, land and air; establish an industrial incubation base of unmanned systems for GBA; accelerate the construction of a high-end marine equipment manufacturing base; build an internationally leading comprehensive service system for cross-border investment and financing for enterprises, and promote green, low-carbon and high-quality development.

Charlie Zheng, chief economist at Samoyed Cloud Technology Group Holdings Ltd, said the document aims to optimize resource allocation and the market environment, hoping to overcome obstacles hindering the development of Nansha and the GBA.

"From an industrial perspective, the key focus on high-end service industries, unmanned smart transportation and advanced marine equipment manufacturing, as well as the promotion of a

low-carbon economy, will significantly enhance Nansha's attractiveness to surrounding enterprises and domestic and foreign investments," he said.

According to the document, plans have been made to introduce more professional services talent from Hong Kong and Macao, and speed up the construction of the cross-border wealth management and asset management center for Nansha in GBA.

Wang Peng, a researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said such a mixture of incentives will attract more people to travel, work and start businesses in Nansha.

"It will help build the place into a hub for technological innovation and advanced industries as well as an attractive destination for international tourism, financial resources and talent."

Bai Wenxi, vice-chairman of the China Enterprise Capital Union, said the measures will help enhance Nansha's international influence, facilitate cross-border investment and financial innovation, and elevate its industrial structure and economic strength.

"The guideline is expected to further promote Nansha's openness and development, accelerate its cooperation and exchanges with Hong Kong and Macao, and inject new dynamics and vitality into the GBA," he said.

"Nansha, as a vital component of the GBA, holds immense development prospects," said Liang Haiming, chairman of the China Silk Road iValley Research Institute.

Liang, who is also dean of Hainan University's Belt and Road Research Institute, said the national focus on Nansha's development, through increased policy support, enhanced infrastructure development and promotion of technological innovation, aims to facilitate its economic growth, better contributing to the construction and development of the GBA.

Despite many achievements by Nansha during the past few years, Bai from China Enterprise Capital Union warned that it still faces challenges in terms of transportation infrastructure, city planning and construction, and the recruitment and training of high-end talent.

He said Nansha needs to further strengthen cooperation and exchanges with Hong Kong and Macao.

More efforts should also be made to promote the development of high-end manufacturing, modern services, and the financial sector, creating an internationally competitive modern industrial system, Bai added.



An employee of China National Offshore Oil Corp operates at an offshore drilling platform in the Bohai Sea in November. DU PENGHUI / XINHUA

Domestic oil, gas production hits record in 2023

By ZHENG XIN
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Oil and gas production reached a record high in China last year, with domestic companies stepped up upstream exploitation and exploration of the fossil fuels to ensure energy security, the National Energy Administration said.

Domestic oil and gas production equivalent exceeded 390 million metric tons last year, with an average annual growth rate of 11.7 million tons of oil equivalent.

Crude oil production, meanwhile, rose to 208 million tons, up more than 3 million tons compared with that in 2022, while natural gas production reached 230 billion cubic meters, it said.

Production of unconventional natural gas, including tight gas, shale gas, coal-bed methane, and natural gas hydrates, exceeded 96 billion cubic meters last year, constituting 43 percent of the total natural gas output and emerging as a significant growth driver in the increase and storage of natural gas, NEA said.

China has been accelerating efforts in oil and gas exploration, focusing on increasing capacity and storage of oil and gas, and adopting advanced technologies to bolster energy security and reduce its reliance on foreign energy resources, said Li Ziyue, an analyst with BloombergNEF.

The nation's domestic gas output grew 6 percent last year as the coun-

try has been hiking investment in oil and gas exploration in recent years, Li added.

Surging nonconventional gas production, which is estimated to have spiked by around a third from the previous year in 2023, has contributed immensely to enhanced domestic gas supply security, she said.

"China is on a fast track to further exploit deep-sea gas resources, which will in turn further strengthen the country's energy security in the offshore sector."

China's offshore oil and gas output has great upside potential, Li added.

According to the energy administration, growth in the oil sector last year came mostly from offshore

sources, with domestic offshore crude oil production exceeding 62 million tons, accounting for over 60 percent of the national increase in crude oil production.

China National Offshore Oil Corp has said previously that the exploitation of offshore natural gas resources is steadily advancing toward ultra-deep waters.

China has also been making major breakthroughs in independent marine exploration.

CNOOC recently completed a 3,000-meter deep seabed geology exploration, with an independently developed marine seismic exploration and acquisition equipment — "Haijing" — which is a major breakthrough in the country's independent marine exploration technology.

HK, neighboring Shenzhen getting cozier via visits

By WANG XU
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In an intriguing cultural exchange, residents of Hong Kong are increasingly crossing the border into Shenzhen, Guangdong province, while Shenzhen residents are making the reverse journey to Hong Kong, creating a dynamic interplay of commerce, culture and leisure activities.

"It took me less than an hour to get across the border to Shenzhen. There are so many food options, and I spent most of my time walking around the shopping malls," said Chris Chan, a 32-year-old Hong Kong resident, adding that it has become a trend among his friends to shop, dine and spend their weekends in Shenzhen.

In fact, since the resumption of Customs clearance services in early 2023, the movement of people between Hong Kong and Shenzhen has seen a significant transforma-

tion. Hong Kong residents, seeking diverse experiences and economic opportunities, have flocked to Shenzhen. Meanwhile, Shenzhen residents are drawn to the vibrant streets and luxury offerings of Hong Kong.

According to Hong Kong immigration statistics, since January 2023, more than 48 million trips have been made from Hong Kong to Shenzhen. Shenzhen General Station of Exit and Entry Frontier Inspection told China Daily that new records in cross-border travel were established nearly every month in 2023, with over 253,000 entries and exits in both directions recorded at its checkpoints in just one day in August.

Under such a backdrop, EGL Tours, a Hong Kong-based travel agency, introduced its two-day Shenzhen Sam's Club Tour last Wednesday. In just a week, over 3,000 participants have eagerly signed up for the tour, with all slots fully booked for January.

Steve Huen Kwok-chuen, executive director of EGL Tours, highlighted that the significant surge — which he said was three times higher than visits to Japan or other overseas destinations — is attributable to the upcoming Spring Festival, prompting many Hong Kong residents to travel to the mainland for New Year's shopping, with warehouse supermarkets like Sam's Club gaining particular popularity.

"To meet the shopping needs of our tour group members, we've arranged a full day of shopping at Sam's Club in Shenzhen, reserving 29 inches of luggage space for each person," he added.

However, it is not just Hong Kong residents who are embracing Shenzhen.

Luxury goods shopping, reveling in extravagant New Year's festivities and immersing oneself in the unique cultural atmosphere of Hong Kong have become magnets for Shenzhen residents too.

The Hong Kong Tourism Board

pointed to a notable surge in Shenzhen visitors during key events. The city's renowned New Year's Eve festivities, featuring a record-breaking 12-minute fireworks display — the largest ever — have attracted over 479,000 spectators, including approximately 223,000 visitors.

But logistical challenges emerged after the New Year's Eve celebrations. Many mainland tourists who flocked to Hong Kong for the grand event but had not booked hotel rooms, found themselves stranded at checkpoints, shedding light on the need for improved coordination and infrastructure.

However, Li Wei, who ventured into Hong Kong for the event, said the one flaw does not overshadow the overall excellence.

"The grandeur of the fireworks show and the vibrant atmosphere of Hong Kong's New Year's Eve celebration are unparalleled. It's worth the visit every year," Li said.

Yi Yang contributed to this story.

Nation uses sub-seabed cables to transmit power

By LIU YUKUN
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An inter-island power transmission network in Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, which is the first case in China to use land cables running beneath the ocean floor instead of traditional submarine cables to transmit electricity between islands, recently began operations.

Experts said the project marks another milestone in the country's advancement of marine power transmission technology and further contributes to China's offshore energy development.

The project uses a 10-kilovolt cable running from a preset channel that is 6 meters below the seabed in the northern waters of Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, and is 1 kilometer long. The cable runs from Zhoushan Island to Shangyuan Island.

State Grid Zhoushan Power Sup-

“Going forward, inter-island and island-mainland power transmission will have greater room for development ...”

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University

ply Co, the project's developer, said that using cables buried beneath the seabed, instead of simply being placed underwater, can help solve problems like potential cable damage from ships' anchoring and longer project approval time.

According to the company, at

present, inter-island energy transmission in China mainly uses submarine cables. However, China's coastal waters have dense waterways and busy shipping lines, which may damage submarine cables when ships anchor.

Compared with submarine cables, land cables — which are buried deeper than anchoring depths — pose no risk of external damage, and are thus suitable for short-distance energy transmission between nearby islands. They also enjoy lower costs and less difficulty in construction, less stringent requirements and shorter administrative approval time, the company said.

It carried out a number of tests during the project's early stage, such as a detailed geological survey of the project's cross-sea section, and selected the most suitable crossing strata based on geological conditions. To reduce tension and friction of the cable during traction — a pro-

cess of line laying — the company used wire rope traction as if installing an "exoskeleton" for the cable, and used pipeline lubrication materials to reduce friction, ensuring that the cable remained intact during the dragging process.

The company said this new form of energy transmission — land cables running beneath the seabed — will be widely used in power transmission between islands with a distance of less than 2 kilometers.

Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University, said the vast potential of offshore energy development underscores the growing importance of offshore energy transmission systems.

A recent report by CNOOC Energy Economics Institute showed that last year, China's offshore oil and gas production volume is estimated to have reached new highs, and the integrated development of marine



Employees of State Grid Zhoushan Power Supply Co ready cable for an inter-island power transmission network in Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, last week. YAO FENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

oil and gas with new energy will become a focal point. Offshore wind power is emerging as a key pillar in the development of offshore renewable energy.

"Going forward, inter-island and island-mainland power transmission will have greater room for

development, spurring massive investment and business opportunities, amid growing demand for electricity used in the exploration and development of offshore energy sources. Technological advances will further reduce transmission costs," said Lin.

BUSINESSFOCUS

'Cat'ering to felines, canines no mere pet project

Ownership of furry companions prompts hotels, travel firms to be four-legged-friend amenable

By WANG KEJU
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Zhao Shan had always felt a pang of guilt every time she dropped off her beloved dog, Max, at a pet care center before embarking on her holiday travels. Max's sad eyes and whimpering goodbye always tugged at her heartstrings, but she had no better option.

Last year, determined to include Max in a family vacation during the National Day holiday in October, the 28-year-old Shanghai consultant planned an unforgettable trip for herself and her faithful companion to neighboring Zhejiang province.

"Max is not just a pet. He is family, and I simply don't want to leave him behind again," Zhao said, adding that she researched various accommodation options, discovering that many hotels and vacation rentals now cater to pet owners.

Zhao is among the rapidly growing ranks of pet owners who now take their furry family members on vacation with them — a trend made possible by the rise in animal-friendly accommodations along with transport operators and eateries that meet these needs.

