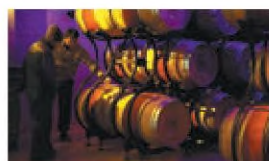


Innovation highlighted

Coastal city in Shandong making strides in upgrading its industries

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Creating bigger role for small enterprises

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Everlasting legacies

Excavations of cemetery in Shaanxi uncover stories of its elite occupants

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# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 MONDAY, JANUARY 15, 2024

## Marking a grim milestone



Clockwise from top: Pro-Palestinian demonstrators march in Washington, DC, on Saturday to demand a cease-fire in Gaza as the latest conflict between Israel and Hamas neared the 100-day mark. JOSE LUIS MAGANA / AP. A Palestinian child walks on Saturday past factories destroyed in the Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Strip in Deir al Balah. ADEL HANA / AP. Protesters in Tel Aviv, Israel, call on Saturday for the release of Israeli hostages taken by Hamas. ALEXANDRE MENECHINI / REUTERS See more, page 6

## US visit aims to widen scope of exchanges

Senior Party official demonstrates Beijing's practical, flexible approach, expert says

By ZHANG YUNBI zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

As the first senior Chinese official to visit the United States in the new year, Liu Jianchao, head of the International Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, has attracted huge attention at home and abroad for his whirlwind trip in the past week.

During the visit, which took him from New York and Washington, DC, on the East Coast to San Francisco on the West Coast, he reached out to people from all walks of life, including senior government officials, members of Congress, think tank members, business leaders and media representatives. He also met with United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

Zhao Minghao, a professor at Fudan University's Institute of International Studies, said the visit was clear evidence of the "practical approach and flexibility" of China and Liu's department in addressing US ties.

The Chinese delegation led by Liu addressed a number of topics and exchanged views on China's growth prospects, China-US ties and global governance with various parties during the visit from Jan 8 to Saturday.

As a sign of US interest in Liu and his mission, Michael Froman, president of the nonpartisan US think tank Council on Foreign Relations, noted before Liu's speech on Tuesday that, "in addition to the people in the room today ... we have over 400 CFR members participating virtually".

Observers noted that the senior

Party diplomat's visit is part of the increasing liaisons between Beijing and Washington in various fields and at various levels in the new year.

President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden exchanged congratulatory letters on Jan 1 to mark the 45th anniversary of the bilateral diplomatic ties. In addition, the 17th China-US Defense Policy Coordination Talks were held in Washington on Jan 8 and 9, and Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao held talks by phone with US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo on Thursday.

"The frequent official interactions following the presidents' San Francisco summit (in November) show the renewed joint efforts in securing the momentum for repairing the ties, and there are still a lot of issues remaining to be settled," said Wu Xinbo, dean of Fudan University's Institute of International Studies.

"The wide range and high level of US officials who talked to Liu also remind people about the great emphasis Washington placed on his visit," Wu added.

In the wake of what the White House described as a "candid and constructive" meeting with US Principal Deputy National Security Advisor Jon Finer on Wednesday, Liu met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Washington on Friday and discussed China-US ties.

"The two sides agreed to strengthen dialogue and cooperation" and further realize the San Francisco summit consensus, and Liu highlighted the need for both sides to "work toward the same goal and virtually".

See *Ties*, page 3

## Taiwan results won't impede national reunification

By ZHANG YI zhangyi@chinadaily.com.cn

The results of Taiwan's elections will not impede the inevitable trend of China's reunification, the Chinese mainland's Taiwan affairs authority said after the island held its leadership and legislature elections over the weekend.

Democratic Progressive Party candidate Lai Ching-te and his running mate, Hsiao Bi-khim, won the leadership election, receiving about 40 percent of the ballots cast.

In the election to the island's 113-seat legislature, the Chinese Kuomintang party won 52 seats, the DPP won 51 seats and the Taiwan People's Party got eight seats. The remaining two went to independent candidates.

Chen Binhua, a spokesman for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, said on Saturday that "the results reveal that the DPP cannot represent the mainstream public opinion on the island".

Underlining that Taiwan is China's Taiwan, Chen said the elections will not change the basic landscape and development trend of cross-strait relations, and will

not alter the shared aspiration of compatriots across the Taiwan Strait to forge closer ties.

"Our stance on resolving the Taiwan question and realizing national reunification remains consistent, and our determination is as firm as rock," Chen said. "We will adhere to the 1992 Consensus that embodies the one-China principle and firmly oppose the separatist activities aimed at 'Taiwan independence' as well as foreign interference."

The mainland will work with relevant political parties, groups and people from various sectors in Taiwan to boost cross-strait exchanges and cooperation, enhance cross-strait integrated development, jointly promote Chinese culture, and advance the peaceful development of cross-strait relations as well as the cause of national reunification, Chen added.

Commenting on the election results, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said on Saturday that the Taiwan question is China's internal affair, and regardless of changes that take place in Taiwan, the basic fact that there is only one China of which Taiwan is a part will not change.

The Chinese government's position of upholding the one-China principle and opposing "Taiwan independence" separatism, "two

Chinas" and "one China, one Taiwan" will not change, the spokesperson said, adding that the international community's prevailing consensus on upholding the one-China principle and long-standing and overwhelming adherence to this principle won't change either.

Underlining that the one-China principle is "the solid anchor for peace and stability" in the Taiwan Strait, the spokesperson said, "We believe that the international community will continue to adhere to the one-China principle, and understand and support the Chinese people's just cause of opposing 'Taiwan independence' separatist activities and striving to achieve national reunification."

On Sunday, the Foreign Ministry firmly opposed the US State Department's statement on the Taiwan elections after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken extended his congratulations to Lai.

A spokesperson for the ministry said the statement goes against the United States' own political commitment to maintaining only cultural, commercial and other unofficial relations with the Taiwan region.

The Taiwan question is at the very core of China's core interests and the first red line that should

not be crossed in China-US relations, the spokesperson said, urging the US to earnestly abide by the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiqués.

The spokesperson further urged the US to act seriously in accordance with the commitments reaffirmed multiple times by its leaders to not supporting "Taiwan independence", "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan", and not seeking to use the Taiwan question as a tool to contain China.

Chinese embassies issued statements expressing dissatisfaction with countries, including the United Kingdom and Japan, for congratulating Lai and his political party, and urged them to honor the commitments made on the Taiwan question.

A spokesperson for the Chinese embassy in London urged the UK to adhere to its recognition of Taiwan as a province in China, and handle the Taiwan question with caution in accordance with the one-China principle.

The Chinese embassy in Tokyo urged the Japanese government to deeply reflect on its history of invading Taiwan, and not to disrupt the peace in the Taiwan region.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

## More steps to cooperate can stabilize Sino-US relations

This year marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States. Over the years, the two countries have experienced various forms of engagement, cooperation and competition, leading to evolving mutual understanding.

However, what remains unchanged is the clear recognition of the importance of the bilateral relations by both countries and the mainstream public opinion in both countries hoping for sound and peaceful bilateral ties.

China's policy toward the US has maintained a high level of stability. The goal is to build a new type of major country relationship based on mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation. This aims to create a favorable external environment for the great rejuvenation

WORLD WATCH By Zhang Wenzong

of the Chinese nation while working together to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

However, in recent years, the US government has viewed a rising China as a "threat" and primary competitor, and has implemented comprehensive containment and suppression measures against it.

Under the impact of a series of major events and issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, a new round of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and intense competition between China

See *Stability*, page 3

## NATION'S MOVIE MARKET SURGES AHEAD AFTER PANDEMIC

Robust recovery sees audiences return to theaters in numbers

By XU FAN xufan@chinadaily.com.cn

With the New Year holiday witnessing one of the highest-grossing movie box-office seasons to date, the Year of the Rabbit entered its last lunar month on a promising note, maintaining the robust



recovery witnessed in 2023. Some 1.53 billion yuan (\$214 million) was earned from more than 36.6 million theater visits during the Dec 30 to Jan 1 holiday

period, with domestic movies contributing 1.41 billion yuan, or 92 percent of overall ticket revenue, showed data from the China Film Administration, the country's top industry regulator.

Shining for One Thing, a movie remake of the popular eponymous 2022 television series, dominated the holiday box-office

charts, enticing millions of young couples to spend a romantic and memorable New Year's Eve at the cinema.

A total of 1,314 theaters held special screenings as the movie premiered, recreating a classic scene with sprays of artificial snow.

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INSIDE Finding the same wavelength in sector of technology Global Views, page 13

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# PAGE TWO



Visitors to a cinema in Huai'an, Jiangsu province, line up to buy tickets on New Year's Eve. DAI XIMING / FOR CHINA DAILY

### From page 1

The comedy *Johnny Keep Walking!*, which resonates among numerous white-collar workers with its satirical depiction of office problems, secured second place at the national box office during the New Year holiday. It was followed in third position by Hong Kong crime film *The Goldfinger*, which draws inspiration from a notorious corruption case in the 1980s.

Yin Hong, vice-chairman of the China Film Association, said that after enduring the challenges posed by the three-year-long COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese film industry has witnessed a robust and stable recovery with a series of high-quality blockbusters.