A survey conducted by the Shanghai-based Asia Pet Alliance in early November showed that among services pet owners are most keen to patronize, pet-friendly hotels, travel-with-pet services and pet-friendly restaurants rank high on the list.

The pet-friendly homestay market in Shanghai, as seen from statistics released by vacation rentals platform Tujia, had a notable upsurge in 2022, with the number of such accommodations approaching 30,000, up 127 percent from pre-pandemic 2019. In addition, Zhejiang saw an even more remarkable rise in pet-friendly lodging alternatives, with over 70,000 available — a 157 percent increase over three years prior.

"Including Max means my travel budget has to be adjusted accordingly since pet-friendly accommodations often come with additional fees and charges, which is about 200 yuan (\$28) higher per night than regular stays. I understand the need for extra cleaning and maintenance," Zhao said, stressing that the joy and companionship shared with her beloved pet are worth every yuan.

This newfound popularity of pet-friendly travel not only provides pet owners with the opportunity to bond with their furry companions, but also prompts more businesses to adapt to pet owners' shifting needs, executives and analysts said.

Hotel chains have long recognized the potential benefits of accommodating pets, tapping into



A cat lover kisses her furry friend in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

a rapidly growing market segment of pet owners who wish to include their furry friends in their travel experiences, said Zhao Huanyan, chief knowledge officer at Huamei Consulting Group.

As of the end of 2022, there were more than 70.43 million urban pet owners (including both dogs and cats) in China, a year-on-year increase of 2.9 percent, according to a white paper on China's pet business published by Chinese pet industry website pethadoop.com.

Meanwhile, the total number of pets in China nationwide, as shown by data from consulting company Frost & Sullivan, is expected to increase to 446 million by 2024.

As demand for pet-friendly accommodations continues to rise, a wide variety of pet-friendly hotels have emerged to tap into the lucrative market, providing tailored facilities and services that prioritize the well-being and comfort of people's furry companions, Huamei's Zhao said, adding that these enhanced offerings often come at a premium price.

Pet-friendly hotel rooms require additional labor and time, as well as specialized cleaning equipment and disinfection protocols, to ensure thorough cleanliness and hygiene, said Kang Wei, vice-president of marketing at Atour Group, a domestic hotel chain.

Moreover, investment in outdoor spaces, pet-friendly amenities and

oversized rooms for pets not only leads to higher construction and maintenance expenses, but also requires ongoing upkeep and customization to cater to the needs of different pets and their owners, Kang said.

With a strong affinity for pets and a desire to provide them with the best care, pet owners — especially younger ones — are willing to pay for pet-friendly accommodations that align with their values and lifestyle even at rather lofty prices, said Zhang Xuyun, a hospitality industry insider.

The population of young pet owners continues to rise, with individuals born after 1995, commonly known as Generation Z, taking the lead, accounting for 36.8 percent of all pet owners in the country, according to the white paper.

In addition to regular pet-friendly hotels, pet-themed hotels, where both design and decor are inspired by canine and feline concepts, are gaining in popularity, as well as hotel resorts that offer a range of pet services, such as dog parks and grooming, to actively engage with this demographic, Zhang said.

Hotel groups are leveraging technology and digital platforms to connect with young pet owners. Online booking systems, social media engagement and dedicated pet-friendly websites are just a few examples of how hotels are reaching out to this tech-savvy



A young girl walks her dog near a homestay in Hebei province in August 2021. ZHAI YUJIA / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

generation, Zhang added.

Ren Hong, a 30-something resident of Hangzhou in Zhejiang, stumbled upon a series of heartwarming photos and videos shared by a group of pet owners who had taken their furry friends to a hotel for the weekend. Motivated by the joyous moments captured in those online posts, Ren made the decision to take his pet along on a hotel getaway.

"I never expected there would be so many people vacationing with their pets," Ren said, adding that the

thoughtful amenities provided for their furry companions — such as inviting pet beds, food and water bowls and even a personalized welcome treat — exceeded his initial expectations.

Despite the hotel's charge of approximately 1,000 yuan per night, Ren was able to experience a delightful and hassle-free vacation, thanks to the hotel's dedication to going the extra mile to provide a range of amenities and services specifically designed to cater to pets.

As the pet industry continues to

“One of the primary hurdles faced by hotel groups is the standardization of pet-friendly amenities and services across multiple locations.”

Bo Wenxi, chief economist at Interpublic Group China

witness exponential growth, spurred by consumer upgrades and a shift toward personalized consumption, demand for pet-related hospitality services shows no signs of slowing down.

According to research firm iiMedia Research, the industry scale of China's pet economy hit 493.6 billion yuan in 2022, a year-on-year increase of 25.2 percent, while its market size is expected to reach 811.4 billion yuan by 2025.

While demand for pet-friendly accommodations is on the rise, it is essential for hotels to assess their suitability for accommodating pets before promoting themselves as such, said Gu Huimin, a professor with the school of tourism sciences at Beijing International Studies University.

Factors such as hotel infrastructure, location and existing amenities play a significant role in determining if a hotel is genuinely pet-friendly, Gu said, adding that hotels located in bustling urban areas or those without appropriate outdoor spaces, for example, may not provide an optimal environment for pets.

While catering to pet owners can attract a specific market demographic, it may also lead to the loss of customers who do not own pets or have different preferences. Some guests may have concerns about allergies, cleanliness or disturbances caused by pets, Gu added.

Meanwhile, the expansion of pet-friendly offerings on a larger scale presents unique challenges that require careful consideration and innovative solutions so as to suit the evolving expectations of pet owners and the increasing recognition of pets as integral family members, said Bo Wenxi, chief economist at Interpublic Group China.

"One of the primary hurdles faced by hotel groups is the standardization of pet-friendly amenities and services across multiple locations. Achieving consistency in the hotel experience while accounting for variations in architecture and design is crucial," Bo said.

Effective personnel management is another vital aspect that hotel chains must address. Staff members who interact with guests and their pets require proper training to be knowledgeable about pet-related services, demonstrate empathy toward pets, and possess the ability to handle any potential issues that may arise, Bo added.

Domesticated animal mkt not just 'reigning' cats, dogs

By WANG KEJU

In a world where cats and dogs have long reigned supreme, a quirky and captivating trend has taken the pet community by storm. A growing number of people are breaking free from convention, choosing companionship from animals that are neither feline nor canine, thus redefining what constitutes a pet.

From adorable hedgehogs and jumping spiders to slithering lizards and flying sugar gliders, people are sharing their love for animals in the most extraordinary ways imaginable.

According to statistics released by the Asia Pet Alliance, the number of pets in China reached 220 million in 2022, with about 25 percent of the total being more exotic animals such as birds and reptiles.

Zhang Wencheng, a 29-year-old cafe owner in Jinan, East China's Shandong province, grew up with unusual companions in his child-

hood, inspired by the wildlife documentaries he avidly watched.

Over the years, Zhang has nurtured his passion, gaining experience in caring for these unique creatures. He has welcomed more than a dozen unconventional pets into his home, covering a diverse range of species, including snakes, tarantulas and geckos, and devoted a cumulative investment exceeding 100,000 yuan (\$13,990).

"We live in a society that values individuality and self-expression. Owning an unusual pet has become a way for people like me to showcase a unique personality and stand out from the crowd," Zhang said.

The driving force behind the fast-growing unusual pet market is the younger generation, including the post-1990s and millennials, who exhibit a greater sense of independence, embrace diverse perspectives and always stay at the forefront of the latest trends, said Yuan Zhibin, who has run an unconventional pet store in Beijing for five years.

"The current popular species in the unconventional pet community are snakes, geckos, spiders and frogs," Yuan said, adding that these species have gained popularity among young people primarily due to their relatively low maintenance and cost of care, making them well-suited to the fast-paced lifestyles of today while providing a new form of spiritual fulfillment for the younger generation.

According to a report published by e-commerce platform Tmall, males made up around 60 percent of buyers in the reptile pet market in 2022, with over 40 percent of them being in the 30-39 year-old age bracket.

Furthermore, there has been a rapid growth in the 18 to 24-year-old age group, predominantly being in second and third-tier cities, the report said.

With an increasing number of individuals in search of less-common nonhuman companions, businesses can seize the opportunity to

tap into this trend and cater to the distinctive needs and desires of pet enthusiasts, said analysts.

The trend of owning unusual pets has gained significant traction on social media platforms. Pet owners often share their experiences and showcase their extraordinary companions' unique attributes, which will attract more like-minded animal lovers and foster a robust consumer base, said Zhang Yi, chief analyst at iiMedia Research.

Moreover, there is growing demand for specialized supplies and accessories tailored to their unique requirements. From custom-made habitats and specialized enclosures to exotic foods and grooming products, businesses can tap into this niche market and offer a wide range of products that cater to the specific needs of these conventional pets, Zhang added.

For example, intelligent temperature and humidity controllers, according to Tmall's report, are high



Pet lizards rest in their owner's palms in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, in February 2022. MAO XUQIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

on reptile and insect keepers' must-buy list, so they can provide their pets with the best possible living conditions, because these animals are extremely sensitive to environmental changes.

Medical care available for unconventional pets, however,

still remains limited, and the scarcity makes it difficult for pet owners to access the necessary expertise and guidance, Zhang said, adding that going forward, this is urgently needed to bridge the gap in healthcare services for these unique companions.

COMMENT

Editorials

Japan and ROK should not be party to the lunatics taking over the asylum

In the joint statement they released on Saturday after their Trilateral "Indo-Pacific" Dialogue, the United States, Japan and the Republic of Korea expressed concerns over what they alleged was China's "dangerous and escalatory behavior" supporting its "unlawful maritime claims in the South China Sea".

While pointing accusatory fingers at China for attempts to change the status quo by force and coercion — including implying that it is China rather than the US that is responsible for jeopardizing peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait — they rather tellingly offered testimony that this is a charge that should be laid at their doors.

By reiterating their shared commitment to "maritime security and law enforcement cooperation" including the freedom of navigation and overflight operations which are nothing more than an excuse for their provocative military posturing in the waters, they made it crystal clear that it is they that are guilty of trying to use coercion to impose the US' notion of what the regional status quo should be — one in which China's development over the past 40-plus years never happened.

The US has constantly sought to exploit the maritime disputes in the South China Sea, which are bilateral issues between China and a few Southeast Asian countries, as a means to consolidate its various alliances and cliques, including the one with Japan and the ROK, in order to sow the seeds of divi-

sion between China and its neighbors. Its aim is to make regional countries part of the armored ring fence it is trying to build around China in order to contain it. It is not China that is guilty of so-called escalatory behavior, but the US.

At present, the greatest challenge to peace and stability in the South China Sea comes from Washington's encouragement of Manila's provocations regarding Ren'ai Reef and its collusion with pro-independence forces on Taiwan island. With the island holding its local leadership election later this month, the US apparently wants to send a supportive message with its allies to disruptive-minded, pro-independence candidates. It is the US' continuous flexing of the muscles of its alliance system and its inciting of cross-strait tensions that are disturbing the peace and stability fostered through the concerted efforts of countries in the region.

As Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said of the trilateral statement, it exposes the US' attempts to cobble together exclusionary groupings in the name of cooperation, its gross interference in China's internal affairs, and its smearing of China with the aim of stoking confrontation and antagonism.

As she said, the Asia-Pacific region should not be a chessboard for geopolitical contests. The US' regional allies should recognize the dangers inherent in the Cold War dry rot that has damaged mental faculties in Washington, and cease to fuel tensions in the region by following its demented lead.

Tariff extension sign of squabble to come

On Sept 5, 2023, the Office of the United States Trade Representative posted a notice in the Federal Register stating that it was extending previously reinstated exclusions to the Section 301 tariffs till Dec 31.

Days before that extension was due to expire, the USTR's office on Dec 26 announced another extension, this time to May 31, 2024, to allow for comments on a review of the exclusions and alignment with the four-year review.

As part of the trade war it launched against China, the previous administration imposed punitive tariffs on Chinese products under Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974 beginning 2018. But 352 Chinese import and 77 COVID-19 related categories were exempted to mitigate the negative impacts of the pandemic on US businesses and consumers.

That the Joe Biden administration remains undecided as to how to deal with the Donald Trump legacy in a presidential election year, with a rematch with his predecessor on the cards, underscores the matter's nature as a political hot potato.

Leaving the Trump tariffs untouched may be perceived as tacit endorsement of his core policies. Going too far in that direction, however, may backfire for that would inflict greater pains on US businesses and consumers. Therefore, when Biden seeks to "put his stamp on Trump's tariffs", as the US news website Axios put it, and look "smarter" and "more strategic", or at least not "soft", as Trump has accused

him of being, he has a delicate balance to strike.

The idea so far, appears to be keeping much of the Trump tariffs in place, pairing higher duties on electric vehicles, solar panels and such critical minerals as cobalt and lithium with lower tariffs on some consumer goods.

For the former and present US presidents, getting reelected in November is no doubt their top priority. The tariffs, like any other issues, may just be a political card in their game. Certainly, as in previous presidential campaigns, China is again likely to be front and foremost as the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates compete on the public stage with displays of toughness. It will be particularly so given the unprecedented bipartisan consensus on a tougher approach to China.

The far-reaching damage to the US' image as a preacher of free trade notwithstanding, such a contest will end up harming the US as much as it hurts China. A 2023 study released by major US industry groups found that the tariffs resulted in "many hundreds of millions of dollars a year in costs on apparel, footwear and travel products, with financial burdens falling disproportionately on lower-income consumers".

Yet with the Democrats and Republicans scabbling and squabbling for an advantage in the run-up to the election, there seems little hope of the Biden administration scrapping the tariffs and fostering a fair and nondiscriminatory trade environment.

Self-damaging chip move off the old block

After obstructing high-end chipmakers and chipmaking equipment manufacturers using US-related technologies and parts from dealing with China, the US government is being urged by some China-bashing lawmakers to wean the United States off lower-end chips from China.

In a letter to US President Joe Biden's top business and trade officials late last week, Republican Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin, chairman of the House Select Committee on China, and Raja Krishnamoorthi of Illinois, the committee's ranking Democratic member, urged the Biden administration to take stronger action to stem China's growing dominance in making older-generation microchips, citing the same "national security" concerns as for advanced chips.

The lawmakers' call for new moves, including potential tariffs, is intended to end what they claim is the US' overreliance on China for less-advanced chips. That might be hard to realize any time soon, as the US cannot find a replacement for China in the short term at least able to provide the chips that are essential across several industries, including electronic products, automobiles and home appliances.

Notably, it was also the two lawmakers that wrote letters to the Biden administration in November and July to press it to probe into Chinese drones and artificial intelligence products respectively.

As a matter of fact, over recent months, the US Congress and the Biden administration have already taken actions to allocate funds through the

\$53 billion chip act to support the production of older-generation chips at home. However, due to the low profit margin, the federal subsidies have generally met with cold shoulders from the industry, which actually opposes the "chip war" the US is waging against China.

Yet due to the tough stance on China-related issues that is nonnegotiable in the US presidential election year, the Biden administration has to appear to be at least receptive to targeting low-end chips from China.

However, if punitive tariffs are imposed on these chips, it will be US consumers and downstream companies that will end up paying the costs.

As chip enterprises from the Republic of Korea, such as Samsung Electronics, and other US allies account for a large share of the chip manufacturing industry in China, to which the Biden administration has recently given a green light to further expand their production scales, targeting the chips from China will unavoidably damage the interests of companies of the US' allies.

Targeting the lower-end chips from China will also directly belie the Biden administration's insistence that it does not seek "decoupling" between the world's top two economies.

Amid the US business community's rising outcry over the harmful nature of the irrational move and its demand that the called-for tariffs on chips not be forthcoming, the Biden administration has to deal with the two lawmakers' requirement prudently.

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

US making huge oil fortune from conflict in Middle East

The crude oil exports of the United States surged from 3.915 million barrels per day to 5.292 million barrels per day in the last week of 2023, an increase of 1.3 million barrels, largely as the result of the fighting in the Middle East and its spillover effects, especially Houthis attacks on ships in the Red Sea, which have caused some countries to import oil from the US to cut oil costs and reduce risks.

Some analysts point out the chaos in the Middle East is pushing customers into the embrace of US oil producers and predict the US' crude oil exports will hit a record high in the coming weeks.

The Suez Canal has long been an important transit route for oil transport from the Persian Gulf to the rest of the world. However, the shipping crisis in the Red Sea emanating from the protracted Gaza conflict has forced many cargo ships to choose alternative routes, causing not only transport delays but also increased costs. A report

from Standard & Poor's Global Ratings believes that shipping via the Cape of Good Hope could increase transport costs by at least 15 percent. In this context, it is more cost-effective for shipping companies to send cargo ships to the US Gulf Coast and buy US oil.

The war in the Middle East is the direct cause of the current surge in US crude oil exports, but over a longer time horizon, US oil exports have generally maintained an upward trend. Since the US lifted a ban on oil exports in 2015, its oil exports have set new records almost every year, except for 2020 and 2021 when oil export growth stagnated due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is related to the US' shale gas revolution in 2015, which has increased its oil production efficiency and boosted its competitiveness in the international oil market.

After the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out, the US filled the market vacuum left by Western sanctions on Russia's oil exports. In 2022 and

2023 when the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries negotiated a joint production cut to raise oil prices, the US did the opposite, contributing to the long-term expansion of its oil export share.

In the context of the crisis in the Red Sea shipping lanes, US oil exporters have become the biggest winner, but this "windfall" will not last. Realizing oil imports from the US are unsustainable, even some US allies such as Germany and other European countries have signed long-term oil and gas supply contracts with Qatar, Egypt and other countries.

The US' own huge demand also limits its ability to sell more oil to other countries. Oil transport from the Persian Gulf to Europe and East Asia via the traditional Suez-Red Sea route enjoys unparalleled cost advantages and when geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East end, the oil export windfall the US has reaped will disappear.

—BEIJING NEWS

By trying to defame others ASPI defames itself

Pointing a finger at China, a report released in November 2023 by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute claimed that the Communist Party of China "actively cultivates a rising group of foreign influencers with millions of fans, which endorses pro-CCP narratives on Chinese and global social-media platforms".

Despite its claim to be "an independent, nonpartisan think tank", the Australian Strategic Policy Institute has reportedly more than once received money from the Australian Department of Defence plus defense contractors such as Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems, and Raytheon Technologies.

Considering that Andy Boreham, one of the foreigners named by ASPI

in its report, told the media that a snapshot of the original version of the report said it was funded by the US Department of State's Global Engagement Center, a credit that was deleted later, there is enough reason to ask how neutral and trustworthy the institute is.

Former Australian ambassador to China Geoff Raby said of the institute, "I see it as very much the architect of the China threat theory in Australia."

While Bob Carr, former premier of New South Wales, Australia, said that it pumps out a "one-sided, pro-American view of the world".

It might be easy for ASPI to pump out such smears, but it will be difficult to mend the trust damaged by the irresponsible move.

By issuing such reports, the ASPI is trying to convince people that China is bad, China is evil and China is a threat. As increasingly more foreigners visit China, they are sharing a more truthful portrayal of China with their compatriots. Such biased reports as that of the ASPI are aimed at defaming the truth-telling foreigners so as to discredit their views.

Jerry Kowal, one of the main victims defamed by the ASPI report, is reportedly suing the involved parties in several nations, the details of which are yet to be released as the judicial process is going on. Those defaming China and defaming everyone who refuses to defame China may yet have a price to pay.

—ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Corruption clearing disinfects governance system

The third plenary session of the 20th Communist Party of China Central Commission for Discipline Inspection that concluded in Beijing on Monday sent the clear signal that relentless efforts will be made to put power within institutional cages.

Despite the remarkable progress the Party has made in its fight against corruption since 2012, the situation remains grave and complex in the tough and protracted battle against corruption, as indicated by the series of graft cases the central discipline watchdog has recently released.

The anti-corruption campaign is an important endeavor by the Party to unwaveringly advance its self-

reform and practice rigorous self-governance. That entails coordinated actions to ensure that officials do not have the audacity, opportunity or desire to become corrupt, as well as strict and long-term measures to prevent and curb corruption.

Combating corruption in the form of collusion between officials and businesspeople has been set as a clear priority, and more efforts are to be made to prevent various interest and power groups from infiltrating the political arena.

Also, more concrete measures will be taken to rectify corruption in State-owned enterprises, especially in the finance, energy, medicine and infrastructure sectors.

Notably, the meeting emphasized

the necessity to tackle and punish acts of bribery, and efforts to retrieve and address the illicit interests gained by those who give bribes. To that end, constant and rigorous efforts are to be made to purify the political ecosystem and rectify misconduct in the selection and appointment of officials.

At the same time, leading officials are expected to establish good discipline and the right values among their relatives.

In order to advance the anti-corruption campaign, it is essential that continuous efforts are to be made to eliminate the breeding grounds and conditions for corruption.

—LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Wu Jianxiang

China's anti-graft drive to forge ahead in 2024

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, called for targeted and sustained efforts to win the tough and protracted battle against corruption, as he addressed the third plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, the Party's top disciplinary body on Monday.

China's relentless campaign against corruption yielded significant results throughout 2023, and the country is determined to eliminate corruption and implement the CPC's integrity initiatives in 2024.

Xi has stressed the importance of strengthening the fight against corruption, with a specific focus on addressing industry-specific, systemic and regional corruption. As such, efforts will be made to achieve targeted rectification, eliminate "petty corruption" at the grassroots level, investigate both bribe givers and takers, reinforce a new era of integrity and eradicate the conditions that brew corruption.