This demonstrates the vibrancy of the domestic market as well as the perseverance and diligence of filmmakers, Yin added.

Last year ended on a promising note, with a total box office gross of 54.91 billion yuan, a year-on-year rise of 83.4 percent. Even though this was short of the 64.3 billion yuan taken in 2019, the year before the pandemic resulted in nationwide theater closures for six months, many industry insiders and analysts said the film industry in China is making a healthy recovery.

In addition to urban residents, villagers in remote areas where cinemas have yet to be built now have access to cinematic entertainment. The China Film Administration said 262 rural digital cinema chains, which primarily screen movies outdoors, organized 42,000 teams to provide 8.24 million free screenings to rural residents last year.

Yin said, "From Spring Festival to the summer, and from the National Day vacation to the recent New Year holiday, Chinese cinemas have witnessed a significant return of theatergoers during these peak box office seasons, indicating the increasing appeal of domestic films."

### Blockbusters prevail

Signaling a changing trend in recent years, Chinese audiences now prefer local stories, evidenced by the fact that all 10 of the highest-grossing blockbusters last year were produced by domestic companies.

Last year's box office champion, Zhang Yimou's historic suspense film *Full River Red*, and runner-up, director Guo Fan's sci-fi epic *The Wandering Earth II*, were released during the Spring Festival holiday, the nation's most competitive box office season.

The success of *Full River Red*, the

fictional account of a group of grassroots daredevils seeking revenge for Yue Fei, a patriotic general framed and executed during the Song Dynasty (960-1279), is largely attributed to its skillfully written script and the touching performances of a stellar cast, which includes Shen Teng, Yi Yangqianxi and Lei Jiayin.

The movie earned 4.54 billion yuan to top the charts last year in China, and was also the eighth highest-grossing film worldwide.

Widely regarded as a game-changing franchise in reviving homegrown sci-fi works, *The Wandering Earth* — the first installment of which was released in 2019 — returned to Chinese screens with a second edition, earning 4.03 billion yuan to take second position in last year's box office rankings.

Released in a total of 39 countries and regions, the movie was one of the most influential Chinese blockbusters screened abroad last year.

In addition to the main plot of the first installment, which tells of humans embarking on a 2,500-year-long expedition to escape the dying sun, *The Wandering Earth II* further contemplates digital life in exploring how human consciousness can be preserved on the internet to achieve "immortality" and the continuity of civilization.

Film critic Yuan Yun'er, who is based in Beijing, said these concepts are intertwined with cutting-edge Chinese scientific advances such as aerospace and artificial intelligence, which have sparked greater interest among sci-fi enthusiasts.

"China's progress in scientific research and development provides fertile ground for inspiration in sci-fi works, which are also among the most promising genres to represent Chinese stories abroad and attract overseas audiences," she added.

Rao Shuguang, president of the China Film Critics Association, said movies adapted from real-life cases or which focus on highly relevant social issues have also emerged as a prominent category, captivating a large audience.

Such popular films include *No More Bets*, which was inspired by numerous cyberfraud cases in several Southeast Asian countries; *Never Say Never*, based on the story of the founder of a fighting club who helps children from poverty-stricken families in Sichuan province; and *Beyond the Clouds*, which tells the true story of Zhang Guimei, a teacher who dedicated her life to rural girls' education in Yunnan province.

## Cinema: Foreign filmmakers revisit China



The Chinese thriller *Wolf Hiding* attracts moviegoers to a cinema in Shanghai last month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

China's progress in scientific research and development provides fertile ground for inspiration in sci-fi works, which are also among the most promising genres to represent Chinese stories abroad and attract overseas audiences."

Yuan Yun'er, a film critic in Beijing

In addition, *Endless Journey*, a crime film adapted from a literary work inspired by a true story, stood out as the top box office grosser in China last month. The movie was one of 69 screened in December, a significant rise from the 19 shown during that month in 2022.

The film portrays an unlikely

hero, a former police officer who persists over 12 years in hunting down the person responsible for the murder and sexual assault of a 14-year-old girl.

Rao said, "The success of movies such as *Endless Journey*, which are based on real-life stories, reflects the changing tastes of Chinese



Cinemagoers in Shanghai wear fancy dress on New Year's Eve. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

audiences. Today's theatergoers now prefer stories that are related to modern China, or which touch upon familiar subjects."

Traditional culture, nurtured by China's long history, has also served to inspire filmmakers.

Examples of this range from *Chang An*, a successful animated movie that retells the stories of respected poets during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), to *Creation of the Gods I: Kingdom of Storms*, a fantasy epic inspired by the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) novel *Fengshen Yanyi* (*Investiture of the Gods*).

### Foreign exchanges

With China lifting pandemic restrictions early in January last year, global cinematic exchanges and imports of foreign films also witnessed a recovery.

A total of 84 imported films, including 28 Hollywood movies, were released in the country last year, data from the China Film Distribution and Screening Association show.

Apart from domestic blockbusters such as *The Wandering Earth II* and *Hidden Blade* screening in a number of overseas markets, including North America, Chinese films were shown in a total of 19 countries and regions, including Egypt, Chile, Colombia, South Africa and Nigeria.

Foreign blockbusters, although not as commercially successful as those made several years ago, have still made their mark in the Chinese market.

*Fast X*, the 10th installment of the street racing-themed *Fast and Furious* franchise, earned 984 million yuan to become the highest-grossing overseas film in China last year. The Hollywood production, which stars United States actor Vin Diesel, was also the 12th highest-grossing film on the country's yearly box office charts.

The popularity of Japanese animated films continued to grow in China. Renowned director Makoto Shinkai's coming-of-age adventure movie *Suzume* and *The First Slam Dunk*, the first feature-length film based on the sports series *Slam Dunk*, which was hugely popular in the mid-1990s, took second and fourth places, respectively, on the foreign film box office charts in China last year.

*The First Slam Dunk*, which centers on a high school basketball team taking part in a national competition, evokes collective memories among Chinese moviegoers born in the 1980s and early 1990s, despite the main audience for the Chinese film market being in their 20s.

Zhi Feina, a professor at the Chinese National Academy of Arts,

said Chinese audiences are no longer merely satisfied with visually stunning foreign blockbusters, especially if they feature stereotyped plotlines and characters. However, acclaimed Hollywood films such as *Oppenheimer* and *Barbie* continue to earn a market share by attracting local audiences who appreciate foreign titles, she added.

The rapidly recovering market in China has also attracted foreign filmmakers and top stars to return to the country to promote their projects after the pandemic, Zhi added.

In March, Shinkai — considered by many film enthusiasts to be the successor to iconic animator Miyazaki Hayao — visited Beijing to publicize *Suzume*, a film about a 17-year-old schoolgirl's adventure with a man who possesses superpowers to stop natural disasters.

British-American director Christopher Nolan traveled to Shanghai and Beijing in August to promote *Oppenheimer*, the biopic about the titular character, who was hailed as "the father of the atomic bomb".

In December, French director Luc Besson traveled to four cities, including Hangzhou, Zhejiang province and Suzhou, Jiangsu province, to promote his revenge fantasy film *Dogman*.

At about the same time, Hollywood director James Wan and actor Jason Momoa embarked on a tour to Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu and Guangzhou, Guangdong province, to publicize *Aquaman and Lost Kingdom*. The latter movie is the long-anticipated sequel to *Aquaman*, the highest-grossing film in China based on a DC Comics superhero.

Zhi said that China, with an annual box office earnings rise of 83 percent last year compared to 2022, has played a pivotal role in boosting the film industry's global recovery. The comparable earnings rises in North America and Japan were 20.71 percent and 7 percent, respectively.

Last year, the number of visitors to urban cinemas across China reached 1.3 billion, the second-highest figure in the world, after India. However, this number is still lower than the 1.71 billion recorded in China in 2019, indicating that the nation still faces challenges in achieving a full recovery to pre-pandemic levels this year, Zhi added.

"The achievements made in 2023 will help attract more funding to the film industry, assist more filmmakers to create quality works, draw more audiences to theaters, and further prosper the Chinese film industry this year," she added.



Fans watch the Japanese animated film *The First Slam Dunk* at a cinema in Shanghai in April. The movie is based on a sports series hugely popular in the mid-1990s. CHEN YUYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## Up, up and away

Balloons of various shapes, sizes and colors rise on Saturday at Laguna Caren Park in Santiago, Chile, during the International Hot Air Balloon Festival. ESTEBAN FELIX / AP



## Nation's voice highly anticipated at forum

Premier Li to deliver special address at the opening of Davos meeting

By CAO DESHENG  
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Against the backdrop of a protracted period of low growth, international anticipation is high about China's proposals for reviving the economy as Premier Li Qiang joins the global elite for the 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum, which will be held from Monday to Friday in Davos, Switzerland.

Li arrived in the Swiss city of Zurich on Sunday. During his first overseas trip of the year that runs until Wednesday, Li will make official visits to Switzerland and Ireland.