Targeted rectification in key sectors is a crucial way of strengthening the comprehensive governance of the Party and winning the long, arduous battle against corruption. This approach aims to eradicate corruption in areas where power, funds and resources are concentrated, which include financing, State-owned enterprises, the legal system, and industries like grain procurement and sales. Simultaneously, measures will be taken to strengthen deterrence against corruption.

Eradicating "petty corruption" at the grassroots level is a key requirement of the anti-corruption campaign to gain the people's trust because, more than the "distant tigers", the public abhors the "flies and ants" that they have to deal with.

"Micro-corruption" at the grassroots level can evolve into a significant hazard, harming the tangible interests of the public, corroding people's sense of accomplishment, and squandering trust in the Party and government. To address this issue, the anti-corruption campaign will be extended to the grassroots, focus will be shifted to anti-corruption measures in towns and villages, rectification of corruption and cases of misconduct will be given priority, stricter punishment will be handed down to those found guilty, obstacles on the "last mile" of the anti-corruption campaign will be removed, and efforts will be made to boost public confidence in the

Adhering to truth, rules, regulations and laws, and after exploring different models, a comprehensive system will be established to classify different corrupt practices and ways of disposing them.

anti-corruption campaign.

Eradication of corrupt practices such as embezzlement, misreporting, withholding information and favoritism by grassroots officials is crucial. And improved governance in areas related to people's livelihoods will allow the public to experience the tangible results and changes brought about by the anti-corruption drive.

Stamping out the protection networks for corruption and corrupt forces in villages, communities and townships is essential. For this, officials have to punish individuals who shelter, tolerate and facilitate the growth of criminal forces, intervene in or obstruct investigations, or nurture "village bullies", "township bandits" or family-based criminal forces. This strategy aims to make the people feel more secure and happy.

Simultaneously investigating both bribe givers and takers is not only a fundamental principle but also a challenging aspect of strengthening the anti-corruption campaign. Only by persistently investigating both sides can the space for "hunting" by the bribe givers and the willingness to be "hunted" by corrupt officials be obliterated, and the breeding ground for corrupt practices destroyed.

Besides, to prevent private enterprises from giving bribes to get their legitimate work done, disciplinary and law enforcement agencies will carefully navigate policies to address bribery crimes while safeguarding the legal rights of private enterprises and minimizing the collateral damage.

The focus will be on key areas and indi-

viduals, closely monitoring potential bribe givers in sectors such as construction, financing, SOEs, poverty alleviation, environmental protection, education, healthcare, and food and drug safety.

For those committing minor bribery crimes, first-time or occasional offenders, and people who voluntarily or actively cooperate with investigators, lenient or reduced penalties may be proposed or no criminal responsibility pursued. Adhering to truth, rules, regulations and laws, and after exploring different models, a comprehensive system will be established to classify different corrupt practices and

ways of disposing them.

Different models will also be explored before establishing a database of bribe givers to provide data support for precise and effective disposition of bribe givers' cases, in order to organically integrate the fight against bribery and the efforts to boost the development of the private economy.

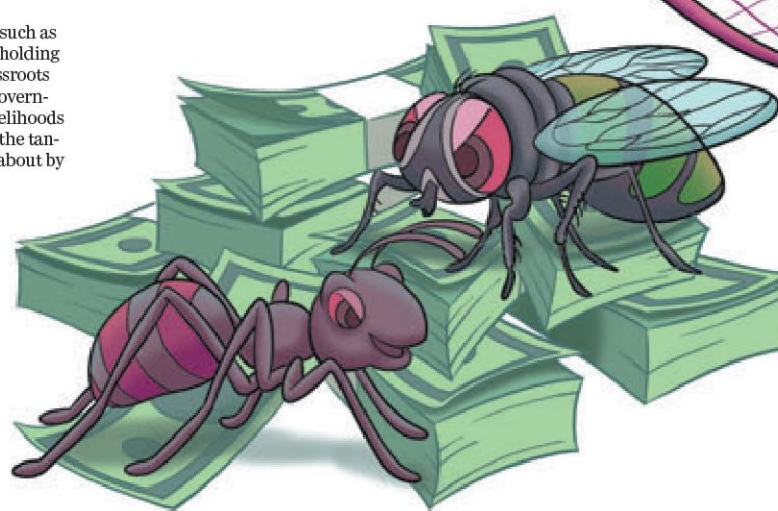
The overarching direction for China's anti-corruption drive in 2024 is to "sustain efforts and deepen the struggle", reinforce deterrence against corruption, and treat corruption-prone areas as breakthrough points to win the long, arduous battle against corruption. And special efforts will

be made to achieve results in areas where achieving breakthroughs is proving difficult.

This comprehensive approach is aimed at preventing, prohibiting and discouraging corruption, and achieving more and better results.

The author is director of the China Anti-Corruption Judicial Research Center, China Against Corruption Law Association and dean of the Discipline Inspection Institute, Xiangtan University.

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



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Wang Shacheng

Better cross-Strait ties key to de-risking for Taiwan's chip sector

Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, the largest of its kind in the world, and its strategies have attracted global attention. The TSMC's annual report for 2022 showed the company commanded 30 percent of the global semiconductor production value (excluding memory) compared with 26 percent in 2021. A Counterpoint Research report further highlighted the TSMC's dominance: the company held 59 percent market share in the global wafer foundry industry by the end of the third quarter of 2023.

But despite its global importance, the TSMC's strategic interests are bound to the United States' market, raising concerns over its lack of industrial autonomy and exposure to risks such as technology leakages. The TSMC's recent announcement that it will expand its operations in Arizona, increasing investments from an initial \$12 billion to an additional \$40 billion, and aiming for 3 nanometer chip production by 2026, marks the company's largest venture outside Taiwan and one of the most significant foreign direct investments in US history.

As TSMC founder Morris Chang Chung-mou said, the investment includes \$39 billion in US government subsidies, which contrasts with the TSMC's annual average investment of \$30 billion.

However, the move comes with risks, including the potential risk of technology leakages, especially due to the passage of the US CHIPS and Science Act of 2022. With the semiconductor industry being a linchpin of the Taiwan economy, some scholars on the island have called for the

protection of this vital sector. The TSMC's robust financial performance, as indicated by its 2022 annual report, shows steady growth in net revenue over the past five years, more than twice in 2022 compared with 2018, despite the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the 21 Data News Lab, until Dec 31, 2023, riding the wave of the arti-

ficial intelligence revolution, the TSMC's market value soared to 3.82 trillion yuan (\$534.31 billion), up by a remarkable 42 percent, which underlined its pivotal role in the local economy and took it to the top of China's top 500 companies list.

Despite the TSMC's stronghold in the North American market with a 68 percent share, the heavy reliance on one market

poses a great risk to the company amid policy shifts and trade disputes. Diversifying market shares in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, where the TSMC holds a mere 5 percent market share, could reduce its dependency on the US market. Also, by focusing more on Asia, particularly on the Chinese mainland where it holds 11 percent of the market share, the TSMC can expand its market and reduce risks.

Taiwan seeks to minimize its industrial risks, and the best way it can do so is by collaborating with the mainland. The complementary industrial structures of the Chinese mainland and Taiwan offer the TSMC an opportunity to optimize its resource allocation and realize mutual benefit through cooperative projects.

Official data from Taiwan's financial authorities for the first 11 months of 2023 show that exports to the Chinese mainland and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region totaled \$138.89 billion, 2.05 times more than to the US, and 3.6 times more than to Europe. By sharing technological resources, promoting innovation and technological cooperation, both sides of the Taiwan Strait can facilitate synergistic development across the industrial supply chains, especially in areas such as packaging testing and smart manufacturing.

The dividends of cross-Strait industrial collaboration are manifested in three key aspects. First, collaboration with the

mainland offers Taiwan's businesses a larger market and more development opportunities. Cross-Strait cooperation already covers various sectors, including electronics, machinery manufacturing and biopharmaceuticals. And General Administration of Customs data for January to November 2023 show that Taiwan's exports to the mainland totaled 1.27 trillion yuan, about 232.97 billion yuan more than that to the US, highlighting the mainland's significance to Taiwan's economic development.

Second, industrial collaboration can help improve cross-Strait relations. By deepening economic ties through industrial cooperation, the two sides of the Strait can promote the peaceful development of cross-Strait ties, especially since trade has become a pillar supporting the development of cross-Strait relations.

And third, cross-Strait industrial collaboration can boost the regional economic integration process. As part of the Asian economy, Taiwan's active participation in regional economic integration, coupled with closer economic ties with the mainland, can contribute to mutual prosperity. Indeed, cross-Strait trade relations have become an integral part of the Asian economic integration process.

In conclusion, the key to de-risking Taiwan's industries lies in stronger cross-Strait relations, not least because deepening cross-Strait relations will unlock broader development prospects and opportunities. Achieving cross-Strait integration requires better policy communication and infrastructure connectivity, smooth trade, financial connectivity, and people-to-people exchanges. And removing institutional barriers and promoting the free flow of resources are essential to achieving that goal.

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



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL VIEWS

TANG LIXIA AND LUO YANNI

Model worker

China is playing a demonstrative role and working with other countries of the Global South to build a community of shared development

The Global South is becoming a leading force in promoting the reform of the global governance system in a more just and equitable direction. But it is important to recognize the range of development issues that countries in the Global South are currently facing.

First, there is a significant disparity in economic development levels among countries in the Global South. Developing countries such as China and India have achieved substantial economic growth, while most low-income countries have not shown a significant economic growth trend.

Second, countries in the Global South are more inclined to learn development models from Northern countries or directly apply their programs in choosing their economic development paths, but they have not achieved satisfactory economic growth and their overall social welfare levels have not improved.

Third, poverty remains the biggest development challenge for countries in the Global South, and poverty eradication has become their long-standing aspiration. International organizations have invested a significant amount of resources in poverty reduction in the Global South, but due to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical conflicts, the global poverty population has shown a resilient growth trend.

Fourth, with increasing instability and uncertainty in the international food market, countries in the Global South face significant challenges in achieving the target of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals on eradicating hunger.

Fifth, the intensity of international development assistance has been weakening, and the amount of direct support for the development of countries in the Global South has been decreasing. From 2018 to 2021, the annual aid scale slowed by an average of 9.52 percent, with the intensity of aid from international organizations and countries such as the United Kingdom declining significantly.

As the largest economy in the Global South, China has achieved sustained and stable economic growth while eradicating absolute poverty. These two achievements have established China as a model for economic development among countries in the Global South. With its targeted poverty alleviation practice and economic transformation and upgrading, China has provided a valuable development example for countries in the Global South, and actively provided development support for them with resources, funding and other means.

In terms of poverty alleviation, China has made significant contributions to the development of the global pov-

erty reduction cause, and provided practical Chinese solutions to the poverty reduction cause of countries in the Global South.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, China has organized and carried out a battle against poverty that is unprecedented in human history, with the largest intensity and benefiting the largest number of people.

In 2021, China won the battle against extreme poverty, achieving the poverty reduction target set in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 10 years ahead of schedule.

To better share its development experience in poverty reduction and addressing food security issues with countries in the Global South, the Chinese government has used the China International Poverty Alleviation Center as a platform to develop knowledge products on poverty reduction in China, promote the establishment of a global knowledge base on poverty reduction, hold forums and policy dialogues, and provide various training courses on poverty reduction and sustainable development.

In addition to efforts to promote South-South cooperation, China has also carried out trilateral cooperation with countries in the Global North to provide new impetus for development assistance to countries in the Global South. For example, in 2012, the Chinese and UK governments jointly launched the China-UK-Malawi Agriculture Tripartite Cooperation and China-UK-Uganda Agriculture Tripartite Cooperation projects to help the two African countries improve their agricultural production capacity and address the food security crisis.

In terms of economic development, China's resilient and dynamic economic growth trajectory has provided referential development experience for the economic construction and transformation of countries in the Global South. First, relying on the continuous optimization of the economic structure to successfully achieve the transition from being a traditional agricultural country to be the largest manufacturing country in the world. Second, it has laid a solid foundation for economic growth through infrastructure construction. Since the launch of reform and opening-up in 1978, China has made great achievements in infrastructure construction, while the infrastructure construction in most countries in the Global South remains at a relatively low level. Third, China has effectively utilized its comparative advantages to attract a large amount of overseas investment to promote economic development.

China actively provides financing,

technology and other development resources to countries in the Global South. In the field of outward direct investment, China's investment stock in developing economies reached \$2.46 trillion by the end of 2022, accounting for 89.2 percent of the total outward direct investment. Through cross-border industrial cooperation, initiating the establishment of industrial development funds, increasing support for infrastructure construction, industrial capacity cooperation and investment, and bilateral trade, China has brought new opportunities for countries in the Global South to vitalize their manufacturing industries. In the field of international development assistance, China has not only set up the \$4 billion Global Development and South-South Cooperation Fund (formerly China's South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund) to support South-South cooperation, but also focused on cooperation with international multilateral institutions and platforms to support the cause of poverty reduction and the sustainable development of developing countries, especially the least developed countries.

The Global South emerged in an era of deep globalization, formed in the pattern of world political and economic relations closely connected with developed countries and embedded with each other, and is becoming a new strategic resource in the global geopolitical and economic pattern. Countries in the Global South need to recognize the differences among nations, build on modern international cooperation platforms and mechanisms, increase the representation and voice of developing countries in global governance, and jointly seek the interests of global economic development. China has actively responded to the development concerns of countries in the Global South, and has always worked side by side with other developing countries to inject strong cooperation momentum into the development of the Global South. In the future, China will continue to contribute China's ideas, wisdom and solutions to the development of countries in the Global South.

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LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

SATYAJIT BOSE

Wealth to treasure

Real value is in the benefits derived from sustainable development not financial assets

Sustainable development is necessarily measured in a multi-dimensional way.

Real wealth is embedded in productive factories, healthy citizens, resilient social networks, motivated employees, satisfied customers, patient and enlightened investors, access to food and energy, healthy ecosystems, nutrient-rich soil, clean water and clean air.

While in theory financial wealth can be calculated from the value of real wealth, in practice the monetary value of many types of capital is not easily measured. Hence, financial or monetary wealth is but a poor shadow of real wealth. We will never be happy to live in polluted environments and toxic societies, however much financial wealth we accumulate.

Ultimately, the bank accounts, stock certificates, corporate debentures and government bonds that we have must be converted into healthy surroundings, clean air and water, affordable and effective healthcare and the provision of a happy life for family and friends. Monetary savings therefore do not amount to much unless combined with sustainable development for all.

Sustainable development is the opposite of putting our trust in financial wealth. Sustainable development means we invest in the smiles of our children when they have time to play outside, the excitement of a recent graduate going to work in a fulfilling job, the joy and utility of discovering new knowledge and the security of an effective and accessible healthcare system. It means we invest in the beauty of our rivers and mountains, of a rural landscape whose inhabitants find meaningful work sustaining healthy ecosystems. Unlike financial wealth which is measured in renminbi or dollars or other currencies, no one can take the wealth of sustainable development away from us. This is encapsulated in the Chinese saying that heaping up gold is not as good as accumulating grain.

The Integrated Reporting Framework of the International Financial Reporting Standards recognizes six types of capital, and financial capital is just one of them (the others are manufac-

ture, intellectual, human, social and relationship, and natural capital). The philosophy of the sustainable development measurement system should recognize the value of many different types of capital, or wealth. It should build on the economic concept that financial capital consists of mere paper claims on real capital. Real capital comprises human, natural, social and other forms of capital.

The 2023 China Sustainable Development Indicator System report demonstrates a dramatic improvement in the level of China's sustainable development. The index has increased from a level of 58.9 in 2017 to a level of 84.9 in 2023. The two most impactful categories driving this improvement are social welfare and livelihood and consumption and emissions. Improvements in social welfare and livelihood comprised advances in educational attainment, expenditure and cultural access, social security coverage, public health access and rural poverty alleviation. The period also witnessed strong reductions in the environmental intensity of economic activity, as measured by land, water and energy consumption and pollution per unit of GDP. The report is a fruit of a multi-year collaboration between Chinese and US researchers.

Despite the vicissitudes of global power politics, academic cooperation proceeded with mutual trust and collegial sharing of knowledge. There are many countries around the world, in Latin America, in Africa, in the Middle East, in South Asia and Southeast Asia, in the Belt and Road Initiative, in the BRICS+ countries and beyond, that will benefit from the knowledge that China has developed in the management of sustainable development. It is important to invest additional effort to disseminate the lessons from China's sustainable development experience to other countries who wish to learn from China's example.

China has not only been a leader in economic growth and poverty alleviation, but also shown significant improvement in the quality of life of its ordinary citizens and the health of its natural ecosystems. This experi-

ence demonstrates that sustainable development goes hand in hand with increasing economic activity, vibrant trade, investment in infrastructure and the absence of conflict.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to sustainable development faced by the world today is the limited level of international collaboration and the dearth of sincerely negotiated win-win agreements. The pace of knowledge sharing remains slow and the scale of sustainable development finance is a minuscule fraction of what is needed. We need investments in the global public good of human and social capital. Easing the barriers to people-to-people contacts and fostering inter-country collaboration in research and training are essential, not just among the major powers, but also for smaller countries which need access to world-class expertise to facilitate innovation and remain competitive.

We also need to deploy financial capital in ways that enhance the value of natural and human capital. The social and environmental impact of any financial investment must be carefully considered and should constitute a key rationale for equity and debt flows. In order to achieve this, the financial sector in every country must build a practice of evaluating the holistic return on investments. This requires going beyond financial analysis which merely measures success in monetary terms to cost-benefit analysis that integrates social costs and benefits in many dimensions.

We all must work together to achieve sustainable global development. As the Chinese saying goes, a single strand of silk is not enough to make a thread nor a single tree sufficient to be a forest. In the context of sustainable development, success must be measured in many dimensions, and the community of nations must strive to achieve it together.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

CULTURE

Two benign-looking gentlemen are playing chess under the roof of a little stilted pavilion, which itself is embedded in a picturesque landscape complete with verdant mountains and meandering streams. At one with their game, the men, occupying the left side of an embroidered canvas, stand in contrast with their two female companions who are leaning against the railing, apparently having found something more worthy of their attention.

From the other side of the picture, a courier has galloped into view on a stallion, the flailing tail and flared nostrils of which suggest a frantic ride. The man is holding, with both of his raised hands, what appears to be a scroll.

It indeed is a scroll, a written one containing a message of such importance to the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420) that it is comparable to the one delivered by the legendary courier Pheidippides to his fellow Athenians who were waiting for news from the Battle of Marathon.

The soldiers of Eastern Jin had just routed their enemies from the north, who outnumbered them by almost twofold. The battle, which took place in the winter of 383, secured in Chinese history the place of one man — Xie An, upon whose strategy the front-line commanders of the Eastern Jin army had acted and to whom the news of victory was delivered, in a classic moment when a seemingly unflappable Xie clashed with a friend on a chessboard.

It also helped to prevent any pillaging that could have happened to the adopted seat of power of the Eastern Jin, founded by a key member of the ruling family of the Western Jin Dynasty (265-316) who crossed the Yangtze River from the north with his supporters in 317.

"The relocation of the Jin court, from central China to the southern region known as Jiangnan, was propelled by the harassment and invasions of the steppe empires from the north," says Clarissa von Spee, curator of the exhibition *China's Southern Paradise: Treasures from the Lower Yangzi Delta*, on view at the Cleveland Museum of Art in the US city of Cleveland, Ohio.

Jiangnan, which literally translates into "land south of the (Yangtze) river", sits on the southern part of that delta. With more than 240 exhibits drawn from museums worldwide, the grand display intends to explain the land's remarkable transformation — from a fringe area where unenlightened locals wore "truncated hair and heavy tattooing" to quote from an ancient piece of literature, to a fertile ground that served as a cultural and economic powerhouse.

"None of that would have happened without a drastic change of demographics," says Von Spee, referring to the influx of immigrants into Jiangnan around 317, some of whom were also driven from their home by the repeated flooding of the Yellow River, which ran across the Chinese heartland.

Between the Western and Eastern Jin dynasties, a pattern was set for Chinese history as much as for Jiangnan: In the ensuing 17 centuries, whenever the north was engulfed in war or political instability, people moved southward, to Jiangnan, the haven and last defensive foothold upon which the fate of an empire would often hinge.

Xie (320-385) was born three years after that fateful relocation first made a Jiangnan city the capital, and therefore political center, of a Chinese empire. Keeping in mind that the literarily minded man had been living a rather reclusive existence before being called upon by history, Xie effectively became an object of veneration for successive generations of educated Chinese, who considered his self-imposed solitude as not only a show of dignity, but also a prelude to great personal success.

The aforementioned piece, a painting-cum-embroidery with certain areas — the horse's saddle and the pine needles for example — highlighted with stitches, was commissioned by the powerful Ming Dynasty art theorist Dong Qichang (1555-1636). Dong intended it as a gift for a fellow official who was taking an extended leave from office, beseeching the recipient to "end your hiatus for the sake of the masses", to quote from Dong's own postscript to the work, written in 1632.

One thing is worth noting: During Dong's life, Jiangnan already constituted China's biggest talent pool, with natives, including Dong, occupying key positions in the central government of the Ming empire (1368-1644). Between Xie and Dong, Jiangnan had seen its own prestige rising steadily, to the point that it became the place to look to for the best China had to offer.

"When the great northern families immigrated to Jiangnan around 317, they took with them their much-valued traditions of painting and calligraphy, of poetry and Buddhism," says Shi Yuan, a researcher from the Shanghai Museum, which owns the partially embroidered piece.

Xie, a patriarch of a prominent family, was a close associate of Wang Xizhi, the single most enshrined calligrapher in Chinese history, whose own uncle, Wang Dao, was a driving force behind the relocation of the Jin court.



A silk gauze robe from the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279).