He is expected to deliver a special address on Tuesday at the opening of the Davos meeting, which will be attended by more than 2,800 delegates from businesses, governments, international organizations and civil society from around the world, including more than 60 heads of state and government, to discuss the world's most pressing issues and set priorities for the year ahead.

The meeting comes amid increasing division and uncertainty

that continue to destabilize the world. Multiple international organizations, including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations, predict that the global economy will slow down further in 2024.

A tight financial environment and weak consumer demand will slow down economic growth. Furthermore, geopolitical tensions will not only affect involved countries but also exacerbate the fragmentation of the global economy, observers said.

"There are high expectations from Premier Li's attendance at the annual meeting, to hear his outlook on China's economy," said Chen Liming, chair of the Greater China of the World Economic Forum, in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

Since the Chinese delegation participated in the Davos Symposium for the first time in 1979, China has never been absent from the annual event, Chen said. China's GDP, which accounted for only about 2 percent of the global total in 1979, now accounts for nearly 20 percent of the global total.

"Clearly, China plays a significant role when it comes to dealing with issues related to geopolitics, economy, innovation or climate change. In every aspect, China has an indispensable role to play," Chen said. "In this sense, we eagerly hope that the Chinese delegation will send messages to the world about China's ongoing and future development priorities."

President Xi Jinping voiced his confidence in the nation's high-quality development in his New Year message to ring in 2024, saying that the year 2023 saw China's economy weather the storm and become "more resilient and dynamic than before."

In 2024, the fundamental outlook of the Chinese economy, which has long been positive, remains unchanged, according to Chen. As the world's second-largest economy, China will continue to contribute around one-third of global economic growth and remain one of the most critical engines for global economic recovery, he said.

"Although the Chinese economy faces certain difficulties and challenges, the implementation of a

series of policies, including those promoting the development of the private sector, encouraging foreign investment and implementing financial policies, is eagerly anticipated for their potential positive effect on the country's growth."

This year's Davos meeting is themed "Rebuilding Trust". Chen said the theme is of crucial importance in today's world, because, in the past few years, the world has been divided and has faced conflicts.

"In a fractured world, how can trust be rebuilt? Trust is the foundation of cooperation. Without trust, it is difficult to talk about cooperation. Without cooperation, it is difficult to address the various challenges we face globally, whether it is economic recovery, climate change, energy transformation, or governance over high-tech development," he said.

While acknowledging globalization is facing challenges at the moment, Chen said that it is highly unlikely that comprehensive and long-term de-globalization will occur.

"We hear many new terms such as de-globalization, decoupling and de-risking. However, I personally believe that a comprehensive and long-term decoupling or de-globalization would make the world less efficient," he said.

"It is unnecessary to make a fuss about short-term or partial decoupling in certain areas. In the long run, the world still requires better cooperation and coordination to address both long-term and short-term challenges we face."

## Asset managers rosy on China's A-share market

By ZHOU LANXU  
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Global investment banks and asset managers have expressed cautious optimism that China's A-share market is poised for a rebound this year, after underperforming major global peers in 2023.

Attractive valuations, improving corporate earnings amid stepped-up policy support and the potential for subdued investor sentiment to recover have all suggested room for a rally, they said.

Following the benchmark CSI 300 Index declining for three consecutive years and losing 11.38 percent in 2023, Goldman Sachs now projects a 19 percent price return for the index this year, staying overweight on A shares and positive on sectors like retail, media, entertainment and tech hardware.

The United States investment bank said in a report that the anticipated gains hinge on projections that Chinese listed companies could see profit growth of approximately 8 to 10 percent in 2024, a critical factor for valuations to reach a bottom.

Recent market corrections have sent the price-to-earnings ratio of the CSI 300 Index, a key gauge of valuation, to the lowest level since the end of 2018 at 10.5, compared with the 10-year average of 12.51, according to market tracker Wind Info.

"We think the worst is over and we have started to turn optimistic," said Meng Lei, China equity strategist at UBS Securities, adding that the A-share market might have been mispriced amid investor pessimism.

Corporate earnings seem to have bottomed out and picked up since the third quarter of 2023, Meng said. This trend is likely to be sustained this year as nominal GDP growth speeds up amid recovering inflation and potential policy support, including further cuts in the reserve requirement ratio and interest rates, an expanded fiscal deficit and more property sector easing.

Policy makers have continuously signaled their commitment to stabilizing economic growth and bolstering investor confidence. The China Securities Regulatory Commission vowed on Friday to rationally handle new stock issuance to foster balanced growth between primary and secondary stock markets, after the

**19%**

Increase of CSI 300 Index, a key gauge of valuation, projected by Goldman Sachs for 2024

People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, injected 350 billion yuan (\$48.8 billion) into affordable housing and other real estate projects to stimulate investment.

Chen Dong, chief Asia strategist and head of Asia research at Pictet Wealth Management, said the Swiss company remains tactically positive on Chinese equities over the short to medium term as China's economic recovery, although bumpy, could lead to an improvement in corporate earnings and investor sentiment in 2024.

China is set to unveil its 2023 GDP growth on Wednesday, which is widely expected to come in at slightly above 5 percent in real terms. For 2024, Chen said stimulus measures should help the economy gain momentum and achieve real GDP growth of 4.7 percent.

Despite the more optimistic forecasts, as of Friday, foreign capital still registered a net outflow of 7.96 billion yuan from A shares since the beginning of the year, via northbound trading of the stock connect programs between the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong exchanges.

With the outflow indicating that investors are still adopting a wait-and-see approach amid lingering uncertainties, the A-share market declined for two weeks in a row since the new year, with the CSI 300 Index ending Friday's trading at 3,284.17 points, down 1.35 percent from a week earlier.

"2024 would be a year abundant with both opportunities and challenges for Chinese equities," said Desmond Kuang, chief investment officer for China at HSBC Global Private Banking and Wealth.

Adopting a neutral stance on A shares, Kuang said factors including global election activities, uncertainties surrounding China's exports and high savings propensity among Chinese households could limit market performance, though policy support and signs of improving China-US relations could offer a cushion.

Shi Jing in Shanghai  
contributed to this story.

## Stability: New challenges seen in managing differences, competition

From page 1

and the US, the relations between the major powers have become seriously imbalanced, the global economy has suffered severe damage, and international politics have witnessed a regression.

If the relationship between China and the US continues to deteriorate and the two countries even enter a new Cold War or military conflict, it could become the final straw that overwhelms the development of globalization, and the international order would undergo the greatest chaos since the end of the Cold War.

Fortunately, both China and the US have recognized the enormous cost of comprehensive decoupling and military conflict, and there is no need to go down that path. Sitting down to talk, clarifying each other's bottom line, and making

concessions are responsible actions that benefit both sides and the world. The leaders of China and the US reaffirmed their commitments on major issues, including the Taiwan question, in San Francisco in November, and they have restored institutionalized dialogues. They also have vowed to cooperate in areas such as narcotics control and addressing climate change, successfully stabilizing bilateral relations.

However, the stabilization remains fragile. The erroneous US perception of China and its comprehensive competition strategy has not changed, and China's opposition to US containment measures to suppress its economy will not waver. In 2024, China-US relations will be influenced by a series of factors, which will bring new challenges to managing their differences and competition.

The Taiwan question has always been the most important and sensitive area of Sino-US relations. If the US continues to interfere in China's internal affairs and keeps going down the wrong path of "containing China with Taiwan", China will resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity and firmly maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

The US will hold a presidential election this year, and China will firmly oppose the actions of some US politicians who, driven by electoral needs, hype up the "China threat" and push for new measures to contain China.

Despite growing calls in the US for cease-fire negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, supporting Ukraine to continue fighting remains the basic policy of the US and Western countries. China continues to promote a cease-fire and

peace negotiations, and it also opposes US attempts to undermine China-Europe relations by exploiting the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as well as US efforts to provoke bloc politics and confrontations between camps.

Meanwhile, the two-state solution is the only way to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Only by establishing an independent Palestinian state can genuine peace be achieved in the Middle East. US support for Israel in creating a large-scale humanitarian disaster regardless of the consequences has been met with dissatisfaction and opposition from China and the majority of countries worldwide.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the US continues to sow discord between China and its neighboring countries, building a military encirclement aimed at containing China. The forward military deployment

carried out by the US to win over its allies, the joint military exercises and patrols around China, and close-in reconnaissance have worsened China's security environment, and some have even violated China's sovereignty. The bilateral relationship could take a sharp turn for the worse in the event of a deadly collision between Chinese and US ships or aircraft.

The world is entering a new period of turbulence and transformation, and there may be an increasing number of factors that have an impact on and disrupt the relationship between China and the US. Recognizing the significance of maintaining stability in bilateral relations, both sides are currently investing a significant amount of effort in enhancing communication, managing differences and avoiding conflicts.

How China and the US, the

world's two largest economies and permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, coexist in the future is of great significance. China and the US should strengthen unity and cooperation, working together to address global challenges and promote global security and prosperity. Instead of adopting a zero-sum mentality and fueling camp confrontation, the US should work together with China to strive to prevent the world from descending into turmoil and division.