Editor's note:

From a place of exile to a cultural and economic powerhouse, the influence of Jiangnan still echoes in China today. The next three pages will take you on a journey through this verdant land's eternal poetry, art and spirit.



The embroidery, titled *Mount East*, captures the moment when news of victory was delivered to Xie An, a fourth-century statesman. It was commissioned by Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) artist Dong Qichang for a friend.

The jewel in China's crown

Throughout the nation's history, the southern region of Jiangnan has consistently stood as a beacon of culture, beauty and abundance, even in the most troubled of times, Zhao Xu reports.



This Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) hanging scroll by Wang Shiyi captures the busy morning traffic at the Chang Gate of the Jiangnan city of Suzhou during the 17th century.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

When Wang Xizhi gathered his eminent friends for a drinking and poetry writing party in the spring of 353, Xie was invited. The event, taking place amid the beautiful Jiangnan scenery, was immortalized through Wang Xizhi's writing, before being re-imagined in countless paintings for later generations, creating a strong visual bond between the land and the proponents of the country's elite culture.

A capital location

China descended into a state of chaos upon the demise of Eastern Jin in 420, and stayed fragmented until the founding of the Sui Dynasty in 581. The Sui emperors — there were only two of them — oversaw the digging of the Grand Canal, the world's longest artificial waterway which was to run between the modern-day Beijing and Jiangnan city of Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

"The aim was to facilitate the transportation of men and materials — Jiangnan's rice produce for example — between the south and the north," says Von Spee. More than a millennium later, the same canal would carry the rulers of Qing (1644-1911), China's last feudal dynasty, to Jiangnan, to project their power over the empire's "source of tax and talents" to quote the legendary Qing emperor Kangxi.

In other words, although a distinct regional awareness had emerged in Jiangnan as early as the 4th century, the area was by no means a haven unto itself. Through close interaction with the rest of China, it became a reference point and a source of inspiration, putting its cultural stamp on many things we now consider quintessentially Chinese.

One example involves the poetry production of the Tang Dynasty (618-907). This powerful empire, whose territory at one point stretched between the Korean Peninsula in the east to present-day Afghanistan in the west, was politically centered in modern-day Shaanxi province in northwestern China. Yet its poets, who outshone those from all other historical periods in China, frequently traveled to Jiangnan, where they were duly impressed by the otherworldly beauty of its misty landscape and wrote tirelessly about it. One of them, named Wei Zhuang, reflected that "this place, where one sleeps to the sound of rain, is for a weathered traveler to age".

When violent rebellion broke out in 755 and shook the Tang empire to its core, people, among them men of words, fled for Jiangnan, where they nurtured their grief while listening to the endless rain, only to return to the north years later to pour out their memories on paper.

However, the defining moment for Jiangnan didn't come until 1127, toward the very end of China's Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127). That year, the Song emperor Zhao Ji and his son Zhao Huan, who by that point had succeeded his father, were captured by their arch-nemeses — the Jurchen armies from the north who rode into the Song capital of Bianjing (modern-day Kaifeng in Henan province) on horseback and ransacked the city.

What the Song court did in the face of imminent demise held up a mirror to history: They moved their capital across the Yangtze River, to Lin'an (modern-day Hangzhou), the southernmost end of the Grand Canal.

"The comparability is obvious, but there were also major differences. While the Jin rulers were pushed into Jiangnan by circumstance, their Song counterparts clearly felt its pull. Knowing too well the potential of Jiangnan, the latter helped to fully unlock it in the ensuing one-and-a-half centuries," says Zhao Feng, dean of Zhejiang University's School of Art and Archaeology.

Following the relocation of the Song court, China's silk and textile production center shifted from the country's north to Jiangnan, whose warm climate made it ideal for both the growing of mulberry trees and the wearing of flimsy silk clothing. The Cleveland show features a 12th-century silk gauze robe on loan from the Hangzhou-based China National Silk Museum — one of 80 articles of silk clothing unearthed from the tomb of an upper-class lady in the region.

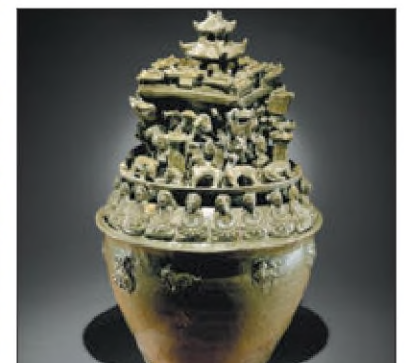
And silk, like the locally produced green porcelain known as celadon, became Jiangnan's biggest export to international and domestic markets. Immense wealth was generated where the ruling elite resided, giving rise to a dynamic luxury sector catering to their demands.

"Jade, mahogany wood, rhinoceros horn — none of them were indigenous to Jiangnan, yet they were all sent to the workshops there to be sweated over by the country's best craftsmen, before being sold on the local market," says Shi.

Brushes with greatness

When it came to taste, Jiangnan had the final word. This was even truer in the sphere of high culture. Landscape painting, the tradition of which started in China in around the 7th century, found its ultimate expression in the vistas of Jiangnan's water-rich scenery, which it in turn helped to eternalize.

See *Enduring*, page 15



A funerary urn, from around the third to fourth century, with green glaze and decoration.

CULTURE

HOME IS WHERE THE ART IS

The inclusiveness of Jiangnan created a uniquely aesthetic spirit that was carried wherever its natives went, **Zhao Xu** reports.

One exhibit stands out from the recent exhibition *China's Southern Paradise: Treasures from the Lower Yangzi Delta*, on view at the Cleveland Museum of Art. It is a map — a rubbing to be exact — of China's earliest surviving city plan to have been engraved on a stone slab. Within an area of 5 square meters, the rubbing, created in the first half of the 20th century, depicts modern-day Suzhou, featuring six water gates and more than 300 bridges, validating the city's entitlement to the name "Venice of the East".

For centuries up to the point when the map was made, Suzhou had acted as a commercial center of Jiangnan, the term denoting the southern part of the lower Yangtze River Delta, the region examined by the exhibition at the CMA.

And for people who have traced the region's history to antiquity, the concept of water gates is anything but new. Back in around 3000 BC, the ancient people of Liangzhu, who first realized the potential of the land, erected on it a grand city, before furnishing the inner city walls with eight water gates — two on each side — to facilitate transportation conducted over a dense network made up of both natural and man-made waterways.

Today, what remains of Liangzhu City still evokes the heroic efforts involved in turning this place into a home, including building stilt houses, digging aqueducts and cultivating acres of swampy land to grow domesticated rice, whose carbonized form can still be seen today.

"The water element provides an undercurrent to the storytelling of Jiangnan," says Wang Ningyuan, who has led the excavation at what's known today as the Archaeological Ruins of Liangzhu City, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Judging by what has been discovered from the waterlogged underground silts, the ancient Liangzhu people traveled on flat wooden rafts, measuring at about 0.5 meters wide and 2 meters long. They probably still did when *Yue Jue Shu* (the Book of Yue) was compiled somewhere between the 1st and 3rd centuries, in which it was rightfully noted that "the Yue people (from the south) tamed boats the same way the Hu people (from the north) tamed horses".

Here, Yue refers to the ancient state of Yue, whose prolonged war with its neighbor, the state of Wu, fought between the late 6th century BC and mid-5th century BC, is well-chronicled. For some time, the two occupied the Jiangnan area, which explains why the region is traditionally referred to as "the land of Wu and Yue". After Wu's total defeat in 473 BC, the rulers of Yue decided to move their power base to the former capital of Wu — the city of Suzhou.

According to Yang Haitao, a veteran researcher from the Nanjing Museum, despite commonly held beliefs, Jiangnan during the time of Wu and Yue had interacted frequently with the land to their immediate north, land long considered to be the sole birthplace of the Chinese civilization before historians were persuaded by overwhelming archaeological evidence to greatly modify their conclusions.

"Bronze swords and mirrors with intricate

patterns were produced in relatively large numbers in Jiangnan around this time, testifying to the spreading into the region of metallurgical know-how from the north, where it had been put to the creation of magnificent, bewilderingly complex ritual bronze ware," says Yang.

The exhibition features an ox-shaped bronze lamp on loan from the Nanjing Museum, located in the Jiangnan city of Nanjing, 200 kilometers from Suzhou. Opulently patterned and ingeniously designed — when in use, the smoke and soot resulting from burning fuel is channeled through a connecting pipe into the animal's water-filled body — the lamp was believed to have been locally made between the 1st and 3rd centuries.

"You can tell the story of Jiangnan through craftsmanship," says the exhibition's curator Clarissa von Spee, pointing to the fact that the region, during the entire Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), had served as the single largest base for China's handicraft industry, with the city of Yangzhou noted for its mirror production.

Outside influences

Apart from tradition, the several waves of immigration that had rushed over the land of Jiangnan over the course of history also contributed to the phenomenon, according to Von Spee. "Increased population density intensified competition, and competition breeds excellence," she says.

In the case of Jiangnan, that excellence has often taken the form of exquisiteness, achieved at the cost of time-consuming labor. To prove it, Von Spee includes in the exhibition a bamboo vest made up of an estimated 3,490 fine bamboo tubes, each measuring about 5 millimeters long.

"These were typically worn by officials, who were men, as undershirts to prevent the soiling of their court robes in the sweltering Jiangnan weather," says the curator. "Strung together by cotton threads, the tubes are hollow inside. Yet I cannot imagine a bamboo of that thinness having already developed a wooden texture."

"Therefore, there's only one possibility: Whoever responsible for making of this vest, sometime around the 17th century, must have hollowed out bamboo wood to create these tiny tubes," says Von Spee, noting that her decision to highlight the vest, which entered the museum's collection back in 1918, was also driven by the significance of bamboo to the literati culture of Jiangnan.

The plant, "growing so abundantly in the lower Yangtze Delta" to use her words, had long been admired for its sturdy flexibility, which made it a symbol of resilience in times of adversity.

At the exhibition, the image of the plant appears on a 12th-century gilded silver tea service set, together with those of birds, butterflies and blossoms — all favorite subjects of Jiangnan artists. According to historical documents, tea shops in Hangzhou, the Southern Song capital between 1127 and 1279, would sell ice-cold plum-blossom drinks in silver vessels during the summer.

The kind of beauty Jiangnan had embraced and embodied was a sophisticated one, informed by an elegant lifestyle

with her, although the region, after Southern Song, almost never served as the political center of a Chinese empire — except for the initial few decades of the Ming Dynasty.

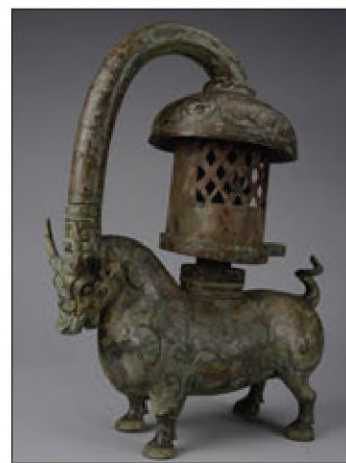
Densely cultivated fields routinely appear in Ming-period landscapes, testifying to an embrace of realism that also led the painters to capture the merchant ships "gathering like clouds" around the mouth of the Chang Gate, an intersection of three major streets and a canal in the modern-day city of Suzhou which, before the rise of Shanghai in the late 19th century, was Jiangnan's — and China's — biggest commercial center.