Competition between major powers cannot solve the problems faced by China, the US and the world. The planet is big enough for both China and the US to prosper, and the success of each country represents an opportunity for the other.

The author is deputy director and a researcher at the American Studies Institute of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Ties: More collaboration at subnational level sought

From page 1

pushed for stable, sound and sustained growth of China-US ties", according to a statement from Liu's department.

Beijing and Washington have a history of political party exchanges. Wang Jiarui, head of the CPC Central Committee International Department from 2003 to 2015, traveled to the US several times during his tenure, hosted high-level dialogues between Chinese and US political parties, and met with people from all walks of life.

Liu, who assumed his current post in 2022, also attended the 13th China-US political parties dialogue via virtual format last year, but his trip to the US this year was not limited

to political party exchanges. He spoke to local officials, scholars and ordinary people on topics ranging from China's path to modernization and the Taiwan question to giant pandas.

During his talks with San Francisco Mayor London Breed on Saturday, Liu voiced hopes for greater people-to-people exchanges and collaboration at the subnational level.

While addressing audiences in US communities, Liu told stories about the Party and the nation in a plain way, in an effort to tackle any lack of understanding, minimize doubts and offset negative narratives about China and the Party, observers said.

Zhao, the Fudan University professor, said that during the trip, "Liu's speeches given in fluent

English outlined Beijing's perceptions on the world order and the country's quality growth, and he responded efficiently to claims such as 'China challenges the world order', which will help iron out Washington's miscalculations and misjudgment on China's strategic intentions."

Experts noted that with the US presidential election coming up later this year, campaign rhetoric aimed at China and the Taiwan question is among the factors that may have a great impact on the hard-won improvement of China-US relations. They said that Washington will need to take more steps toward the same goal with Beijing to keep the ties afloat.

"Great challenges may emerge as

the Republicans and Democrats, as is routine, may play the 'China card' on the campaign trail," said Su Xiaohui, deputy director of the Department of American Studies at the China Institute of International Studies.

She noted that during Liu's trip, he stated clearly China's determination to champion national interests and warned the US about the risks of attempts to push China's bottom line.

"Having this said is in some sense also a necessary way to reduce risks," she said.

"Recently, the two sides have been resuming, establishing or putting into play dialogue mechanisms in various fields and at various levels," Su said. "This means that the ties may hopefully enjoy more stability."



Liu Jianchao, head of the International Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, meets with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Washington, DC, on Friday. Liu visited the United States from Jan 8 through Saturday. LIU JIE / XINHUA

## CHINA

## Bridesmaids-for-hire business booms

The practice of hiring bridesmaids for weddings is becoming increasingly popular, as more people recognize it offers a solution to the dilemma of finding suitable attendants for brides away from home while eliminating the awkwardness of social indebtedness.

Professional bridesmaids offer their services on various online platforms, including social media apps. The bridesmaids advertise their reliability, attentiveness and the high level of coordination they can offer on the wedding day.

One advertisement read: "I am available to be hired as a bridesmaid. I have average looks so I won't steal the spotlight from the bride. I promise I won't embarrass her on the wedding day and I can be the bride's best friend, secretary, caretaker, assistant, bodyguard..."

The bridesmaids are advertised as being experienced in assisting with various wedding tasks and ensuring a smooth wedding day.

They need to be able to establish an assumed relationship with the bride, such as former colleague or high school or university friend. During the wedding, they refrain from engaging in extensive conversations and focus solely on executing their assigned tasks.

Typically, the hired bridesmaids arrive a day early to help with venue decoration. On the wedding day, their responsibilities include properly managing the bride's emotions, safeguarding various items, organizing wedding games, assisting photographers with makeup touch-ups for the bride and accompanying the bride throughout the event.

Xie Yuke, 23, became a professional bridesmaid after graduating from university in Chengdu, Sichuan province.

Xie built her bridesmaid team by attracting people through social media platforms and taking recommendations from friends and relatives. It now has about 100,000 people on its books, with a ratio of about 100 bridesmaids to every groomsmen, and they have played roles in thousands of weddings across China.

The market for hiring bridesmaids is substantial. Statistics from gofish.com, a secondhand goods platform, said the demand for hired bridesmaids during the May Day holiday in 2021 was more than 20 times higher than during the corresponding period two years earlier. The demand for hired groomsmen was 25 percent of that for hired bridesmaids.

A large wedding usually requires six bridesmaids and six groomsmen, while smaller weddings may have one to three of each. The fees for hiring bridesmaids vary, with top-tier bridesmaids charging 300

Professional wedding attendants are gaining in popularity as more women pursue careers away from their hometowns. **Li Hongyang** reports.



Newlyweds celebrate their wedding with bridesmaids and groomsmen in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, on June 26, 2022. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

yuan (\$42) to 1,000 yuan a wedding.

Hao Rongli, a 19-year-old nursing intern from a college in Qingdao, Shandong province, has ventured into the bridesmaid-for-hire business as a part-time job.

She has more than 300 bridesmaids available for hire and has bookings for months ahead.

As she tried to grab a bigger share of the booming market, she expanded her business network by visiting wedding planning companies in Qingdao to seek their cooperation.

Hao said there are several reasons the market will continue to flourish. One is that when a bride relocates to a different city to pursue her career and the wedding ceremony is held in the bridegroom's hometown, she may not have a close circle of friends there. Hiring professional bridesmaids allows her to avoid having to invite distant relatives or acquaintances.

"By paying for the service, the bride avoids any potential discomfort in asking people she isn't close to for assistance or feeling socially indebted to friends or family who come from a long way away," Hao said.

She added that a desire to avoid potential conflicts with the bride's zodiac sign was another reason couples opted to hire bridesmaids.

"According to traditional beliefs, it could potentially bring bad luck



Left: Xie Yuke, who works as a professional bridesmaid, helps decorate a wedding room in Ningbo on June 26, 2022. Right: Hao Rongli makes preparations for a wedding. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

to the marriage if any bridesmaid has a zodiac sign that clashes with that of the bride," she said. "By hiring bridesmaids, couples can choose those with appropriately matched zodiac signs."

One memorable case Hao experienced in September involved a couple who required bridesmaids with certain zodiac signs to perform spe-



cific responsibilities during the wedding, in accordance with custom.

The bridesmaids had to carry special items, including an ax, a pair of shoes and chopsticks, and a bowl of noodles, which symbolized the bride's good luck and starting a new life. The hired bridesmaids followed the customs, ensuring the

smooth execution of the wedding rituals, she said.

Ax in Chinese is pronounced *fu*, resembling the pronunciation of another character meaning good luck.

The wedding process and related rules can sometimes be complex enough to make bridesmaids — close friends or not — tired and irritated. Some have even posted their complaints about unpleasant experiences on social media platforms.

One bridesmaid recently shared her dissatisfaction with her role at a wedding, where she felt unappreciated and overworked. The woman, who had taken two days off from work to fulfill her duties, arrived at the wedding venue at 10 pm. Upon her arrival, she was immediately tasked with decorating the room, without being offered any assistance or even a glass of water. After working tirelessly for a couple of days, she began to question the purpose of her role. She expressed her frustration, saying that being a bridesmaid required quick thinking and flexibility. "But am I an employee? Do not take it for granted," she said.

Another woman advised against agreeing to be a bridesmaid for a co-worker one is not close to. In her particular case, she had only agreed to take on the role because the bride was desperately in need of

help due to her advanced age. However, her efforts went unrewarded, as she did not receive a bridesmaid gift or red packet containing lucky money. The meals provided during the wedding were takeout for lunch and leftovers for dinner.

Another bridesmaid emphasized that such roles should only be accepted if they assisted close friends, the only ones who could make the experience worthwhile. She said that as long as the bride is happy and joyful on her wedding day, other inconveniences can be overlooked, but those with average relationships would find it difficult to refrain from dwelling on trivial matters.

Such comments highlight the need for clearer expectations and more appreciation for bridesmaids, who often dedicate a considerable amount of time and energy to ensuring a successful wedding.

Professional bridesmaids can make the situation clearer because, after getting paid, they will do as etiquette requires. Despite being strangers, they can also offer emotional support, much like a friend would.

Zhang Yuxin, a professional bridesmaid from Xie's company, shared her experience of providing emotional support to a bride in Mianyang, Sichuan, in September who had second thoughts about getting married. Zhang and another bridesmaid consoled the bride, helping her communicate her concerns to her fiancé. The situation was resolved after he explained to them that he had been busy at work and asked for forgiveness and understanding.

However, Qu Huan, who works as a hired bridesmaid in Dalian, Liaoning province, said she preferred having close friends or family members as bridesmaids.

She said that hiring strangers for such a significant role may result in a wedding lacking the sincerity and authenticity that close relationships bring.

"It is fine if a bride can find a good bridesmaid who will indeed help share worries and solve difficulties," Qu said. "However, if I just randomly choose someone from the vast sea of people without knowing them well, I will still have some doubts: Will this person be reliable and do a good job?"

"What if I encounter someone like those young girls who have just started out in the bridesmaid industry. They might cause trouble for me. If I were to use someone, I would definitely consider my friends or people I know. Only if there are no suitable candidates would I hire one."

Li Menghan contributed to this story.

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## Paying to avoid hassle could lead to less happiness

By LI HONGYANG

I didn't hire bridesmaids for my wedding, but when I learned about the trend of young couples doing so, I understood why.

It's like many situations when I don't want to make myself feel socially indebted to someone and instead pay for services, including errand services.

It seems that the fast pace of life has made young people too busy to interact with or make close friends that they can call on for help without acquiring too heavy an emotional burden.

Today, young adults are increasingly placing a higher emphasis on social boundaries. Their philosophy is: "I won't bother you, so please don't bother me."

A 2020 study led by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences revealed that 40.2 percent of the more than 4,000 respondents admitted to some degree of "social anxiety"; while 52.7 percent felt they lacked social skills.

Social anxiety can affect relationships, daily routines and other activities due to the presence of fear, anxiety and avoidance.

Young people tend to shield themselves from unnecessary social interactions. They desire friendships without obligations



Reporter's log  
Li Hongyang

and supportive family relationships without constraints.

In the digital age, young adults turn to online platforms for one-stop services, seeking assistance with everyday tasks such as moving house, package delivery, running errands and chauffeuring. There is a reduced reliance on traditional social networks and the emotional burden that comes with them.

I agree that more professions are being created as society develops and that we embark on different career tracks like high-speed trains. It is understandable and irreversible.

But we still need to experience something away from that track that leaves space for creativity and generates a passion for life.

Professional bridesmaids have become a trend because the role requires some etiquette to be followed to make the wedding process go smoothly. But I still hold a wait-and-see attitude.

I invited my best friend from

college to be my bridesmaid. I was busy with chores and didn't realize how much effort the role involved. When she married later, I got some time off work and attended her wedding, not as a bridesmaid, but as a friend who accompanied her through the whole process.

I helped with organizing her wedding game. The groomsmen have to overcome challenges to gain entry to the bride's house to pick her up and take her to the ceremony, and the games are meant to make it harder for the groom to pick up the bride and alert him to the need to cherish her.

I felt the difficulty of being an event organizer deeply, because it was important the questions for the groom were not too hard or too easy. Everything needs to be just right.

Although I am not a professional wedding supervisor and might have ruined the game, I overcame the challenge, fostered intimacy with my friend and found an interest in the sense of ritual in daily life.

If it is not that hard to find an acquaintance to assist, individuals should maintain real-life social connections through seeking help and helping others with daily routines.

It may not be a burden for a friend to give a hand, and may instead enable them to experience other positions and tap into their creativity and passion for life.

While trouble can be avoided by paying for a service, some small happiness may also be missed.

## Niche market role spurs mixed reactions

By LI HONGYANG

The wedding market has witnessed surging demand for professional bridesmaids and groomsmen, bringing additional income and specialized services to the industry, but views on them are mixed.

Lin Miaomiao, 33, who has 10 years' wedding industry experience, views such professionals as products of a niche market.

"Most of the couples that require professional bridesmaids are returnees (from overseas), knowing little about traditional wedding customs in China. Consequently, they ask for professional wedding service providers equipped with comprehensive knowledge on wedding procedures and customs," Lin said.

A poll conducted by China News Service on its Sina Weibo account in October showed that 27.3 percent of the 4,135 participants expressed their willingness to hire professional bridesmaids or groomsmen, while 66.3 percent rejected the idea, with the remainder undecided. A report on wedding consumption trends released by wedding service provider Hunliji indicated that people placed more emphasis on an immersive wedding experience.

Qu Huan was hired as a bridesmaid for 20 brides she did not know last year.

"Compared with traditional

bridesmaids, who are usually relatives or close friends, we acquire more specialized knowledge to remind the couples what to do next, help them tackle last-minute challenges and let them enjoy the happiness of their wedding," she said.

Until recently, the 30-year-old worked from Monday to Friday as an office clerk with a private company in Wafangdian, Dalian, Liaoning province. On the weekends, she provides services as a professional bridesmaid in the city.

She is a so-called "slash youth", who refuses to be defined or bound by just one identity and chooses to pursue diverse experiences for money, fun and even personal values by having multiple careers.

After graduating in 2016, Qu opted for steady office work. While diligent about her daytime job, she developed her zeal for the wedding industry into secondary careers that included makeup assistant and professional bridesmaid.

"My parents give me full support," Qu said, explaining that "slash lives" not only generated extra income, but also led to personal change and growth.

According to the consumer-to-consumer marketplace gofish.com, professional bridesmaids and groomsmen earn around 200 yuan (\$28) to 500 yuan for each booking. Sometimes, the price for professional groomsmen is a little higher, as they are harder to find.

In addition to the agreed price, couples often show respect to the professional bridesmaids and groomsmen, politely invite them to the feast and give them small red packets containing 1 to 5 yuan.

"I used to be an extremely introverted type of girl who felt embarrassed even when holding hands with my mom," Qu said. "However, through my two years of experience as a professional bridesmaid, I have become more outgoing to enliven the atmosphere."

Traditionally, a maid of honor is a close friend or relative of the bride. Qu said she has had no problem playing the role for her customers, preventing them from being seen as a "naysayer" to tradition.

At first, she had refused to work full-time as a bridesmaid due to uncertainty over a steady income, intense competition and lack of work regulations. However, in October she quit her office job and so far this year has worked at three weddings.

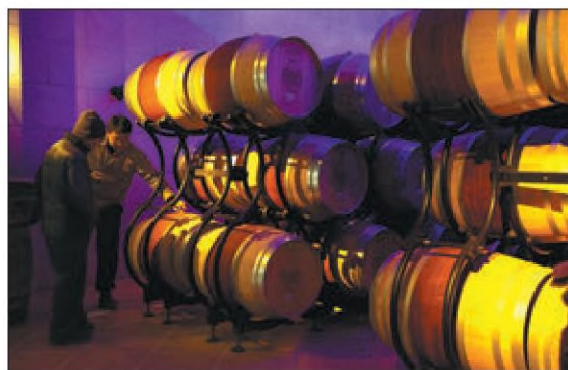
Xiaohongshu, a popular social media platform, has numerous stories of bridesmaid and groomsmen bookings being called off at the last minute. There are also stories of slack marketplace bridesmaids standing around and playing with their mobile phones rather than attending to their duties.

Li Menghan contributed to this story.

# CHINA



A worker sorts wines on display in the Changyu Wine Culture Museum in Yantai, Shandong province, on Dec 26. PHOTOS BY GENG FEIFEI / CHINA DAILY



A worker at the Chateau Tinlot, a winery in Yantai, introduces wine to a visitor on Dec 27.



A worker checks production at the Chateau Koya, a winery in Yantai, on Dec 27.



High-precision six-axis robot arms are on display in the exhibition hall of the Yantai Eddie Precision Machinery Co on Dec 27.



From left: A visitor appreciates Polaris clocks on display at the Yantai Industrial Base of Yadong No 7 Cultural and Creative Park on Dec 26. People are seen reading at the park that same day.



Visitors admire a wall decorated by mechanical components at the Yantai Industrial Base of Yadong No 7 Cultural and Creative Park on Dec 26.

## YANTAI INNOVATES TO UPGRADE INDUSTRIES

Coastal city in Shandong nurturing several well-known domestic brands

By GENG FEIFEI in Yantai, Shandong and ZHAO RUIXUE

Yantai, Shandong province, has been a key contributor to the Chinese economy.

In recent years, the city has made significant strides in transforming and upgrading its traditional industries by harnessing the power of innovation and high technology in a bid to strengthen its economic foundation.

Yantai, located on the coast of the Yellow and Bohai seas, has nurtured several well-known national brands, including Changyu, China's first industrialized winery, and clock brand Polaris.

Changyu is an example of how Yantai has revitalized its industrial heritage through innovation and

modernization. The Changyu Wine Culture Museum has helped introduce wine to the cultural and tourism industry, promoting the integration and development of both sectors. The museum has been selected as one of the National Industrial Tourism Demonstration Base's first sites.

Yantai's efforts in promoting the transformation of its industrial heritage and the development of new industries demonstrate its commitment to sustainable development. Of the nation's 41 major industrial sectors, the city has established a presence in 37, evidence of its determination to achieve long-term economic prosperity.

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# WORLD

## Skills training

Angolan President Joao Lourenco (second from left) visits a professional training center donated by the Chinese government in the city of Huambo in Huambo Province, Angola, on Friday. The same day, the president cut the ribbon to inaugurate the Integrated Center for Technological Training.

LYU CHENGCHENG / XINHUA



# Houthis vow action on US strikes

Protests across globe call for end to Gaza conflict which enters 100th day

WASHINGTON/ADEN — The Houthi militia threatened a “strong and effective response” after the United States carried out another strike in Yemen overnight through Sunday, further ratcheting up tensions in the Middle East.

It came as protests erupted across the globe, calling for a ceasefire to the Gaza conflict as the crisis entered its 100th day.

The strike has added to concerns over the escalation of a conflict that has spread through the region since the Palestinian militant group Hamas and Israel went into conflict, with Lebanon and Yemen also entering the fray.