In 1689, the Chang Gate had a special visitor — Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), whose Manchu ancestors defeated the Ming troops and who, clearly recognizing Jiangnan as the jewel in the crown, traveled to the region six times during his 61-year-long reign.

This particular tour, second of the six, was re-created by court artists in a series of laboriously painted hand-rolls, including one on view at the Cleveland Museum. On loan



China's Southern Paradise: Treasures from the Lower Yangtze (Yangtze) Delta tells the story of Jiangnan. XU JIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Top: An ox-shaped bronze lamp from the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220).

Above: An undershirt made of carved bamboo tubes from the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911). PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

championed by society's educated members. Playing a major role in the formation of the aesthetic and literary traditions of Jiangnan, this group infused their endeavors with a sense of poetry.

One particular exhibit drenched in that tradition is a rubbing made of a piece of prose carved into a cliff face in the Jiangnan town of Zhenjiang, between the 5th and 6th centuries. The original calligraphy, on which the carving was based, is attributed by some scholars to Tao Hongjing (456-536), a calligrapher-alchemist who was also a devoted Taoist.

In the article of 168 characters, titled *Yi He Ming* (Eulogy to the Burial of a Crane), the author laments, "Did Heaven not allow me to roam the cosmos as I wish? Why take away my crane so quickly?"

Held in high esteem for its calligraphic and literary value, the carving, now housed in a local museum, has spawned many different versions of rubbing over time, including the one on display at the exhibition, made during

the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and currently within the collection of the Nanjing Museum.

"Some versions contain more words, some fewer — the cliff face was half immersed in water and the changing water levels may reveal or conceal part of the piece," says Yang.

In other words, water had a role to play in the artistic process, as it has often been in this part of China.

According to Yang, the prose, from a Taoist believer about an animal considered a Taoist symbol of immortality, could be rightfully viewed as a piece of religious art. Throughout a large part of the history of Jiangnan, Taoism and Buddhism coexisted in harmony.

"When the ancient Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi talked in his writings about 'the uncivilized land in the far south,' he was certainly thinking about the region beyond the Yangtze River," says Von Spee. "He saw the land as not being governed by Confucian rules and rituals, which, he believed, was something positive, since it allowed people to follow the rules of nature, the only rules that should be followed according to Taoist teachings."

Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu) lived between the 4th and 3rd centuries BC. In the ensuing two millennia, Confucianism did become the guiding ideology of Chinese society, and Jiangnan, its stronghold. But the influence of Taoism and Buddhism, having long seeped into the social fabric, never stopped permeating local life and culture.

As a result, Jiangnan was simultaneously at the center and on the margin. It was a cultural and commercial hub that also constituted a getaway in the common imagination. "Inclusiveness — that's what Jiangnan as a land for immigrants was all about," she says.

Gardens of the soul

In fact, that inclusiveness was written in the genes of Jiangnan. In 515 BC, He Lyu ascended to the throne of the state of Wu and immediately started the construction of a grand city on the land of modern-day Suzhou. It was a project that would announce his ambition and anticipate, in retrospect, all the splendor that would befall the city. And the king entrusted it to a man named Wu Zixu, who had come to his aid from the king's archrival, the state of Chu.

Another "foreigner" whose help He Lyu had enlisted was Sun Wu (Sunzi), originally from the state of Qi, who trained the king's army to be invincible, before summing up his military strategies in the ageless text *The Art of War*.

He Lyu died in 496 BC due to wounds he had sustained during a military campaign against the state of Yue, another of Wu's long-standing enemies. He was succeeded by his son, who initially triumphed over Yue, but was ultimately defeated in 473 BC. With the state of Wu ceasing to exist, the region's map was redrawn, once again.

The exhibition had a bronze mirror minted more than half a millennium later, during China's Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220),

that illustrates the Wu-Yue saga, featuring its major characters.

The need for survival demanded open-mindedness, which later served the Jiangnan society well, as it started to put greater emphasis on commerce and education. "From free markets to a sense of freedom intrinsic to literary pursuits, that spirit really provided Jiangnan with its lasting momentum," says Yang.

It is estimated that during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), more than 16 percent of all those who had passed the court examinations and were poised to enter bureaucracy were from the Jiangnan region. (Also during this time, Jiangnan became a national center for publishing and woodblock printing.)

One of them was the legendary artist-art theorist Dong Qichang (1555-1636) whose works and writings shaped literati aesthetics for the next 300 years. During his stay in Beijing, the Ming capital, Dong created a painted album for a friend who, toward the end of his office, was heading back home to Huating (modern-day Shanghai), also Dong's hometown.

One leaf from the album, exhibited at the exhibition on loan from the Shanghai Museum, is beguilingly titled *West Lake*. Instead of showing a view of Hangzhou's iconic scenic spot, this one depicts the rather more anonymous West Lake, situated in the hills to the west of Beijing. What was going through Dong's mind while working on this summer view is unquestionable.

"When a Jiangnan native was appointed to office elsewhere, they took with them the region's cultural traditions and memories," Yang says. Or, they may even try to re-create a miniature version of Jiangnan in their own backyard, whether they were in or outside of the region. It was especially true during the Ming and Qing dynasties, the heydays of garden building in Jiangnan.

"A Jiangnan garden, complete with man-made mountains and lakes, was a condensed, manicured version of the landscape and a world unto itself, where one could, presumably, be intimate with nature and be free," says Yang.

So the idea was: No matter where you were and how elevated you became socially, you need bamboo groves to recline in and fish ponds to gaze upon.

Let Sima Guang (1019-86), a Northern Song (960-1127) period statesman, tell you. The man, after retirement, built a garden for himself that would become so famous that half a millennium later it lent its name — Garden for Solitary Enjoyment — to a Ming-Dynasty painting, which in turn became the template for numerous Suzhou workshop copies.

"I channel streams to water flowers, or trim bamboo," Sima wrote. "I know of no joy between heaven and earth that could take its place."

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Enduring: Painting a picture of prosperity

From page 14

"Landscape became a primary subject matter, and the works collectively went through a transition from the stark, vertical compositions of the Northern Song to a horizontal format to which the watery environment readily lent itself," says Von Spee.

As towering mountains gave way to rambling waters, numerous hand-rolls — as opposed to hanging scrolls — were painted, making the viewing experience similar to the one a person would have ambling along a river bank. One of them, on view in Cleveland, was painted by Mi Youren, son of calligrapher Mi Fu, in 1130. It was a thank-you gift for a friend, who had provided the younger Mi with shelter after his arrival in Jiangnan following the relocation of the Song court.

Both father and son were celebrated by the Southern Song emperors, who not only championed, but also practiced, art — most notably painting and calligraphy — with a fervor not to be repeated in Chinese history. The cultural and economic strengths Jiangnan gained during this time were to stay

with her, although the region, after Southern Song, almost never served as the political center of a Chinese empire — except for the initial few decades of the Ming Dynasty.

Densely cultivated fields routinely appear in Ming-period landscapes, testifying to an embrace of realism that also led the painters to capture the merchant ships "gathering like clouds" around the mouth of the Chang Gate, an intersection of three major streets and a canal in the modern-day city of Suzhou which, before the rise of Shanghai in the late 19th century, was Jiangnan's — and China's — biggest commercial center.

In 1689, the Chang Gate had a special visitor — Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), whose Manchu ancestors defeated the Ming troops and who, clearly recognizing Jiangnan as the jewel in the crown, traveled to the region six times during his 61-year-long reign.

This particular tour, second of the six, was re-created by court artists in a series of laboriously painted hand-rolls, including one on view at the Cleveland Museum. On loan

from the University of Alberta Museums, the scroll, measuring 22.2 meters long, illustrates, in a central scene, Kangxi's arrival by boat at the gate.

The streets are decorated, lined with residents standing or kneeling as the imperial fleet approaches. There is no sign of the vehement opposition the emperor's ancestors once faced in Jiangnan, where they, by virtue of being the ethnic minority Manchu people, were viewed with great hostility and even greater suspicion.

This was before the Qing rulers — Kangxi and his equally long-reigning grandson Qianlong being two salient examples — proved themselves great patrons capable of "bringing Jiangnan to its heights", to use Von Spee's words.

By commissioning large quantities of goods — carved jade and porcelain, for instance — from Jiangnan artists and artisans, the Qing rulers promoted the region, which contributed one-third of the empire's tax revenue, while subtly imposing their own cultural standards.

Calling Jiangnan "an advantaged area

with abundant water resources", Von Spee also credits the decision-making of those responsible for Jiangnan's fate for the region's enduring prosperity.

"We all know that the Southern Song emperors had an appeasement policy — they would rather pay silk than go to war with their enemies in the north. Consequently, there's this general perception of them being weak," she says. "But if you think about it, Confucianism is much more about wise politics than forcing things through military power."

"They could have gone down in history as fierce warriors, but that could have been a totally different story for Jiangnan."

A few centuries earlier, toward the end of one of those periods of division in Chinese history, the ruler of Wuyue, a 10th-century kingdom that controlled the land of Jiangnan, chose to surrender peacefully to the founding emperor of the Song Dynasty, who united China, once again.

But that doesn't mean that Jiangnan was always spared.

"The (Jiangnan) city of Yangzhou was badly shaken upon its capture by the Manchu troops during the Ming-Qing transition. And the whole Jiangnan area was leveled during the Taiping Rebellion in the second

half of the 19th century," says Von Spee. "Each time, it bounced back."

Deciding that "every human being responds to beauty", the curator has served up plenty of it to fill six galleries, without forgetting to hint — ever subtly — at its price.

Visually overwhelming, a piece of green stoneware on loan from New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art is topped with a multistoried palatial structure held aloft by a flock of birds and surrounded by auspicious animals including an elephant and a deer. Accompanying this Taoist vision of the paradise are a row of Buddhas seated on the vessel's shoulder, signifying the merging of two beliefs in Jiangnan between the late 300s and early 400s, a time when the Chinese empire splintered into north and south, with the latter occupied by Eastern Jin.

The vessel, labeled funerary urn, is known in Chinese as *humping*, or "bottle for the souls".

"Some scholars believe that they are the souls of people who lost their lives on the flight to the south of the river, the area we now call Jiangnan," says Von Spee.

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CULTURE



Spring in Jiangnan by Wen Zhengming (1470-1559) portrays the land as a haven and utopia for the literati group, to which Wen himself belonged. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

PARADISE FOUND

Over the course of centuries, China's literati were drawn to Jiangnan, viewing it as a spiritual sanctuary, **Zhao Xu** reports.