The latest strike, which the US said hit a radar site, came a day after dozens of US and British strikes on Houthi facilities in Yemen.

“This new strike will have a firm, strong and effective response,” Houthi spokesman Nasruddeen Amer told Al Jazeera, adding there had been no injuries nor “material damages”.

Mohammed Abdulsalam, another Houthi spokesperson, said the strikes, including the one overnight that hit a military base in Sanaa, had no significant impact on the group’s ability to prevent Israel-affiliated vessels from passing

through the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, Reuters reported.

The Pentagon said on Friday that the US-British strikes had “good effects”.

Hans Grundberg, the UN special envoy for Yemen, called for maximum restraint by “all involved” and warned of an increasingly precarious situation in the region.

The Houthis say their maritime campaign aims to show solidarity with the Palestinian people and to pressure Israel to end its attacks.

The group has fired drones and missiles at ships in the Red Sea and at Israel itself.

The destroyer USS *Carney* used Tomahawk missiles in a strike early on Saturday “to degrade the Houthis’ ability to attack maritime vessels, including commercial vessels”, US Central Command said in a statement on X, formerly Twitter.

In Sanaa, government employee Mohammed Samei said the attacks were an act of “brutal aggression”.

White House spokesperson John Kirby said the initial strikes had hit the Houthis’ ability to store, launch and guide missiles or drones, which the group has used to threaten shipping. He said Washington had no interest in a war with Yemen.

The Houthis said five fighters were killed in the initial strikes.

Multiple countries, including Iran, Iraq and Oman, have condemned the strikes.

Hundreds of thousands of people rallied in Sanaa on Friday, chanting slogans denouncing Israel and the US, footage broadcast by the Houthis’ Al-Masirah TV showed.

On Saturday, thousands of demonstrators converged opposite the White House to call for an end to Israeli military action in Gaza.

People in the US capital held aloft signs questioning President Joe Biden’s viability as a presidential candidate because of his staunch support for Israel.

### Cease-fire sought

March organizers called on Biden to demand a permanent ceasefire and called for the release of Israeli hostages and Palestinian political prisoners.

Vendors were also selling South African flags as protesters chanted slogans in support of the country whose accusations of genocide against Israel prompted the International Court of Justice in The Hague, the Netherlands, to take up the case.

Other cities, including Paris, Rome, and Milan, also saw protests calling for a cease-fire.

China expresses grave concern over the US and UK military action,

said Zhang Jun, China’s permanent representative to the United Nations.

“It is regrettable to see that the blatant military actions taken by the relevant countries against Yemen have not only caused infrastructure destruction and civilian casualties, but have also resulted in heightened security risks in the Red Sea. This does not contribute to the protection of the safety and security of the commercial vessels and freedom of navigation,” Zhang told the UN Security Council on Friday.

Russian UN Ambassador Vasily Nebenzia said the US and Britain “single-handedly triggered a spillover of the conflict (in Gaza) to the entire region”.

Hassan Beheshtipour, a Tehran-based international affairs analyst, said the US-Britain airstrikes against Houthis would worsen the regional situation and expand the scope of the conflict in the region.

Beheshtipour told Xinhua that the US-Britain strikes would not stop the Houthis from continuing their operations and could provoke retaliation from their allies.

The US-Britain strikes also violated international law and the sovereignty of Yemen, which has been suffering from a humanitarian crisis for years, Beheshtipour said.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

# Genocide case against Israel reaches The Hague

CAPE TOWN, South Africa — South Africa has said that more than 50 countries have expressed support for its case at the United Nations’ top court accusing Israel of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.

Others, including the United States, have strongly rejected South Africa’s allegation that Israel is violating the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

It came as Israel kept up bombardments in the Gaza Strip over the weekend, vowing to press ahead with its offensive.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would not be deterred by the case before the International Court of Justice in The Hague, where it is fighting

accusations that the campaign in Gaza amounts to genocide.

Netanyahu, whose government is facing growing international pressure over civilian casualties in Gaza, vowed that “no one will stop us” in the fight against Hamas.

In the southern city of Rafah, an Israeli airstrike on a house sheltering two displaced families killed 10 people, the Gaza health ministry said.

The world’s reaction to the landmark case that was heard on Thursday and Friday at the ICJ shows a predictable global split when it comes to the inextricable, The Associated Press reported.

The majority of countries backing South Africa’s case are from the Arab world and Africa. In Europe, Türkiye has stated its support.

No Western country has declared support for South Africa’s allegations against Israel. The US, a close Israel ally, has rejected them as unfounded, the UK has called them unjustified, and Germany said it “explicitly rejects” them.

Israel fiercely rejects the allegations of genocide and says it is defending its people. It says the offensive is aimed at eradicating Hamas militants, the group that runs the Gaza Strip, which launched a surprise attack on southern Israel on Oct 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking around 240 hostages, media reported.

Israel’s military response in Gaza has killed at least 23,968 Palestinians, according to Gaza’s health ministry on Sunday, with more

than two-thirds of the dead being women and children. Much of northern Gaza has become an uninhabitable moonscape with entire neighborhoods erased by Israeli airstrikes and tank fire.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation was one of the first blocs to publicly back the case when South Africa filed it late last month. It said there was “mass genocide being perpetrated by the Israeli defense forces” and accused Israel of “indiscriminate targeting” of Gaza’s civilian population.

Namibia and Pakistan agreed with the case at a UN General Assembly session last week, and Malaysia also expressed support.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

# French foreign minister visits Kyiv, pledges support

KYIV/MOSCOW — France’s newly appointed Foreign Minister Stéphane Sejourne met Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv on Saturday on his first official visit abroad, vowing that Paris would maintain its support.

Sejourne’s visit came a day after British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak unveiled a fresh package of military help for Kyiv, as Ukraine waits to see if Brussels and Washington will unlock massive sums of new aid.

“Despite the multiplying crises, Ukraine is and will remain France’s priority,” Sejourne told Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba at a joint news conference on Saturday.

Later, he held talks with Zelensky that lasted for about an hour, Agence France-Presse reported.

“I appreciate France’s unwaver-



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (left) and French Foreign Minister Stéphane Sejourne in Kyiv on Saturday. AP

ing defense support for our soldiers and assistance to our people,” Zelensky wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

The visit comes at a crucial time for Ukraine with allies struggling to secure funding while some worry that Kyiv could be forgotten amid

new conflicts in the Middle East, Agence France-Presse reported.

Major blocks of funding, in Brussels and in Washington, have also been tied up for political reasons.

The European Union is due to hold a meeting on Feb 1 to unblock an aid package of 50 billion euros (\$54.8 billion) for Ukraine.

### Congress divided

With the EU package stalled and the US Congress still divided over sending additional aid to Ukraine, Kyiv is feeling the pressure.

Aid promised to Ukraine between August and October 2023 fell almost 90 percent from the same period in 2022, reaching its lowest point since the start of the conflict, according to a survey by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

Zelensky and other Ukrainian

officials have warned that any delay would seriously affect the course of the conflict.

On the battlefield, Russia on Saturday said it destroyed all targets in a barrage of strikes on facilities producing ammunition and drones in Ukraine. “This morning the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation carried out a group strike... against facilities of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex,” the defense ministry said in a daily briefing.

It said it was targeting places producing shells, gunpowder and unmanned aerial vehicles.

Ukraine earlier said it logged 40 drones and missiles launched from Russia, with eight missiles destroyed and “more than 20 devices” disabled by electronic warfare.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

# S. Africa welcomes duty reduction on tea exports

By NDUMISO MLILO in Johannesburg, South Africa For China Daily

South Africa has welcomed the Chinese government’s decision to reduce tariffs on imports of rooibos tea, a major agricultural export commodity, said a South African government official.

China slashed the tariffs on rooibos tea, which was ranging from 15 percent to 30 percent, to 6 percent. Last August, South Africa’s Minister of Trade, Industry and Competition Ebrahim Patel discussed the duties on rooibos tea with Chinese officials during the eighth meeting of the China-South Africa Joint Economic and Trade Commission, asking China to reclassify rooibos tea. The Customs Tariff Commission of the State Council of China has adopted a new tariff code for rooibos with an import duty of 6 percent.

“China is currently South Africa’s largest global trading partner. We look forward to continuing our engagements with our Chinese counterparts as we seek to shift our exports from mainly minerals to a greater basket of value-added agricultural and industrial products,” said Patel.

Rooibos tea, a specialty in South Africa, is a manufactured herbal tea that is rich in antioxidants. According to the South African Rooibos Council, the tea does not contain caffeine and can be consumed by

children, infants and breastfeeding mothers.

South Africa exports rooibos tea to 45 countries and China was the seventh-largest market in 2023. More than 20,000 metric tons of rooibos tea is produced in South Africa every year, creating jobs for over 5,000 people, according to the country’s rooibos council. Patel said the exports of rooibos tea to China and other parts of the world are helping create jobs in the country.

### More jobs

“Our rooibos tea is refreshing, delicious and healthy. This decision will enable more South African rooibos tea to be available for Chinese tea drinkers, creating more jobs in South Africa. Rooibos exporters can now ramp up their exports of tea to China,” Patel said.

South Africa and China have maintained good relations, having officially established diplomatic relations on Jan 1, 1998. Trade between South Africa and China has grown from \$1.6 billion in 1998 to \$57 billion in 2022.

South Africa exports beef, citrus, wine, oysters, rooibos tea and many other products to China. More than 400,000 jobs have been created in South Africa from the \$25 billion investment made by Chinese enterprises.

The author is a freelancer for China Daily.

# UN peacekeeping begins to withdraw from DR Congo

KINSHASA — The UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo has begun its withdrawal operations, said Christophe Lutundula, the country’s deputy prime minister and foreign minister.

The UN mission, also known as MONUSCO, will conduct its disengagement in three phases, starting with a complete withdrawal of its military and police components from the eastern province of South Kivu by April 30, according to a statement issued on Saturday after a joint news conference held by Lutundula and Bintou Keita, the UN envoy in the African country.

The second and third phases of the mission’s drawdown provide for withdrawal from North Kivu and Ituri, two provinces plagued by armed conflicts, with elaborated evaluation in between, according to the statement.

“We are fighting for the withdrawal to be effective at the end of December 2024,” Lutundula said.

“After 25 years of presence, MONUSCO will definitely leave the DRC no later than the end of 2024,” according to the statement.

On Dec 19, the UN Security Council, or UNSC, unanimously adopted Resolution 2717, setting out a com-

prehensive disengagement plan that includes three phases and the gradual handover of responsibility to the government. However, the UNSC has not yet set a final date for the complete withdrawal.

The UN peacekeeping mission has been present in the country since 1999. It is one of the largest and most expensive in the world, with an annual budget of around \$1 billion.

### ‘Historic moment’

“For the first time, the UNSC adopts a mandate asking MONUSCO to begin its withdrawal from the DRC. This is a historic moment. We will spare no effort with our Congolese partners to bring this process to a successful conclusion. I welcome the desire of the Congolese authorities to make the disengagement of MONUSCO a model of successful transition of a UN peacekeeping operation,” said Keita, who is also head of the UN peacekeeping mission.

More than 7 million people have been displaced due to conflicts in the country, mostly in the three eastern provinces where a myriad of armed groups continue to operate, Reuters reported.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

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**RED SANDERS WOOD SALE (PHASE-XIX) 2024 - NOTICE**  
 Andhra Pradesh Forest Development Corporation Limited hereby notifies the sale of **381.377 Metric Tones of Red Sanders Wood(RSW)** through international competitive bidding by way of e-tender-cum-e-auction on **24<sup>th</sup> January 2024**, in the first cycle. The unsold RSW lots in the first cycle, if any, would be put up for sale on **31<sup>st</sup> January 2024** in the Second Cycle. The Government of Andhra Pradesh has all necessary statutory approvals for the sale and export of RSW. The details of the sale conditions and related information are available in the following: <http://www.apfdcl.com>, <http://www.forests.ap.gov.in>, <http://www.mstcindia.co.in>, <http://mstc.commerce.com>

Sd/-  
 Vice Chairman and Managing Director  
 Date: 09.01.2024

# WORLD

## US states forge closer trade ties with China

Officials highlight significant benefits, promote more stable, prosperous future

By LIA ZHU in Las Vegas  
liazhu@chinadailyusa.com

Several US states, driven by pragmatism and economic interests, are actively forging partnerships with Chinese companies, particularly in sectors such as technology and clean energy.

By nurturing the win-win partnerships, which are fueled by strong trade ties and cultural connections, both sides can not only reap economic benefits but also contribute to a more stable and prosperous future, officials from the states of Washington, California and Nevada said at a forum in Las Vegas last week.

Washington state's thriving tech sector, with more than 18,000 information and communications technology companies and nearly 360,000 people employed in tech-related fields, presents a natural draw for Chinese companies seeking partnerships in innovation, Mike Fong, director of the Washington State Commerce Department, said at the forum hosted by the Chinese Consulate General in San Francisco during the Consumer Electronics Show global tech event.

"Tech workers make up nearly 10 percent of Washington's workforce. New ideas are shared rapidly within the ICT (information and communications technology) sector and across other sectors such as aerospace, life science, advanced manufacturing and clean tech, which rely on software and hardware to drive innovation and ultimately profit \$138.7 billion annually," he said.

The state's tech sector accounts

for 21.8 percent of its economy, the highest percentage in the US, and 57 percent of all services exported by Washington state are in technology-related fields, Fong said.

He also highlighted "fantastic new opportunities on the horizon" as both countries are investing in clean technology and renewable energy.

"The US and China are the top two countries for renewable energy installation," Fong said.

"In November, we welcomed a large Chinese delegation and discussed collaborating on new opportunities between our state and China with the focus on clean technology.

"I hope we can continue in the spirit of collaboration and idea-sharing that has marked the past 40 years in China-Washington state trade and business opportunity," Fong said.

### Economic bonds

California's geographic proximity, robust Chinese American community and deep trade history further strengthen its economic bonds with China, Emily Desai, deputy director of international affairs and trade at the California Governor's Office of Business and Economic Development, told the audience, mostly Chinese companies attending the CES.

In 2022, China was California's top trade partner with two-way trade amounting to more than \$165 billion. Of that, California's exports to China were \$18 billion, which makes China the third-largest export market for California, after Mexico and Canada.

The state's deep-water ports serve

as vital gateways for US-China trade, with 40 percent of all containerized goods entering the US through the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports, Desai said, adding that cultural ties are equally important as these personal connections foster mutual understanding and pave the way for continued collaboration.

Similarly, clean technology would be a catalyst for collaboration between California and China.

In October, California Governor Gavin Newsom led a mission to China to advance the mutual work for implementing an array of climate-related agreements.

The shared vision will "take our cooperation on climate to an even deeper level", Desai said. "California is looking forward to continuing this very important work with our Chinese partners."

For Nevada, embracing win-win opportunities means greater prosperity not only for the two countries but the whole world.

Rudy Pamintuan, chief of staff for the Office of Nevada's Lieutenant Governor, thanked Chinese companies for participating in the CES, sharing their business experience and innovation.

Pamintuan said he believes "the ability to not do businesses around the globe together and create these partnerships has contributed to the instability that we currently see".

Acknowledging the detrimental effect of protectionism in global markets, he emphasized the importance of a win-win approach for both businesses and countries in paving the way for greater peace and prosperity.

He said Nevada's message to Chinese businesses is clear: Come to the US, identify opportunities and work together to achieve success.

### Fatal blaze



People assess damage after a fire broke out at a slum in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Saturday. Local police have decided to conduct DNA tests to confirm the identities of the two bodies recovered from the scene, local media reported. The fire has destroyed about 300 shanties, according to the Fire Service and Civil Defence. HABIBUR RAHMAN VIA NEWSCOM

### Briefly

#### UNITED STATES

#### Congressional leaders agree on stopgap bill

Congressional leaders in Washington have reached a deal to keep the government funded until early March, a source familiar with negotiations told Agence France-Presse on Saturday. Announcement of the proposal came just before Jan 19 and Feb 2 deadlines, when federal agencies would have run out of funding. The short-term bill, also called a continuing resolution, will keep the government open until March 1 and 8, the source said — giving lawmakers time to agree on larger budget and spending particulars. The continuing resolution will

need to be passed by both houses of Congress for the country to avoid a government shutdown.

#### Climate envoy John Kerry to step down

Former US senator and secretary of state John Kerry will leave his post as President Joe Biden's special climate envoy after three years but will help Biden's reelection campaign, two administration sources said on Saturday. Kerry, 80, informed his staff members on Saturday about his decision after speaking with Biden on Wednesday, one of the sources familiar with the situation told Reuters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

#### JAPAN

#### Cockpit window crack forces plane to return

A domestic flight of Japan's All Nippon Airways returned to its departure airport on Saturday after a crack was found on the cockpit window of the Boeing 737-800 aircraft midair, a spokesperson for the airline said. Flight 1182 was en route to Toyama airport on Saturday but had to return to the New Chitose Airport after the crack was found on the outermost of four layers of windows surrounding the cockpit, the airline said. There were no reports of injuries among the 65 people on board.

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## BUSINESS

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## Creating bigger role for small enterprises

Policies, removal of barriers seen accelerating evolution of over 50m private firms

By CHENG YU  
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A key pillar of the economy, China's private sector, comprising more than 50 million enterprises, is expected to see in 2024 a breakout year, riding the policy bonanza that marked last year, industry experts said.

A slew of supportive policies announced last year will be implemented with intense focus, generating real benefits for private enterprises this year, they said.

They further said private enterprises, which contribute over 50 percent of the country's tax revenue, 60 percent of GDP, 70 percent of technological innovation and 80 percent of urban jobs, are expected to play a bigger role in driving China's economic growth this year.

"This year, China's private sector will be less constrained and is expected to receive more encouragement and support from authorities. Private enterprises will also move forward with fewer burdens," said Dong Yu, executive vice-president of the China Institute for Development Planning at Tsinghua University.