It is the time for cherries and bamboo shoots in Jiangnan / the moist greens are refreshing / As the rain falls, peach blossoms arrive with the rising water / the crops sprout as spring hurries into the season."

The poem, from 16th-century painter-calligrapher Wen Peng, was composed to accompany the painting of his friend Qian Gu — both active members of a coterie of literati-artists formed around Wen's father.

Wen Zhengming (1470-1559), the old man, had once been recognized as a young genius, before spending four years in Beijing, capital of China during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), to pursue what seemed to be a promising career that he had long deserved. What happened at the end of that stint was that he packed up and went back home to the city of Suzhou, located in Jiangnan — the southern part of the Yangtze River Delta.

Over the ensuing 32 years, the senior Wen turned himself into something of a cult figure. On top of his talent was the public perception of him as a man of high moral standards who disavowed the seedy side of politics in favor of a secluded existence in the garden abode he built for himself.

Yet one thing was unignorable: Wen Zhengming's self-imposed exile, as those orbiting around him might wish to call it, was lived out not in sheer harshness, but amid the many enjoyable things that Jiangnan had to offer, including its spring.

"For Wen Zhengming and his followers, the spring of Jiangnan was common subject matter, a shared language which allowed them to interact and bond on paper," says Clarissa von Spee, curator of a recent exhibition at the Cleveland Museum of Art that examines, among other things, the crucial role this region played in China's cultural history.

The Wen Peng painting, on view at the exhibition, depicts the classic Jiangnan countryside: paddy fields running along stretches of water, lined by flowering plum trees and dotted with boats and bridges. It shares gallery space with a number of other similarly themed artworks, including one by the much-adulated Wen Zhengming.

"They clearly identified with the land," she says.

A solitary state

In fact, Jiangnan, whose geographical borders had been shifting according to Von Spee, was once a land of exile in the true sense of the word. "During the 3rd century BC, Qu Yuan, a member of the aristocracy from the state of Chu, was banished for disagreeing with what he saw as a corrupt court. In written sources, we find the words 'Jiangnan' for the region he was expelled to — one of the earliest appearances of the term," says Von Spee.

It was during China's Warring States Period (475-221 BC) which, as its name suggests, was marked by territorial wars fought among multiple states. One of them, the state of Qin, eventually crushed all others, and its king, Ying Zheng, subsequently became the first emperor of a unified China, known as Qinshihuang.

While the triumph of Ying Zheng made Jiangnan part of a centralized Chinese dynasty for the first time, the tragedy of Qu Yuan, who drowned himself in utter disillusionment in around 278 BC, infused his land of exile with a nobleness that appealed to generations of Chinese, both morally and aesthetically.

One thing must be noted: The term "Jiangnan" cited here should not be confused with the "Jiangnan" as we know it today. Here, "Jiangnan" refers to a solitary part of the state of Chu where the Xiangjiang River and its several tributaries converged, south of the middle — instead of lower — reaches of the Yangtze River. And it

had a more popular name, Xiaoxiang, which was "thought of as a place of reclusion and longing in view of its natural beauty", to quote Von Spee.

Such was the hold of Xiaoxiang on people's imagination that the Northern Song emperor Huizong (1082-1135), a highly accomplished painter-calligrapher, had once sent a court painter out to explore the region. That was before the founding of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) by a son of Huizong, who moved the empire's capital southward, from Central China to the fertile land of the lower Yangtze Delta. The legend of Xiaoxiang continued, but there seemed to be no need for the Southern Song emperors to look beyond their immediate surroundings.

From shimmering lakes and sinuous waterways, to low-lying marshy basins and lush hills, everything Xiaoxiang was supposed to have, Jiangnan had it — and still does today. The two ideas started to merge, especially for literati-artists like Wen Zhengming and his group, who considered Jiangnan their physical and spiritual homeland.

Elite retreat

Paintings based on the Jiangnan scenery and attributed instead to Xiaoxiang were created in such great numbers starting from the early 12th century that many of them eventually found their way to Japan and the Korean Peninsula, where the misty, water-saturated views were interpreted as giving visual expression to Chan (Zen) Buddhism's belief in the illusory nature of reality.

Buddhism first spread to Jiangnan following an exodus from northern China that took place in the early 4th century, upon the transition between the Western and Eastern Jin dynasties (265-420).

The political upheaval that continued largely unabated for the next three centuries bred discontent and disillusionment. A sense of escapism started to develop among members of the society's educated elite, who turned to nature for consolation. Tao Yuanming (365-427), a politician-turned-poet who lived his life in Jiangnan during the time of the Eastern Jin, was probably the most famous of them all.

The Cleveland Museum of Art exhibition features a portrait of Tao from the 17th-century painter Chen Hongshou, who was also active in Jiangnan, testifying to Tao's lasting cultural relevance.

Other hermits were getting their fair share of the attention, too. Also on display at the Cleveland Museum of Art, two rubbings, made of murals from an excavated 5th-century tomb in the Jiangnan region's city of Nanjing, depict a gathering of seven men known collectively as "the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Groves". Keeping in mind that the gathering actually took place between 240 and 249 in today's Jiaozuo city, Central China's Henan province, the discovery of the murals, two centuries down the line and more than 600 kilometers away, stands as another example of Jiangnan's



From top: Portrait of Tao Yuanming by Chen Hongshou (1598-1652). This group portrait commemorates a gathering of six Jiangnan literati, including Dong Qichang (1555-1636) and Xiang Shengmo, in 1636. A painted leaf of Beijing's West Lake by Dong.

adoption of classical motifs from the country's cultural history.

The bamboo groves, as Wen Peng's poem had clearly described, grew just as lush, if not more so, in Jiangnan, where they could have served, for those seeking mental refuge, as a reminder of the bygone sages.

This image of Jiangnan as the perfect retreat was further strengthened during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), founded by the Mongols, with Beijing as its capital. Beijing remained a political center for the next 600 years, serving as the capital for both Ming and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

The Mongol rule was met, not surprisingly, with initial resistance, especially from the literati group which was composed overwhelmingly of ethnic Han people. Harboring misgivings toward the new regime, some chose to live in half-retirement amid the idyll of Jiangnan.

One of them, Wang Meng, born into a distinguished Jiangnan family, withdrew, at one point, into the mountains north of Hangzhou, the one-time capital of Southern Song Dynasty, calling himself Woodcutter of the Yellow Crane Mountain.

At the Cleveland museum show, Wang the self-claimed woodcutter, represented by a landscape, reunites with his scholar-official uncle Zhao Yong, who envisioned himself as a fisherman lost in pastoral Jiangnan. Given the fact that Zhao Yong's father, the hugely influential painter-calligrapher-art theorist Zhao Mengfu, had occupied key positions within the Yuan government, the painting reads like a personal statement that's more willful than sincere.

In fact, the Yuan rulers, through encouraging maritime trade, had done a great service to Jiangnan, whose exportation of silk and porcelain kept increasing during this period.

An idealist idyll

Another Yuan-era painter-calligrapher who had added a cultural layer to the land is Ni Zan (1301-74). Son of a wealthy Jiangnan family, he was forced, in his 40s, to abandon his estate due to floods, droughts and subsequent tax levies on the region's landholders. Dispersing his possessions and living intermittently on a houseboat, Ni witnessed the final years of the Mongol rule while continuing to make art.

Ni wrote, in poems collectively titled *Three Odes to the Spring of Jiangnan*:

"The spring breeze is petulant, and the spring rain urgent / pouring down like tears, moistening the river / Falling flowers regret leaving branches / Zither strings are plucked, to mourn the disarray of red (petals) and green (leaves)..."

A hand-scroll by Wen Zhengming titled *Spring in Jiangnan*, on view at the Cleveland Museum of Art, is believed to have been directly inspired by Ni's poems.

Although it doesn't seem quite so, says Li Lan, an ancient painting specialist from the Shanghai Museum, which owns the piece.

"A sense of loss permeates Ni's words," she says. "Wen Zhengming, born in Jiangnan nearly a century after Ni's passing, dabbed his canvas with plenty of green and the occasional red for a lighthearted rendition of a breezy spring."

"Idealism — that's what it is," says Li. "And if you think about it, idealism is really the flip side of escapism."

Ask Tao Yuanming, Chinese history's much-celebrated recluse best remembered for his fable, *The Story of the Peach Blossom Spring*, written in 421, during a time of great political instability and national disunity.

The story is about a chance discovery by a fisherman of an ethereal utopia, where people lived in complete harmony with nature, unaware for centuries of the outside world. The fisherman, having haphazardly sailed into a river which carried him to the beginning of secret passage, emerged to "look into a landscape that must have looked like a Wen Zhengming painting," to use the words of Von Spee.

"On one hand, you have Tao Yuanming's peach blossom which is indicative of the springtime; on the other, you have these paintings of the Jiangnan spring which, complete with unspoiled nature and rice paddies, constitute an earthly paradise," she says.

The curator points to a Ming-era handscroll with a blue-green color scheme titled *The Peach Blossom Spring*, as well as a Qing Dynasty porcelain dish whose design illustrates the tale.

"Jiangnan is to China what Arcadia is to the West," she reflects. Derived from the ancient Greek province of the same name, the term Arcadia represents a vision of pastoralism and, as such, has long inspired Western art and literature.

According to Von Spee, the Peach Blossom theme saw its popularity soar during the Ming-Qing transition in the 17th century, another chaotic time that had persuaded more than a few to withdraw into the beauty and repose of Jiangnan. And when they did so, they had something — some people — in mind.

In 1652, a group portrait was painted to commemorate what some believe to be an imaginary gathering of six Jiangnan literati in 1636. While the figures were painted by a professional portraitist, the landscape was added on by Xiang Shengmo, who himself appears in the painting sitting at the back, to the right of the piece. The center of attention, not surprisingly, belongs to the red-clad Dong Qichang, the most prominent artist-cum-art theorist of the Ming Dynasty. Dong passed away in the autumn of that year.

In 1644, eight years before the creation of the group portrait, the last Ming emperor handed himself in Beijing, and later, the Manchu rulers of the Qing Dynasty claimed for themselves the throne in the Forbidden City.

Xiang, 47 at the time, painted a self-portrait, placing himself in the middle of a typical Jiangnan landscape rendered completely in red. And it's no coincidence that *shu*, the Chinese character for red, was the surname of the ruling family of Ming.

The man made no secret as to where his heart lay. Yet if he had lived long enough, he would have been able to see Dong, his mentor, being celebrated posthumously by successive generations of Qing emperors, who considered themselves inheritors of the country's immense and invaluable cultural heritage.

In the 1652 group portrait — on view at the Cleveland museum, both Xiang and Dong wear distinctive caps, the kind that was sported by literati of the Eastern Jin Dynasty.

"They were aware that they lived in the land of Tao Yuanming," says Von Spee.

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This 17th-century painting, *The Peach Blossom Spring*, is inspired by a fable of the same name, written by Chinese history's most famous recluse Tao Yuanming (365-427).