Dong, who had also worked for the Office of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs, made the remarks after reviewing the leadership's vision for this year announced at the Central Economic Work Conference in December.

The tone-setting conference said the nation will implement a number of measures to strengthen private enterprises, including better market access, access to factors of production, fair law enforcement, and protection of rights and interests.

"In fact, many major tasks envisioned during the conference provide development directions for the private sector to take this year," Dong said. For instance, private enterprises are expected to help China develop new productivity boosters.

Wang Peng, a senior researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said potential measures this year could include the removal of institutional barriers restricting market access for private enterprises, strengthened fair law enforcement and increased financial support, including tax reductions and credit assistance.

Notably, the conference also emphasized efforts to implement new mechanisms for cooperation between the government and sources of private capital. The country will support the participation of private capital in "new infrastructure" and other areas, the leadership said during the conference. New infrastructure refers to high-tech facilities that use, or are related to, artificial intelligence, the latest telecom formats, the industrial internet and the internet of things (networks of devices that can connect and exchange data).

Song Xiangqing, a professor of the School of Government at Beijing Normal University, said private companies are expected to have more opportunities to play a bigger role in major national projects related to infrastructure, new urbanization, transportation and hydraulic



A visitor (right) gets information from a staff member at the exhibition stand of Dewu, an e-tailer of fashion brands, during the sixth China International Import Expo in Shanghai on Nov 8. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Employees showcase costumes of Tencent's cooperation with anime cartoon character IPs during the 29th China Yiwu International Commodities (Standards) Fair in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, on Oct 21. LYU BIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Visitors walk past a naked-eye 3D screen at the exhibition stand of display panel maker BOE Technology Group during the 2023 China International Fair For Trade In Services in Beijing on Sept 3. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

engineering in the future.

"The government wants to remove those barriers that hinder the development of private enterprises. The government also aims to enable private enterprises to compete in the market at a higher level and in a larger field. It would activate the intrinsic ability of private enterprises to innovate and become more competitive on the global stage," Song said.

Against the backdrop of sluggish world economic recovery, the Chinese government made great efforts in guiding the private sector last year and launched a series of supportive policies.

In mid-July, the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council jointly issued guidelines, complete with 31 measures, to boost the growth and development of the private sector. Breaking down market barriers and protecting the rights of entrepreneurs abroad figure among the proposed measures.

In late July, the National Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic regulator, unveiled 17 measures to further encourage private investment. It also worked with multiple departments and jointly released 28 measures later to boost the growth of private enterprises, in terms of market access, support for factors of production, legal guarantees, enterprise services and business environment.

In September, the NDRC set up a special private sector development bureau, which also marked a milestone in the country's efforts in driving the private sector.

The main role of the bureau is to focus on the sector's needs, coordinate and organize the formulation of policies and measures to promote its development, and provide policy incentives to boost private investment.

Wei Dong, head of the bureau, said the bureau has already effected concrete measures. For instance, it

has added the provision of local government support for the development of the private sector to the list of matters to be annually supervised by the State Council. The bureau will reward those excelling in this regard.

Industry experts believe that such efforts are expected to propel private enterprises forward.

Soon after the unveiling of the 31 measures, Pony Ma, chairman and CEO of tech giant Tencent Holdings, said in a note: "China's platform economy has entered a brand-new development period, with the traditional business development model being transformed and renewed. The value of platform companies in driving (consumption) demand, innovative development, employment, entrepreneurship and public services is waiting to be fully tapped into. It sets clear the goal of platform enterprises to be open and innovative as well as enables future development."

Ma also said that Tencent will

develop in line with these directions to be a connector, a toolbox and an assistant, and promote its consumer internet business to boost domestic demand, enhance its industrial internet business to help drive innovative development of the country's modernization, and beef up the competitiveness of the company's overseas business.

Yang Bing, founder and CEO of Dewu App, an e-tailer of fashion brands such as Loewe, Salvatore Ferragamo and Self-Portrait, said such efforts have marked out the direction private enterprises should take to improve their technological innovation capabilities and accelerate their digital and technological transformation.

As a representative of the digital economy and new economy, Yang said that such guidance is "forward-looking", making tech and internet companies feel excited and full of confidence about their future development.

According to him, Dewu has

developed an AI-powered identification equipment that can sift genuine branded goods from counterfeits in a jiffy. With an accuracy rate of over 99 percent, the gadget can identify more than 100 brands of sports shoes currently.

Since the beginning of last year, the State Taxation Administration and some other ministries have introduced or extended a string of preferential policies for private enterprises, especially tax and fee cuts for small businesses.

The STA said that China's private enterprises are reaping many benefits from tax and fee reliefs, as they accounted for 75 percent of the implemented tax refunds, tax and fee cuts and deferrals from January to October last year. More than 403,000 companies enjoyed pretax super deduction on research and development expenses in the first three quarters.

The pretax super deduction of R&D expenses is a preferential tax policy. If a company incurs 10 million yuan (\$1.4 million) in R&D expenses that do not result in intangible assets and are recorded as current expenses, the company can deduct 100 percent of the expenses incurred, in addition to the pretax deduction of 10 million yuan that is already granted by law.

Jiao Jian, taxation head of leading display panel maker BOE Technology Group Co Ltd's branch in Hefei, Anhui province, said the company has been able to sustain the momentum it has gained in key display technologies mainly because tax reliefs help stabilize its finances. Such benefits help the entire industrial chain, he said.

Jiao also said that as of the end of October, BOE Technology had enjoyed a super deduction of nearly 1.6 billion yuan in R&D expenses, which bolstered the company's finances, helping it to invest on more innovations.

In line with the overall recovery of China's economy, the private sector saw marginal improvements in the first three quarters of last year, posting faster growth in secondary industry investment and steady industrial output.

Data released by the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce, which serves the private sector, showed that the number of private enterprises in China rose from 10.86 million in 2012 to more than 50 million last year.

Wei Jianguo, former vice-minister of commerce, however, said China's private enterprises have not developed their potential fully yet, especially in trade, fixed-asset investment and consumption.

Also, the main production chain, supply chain, service chain and personnel of private enterprises are mostly based in the domestic market. After China became the second-largest economy, the domestic market had undergone tremendous changes, including from supplying products to the current oversupply situation, which left many private entrepreneurs confused about the future direction, Wei said.

Wei Qijia, head of industrial economy research at the State Information Center, highlighted the urgency of implementing policies to generate real benefits. "Only when policies are implemented as concrete measures can private enterprises benefit. It will also bolster their sense of gain and stabilize their expectations for greater growth."

## How a Chinese trend is raising hopes of troubled SMEs

## REPORTER'S LOG

By Cheng Yu

At first, I thought the question posed to me by a corporate executive was simple enough for me to answer. Not quite, as it transpired.

"How do you think a small company like Yihong Precision gets a piece of the economic cake amid increasingly fierce competition?" That's what Hua Jiansheng, deputy general manager of Yihong, sought

to know. It was sort of a rhetorical question, perhaps intended to prime me to receive his answer.

Yihong Precision is a small firm. It makes 300,000 type-C adapters on average per day and supplies them to electronics companies, including big names such as Japan's Sony and Nintendo, as well as Chinese smartphone maker Xiaomi Corp.

The global electronics consumer market, Hua told me, had continued to decline in 2023 and severely affected supply chain providers. "We have been in quite a hard time since the COVID-19 pandemic and then a global downturn in consumer electronics over the past year hit us hard. Many times, I thought that

our business will fold."

Nothing is more important than survival, he emphasized, adding the external uncertainties also make millions of SMEs in China to "neijuan", a Chinese word that is used extensively online these days to refer to someone who wants to "compete unnecessarily and excessively".

That expression immediately hit home. I realized how heavily China's SMEs depend on the market and related government policies for a business boost, given their vulnerability to fluctuations like disruptions to supply and industrial chains.

In a roundtable held by China Dai-

ly in October, Pan Qingzhong, executive vice-president of Schwarzman College at Tsinghua University, pointed out that the main reason why Singapore, the United Arab Emirates and Ireland attract large investments is that their governments empower businesses by creating a business-friendly environment.

"If you give market entities a little sunshine, they will shine, and if you give them a little rain, they will also grow," Pan said.

Concurred Ma Bin, executive vice-president of the China Association of Small and Medium Enterprises. "The confidence of SMEs continues to be boosted as China launches a series of guidelines to promote the

development and growth of private enterprises, along with a series of fiscal, taxation and financial policies to support the real economy and activate the capital market."

To help address the problem, a unique Chinese trend has emerged. An increasing number of central State-owned enterprises are expanding their supplier lists comprising private-sector SMEs, as the country vows to encourage SOEs and centrally administered SOEs to play a big role in helping SMEs.

For instance, a case from the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council showed that half of the 188 domestic suppliers to

Shanghai-based Commercial Aircraft Corp of China now are SMEs.

Yang Yuanqing, chairman and CEO of Lenovo Group, the world's largest PC maker, also said established companies should play a bigger role in driving the joint innovation and development of SMEs in the upstream and downstream segments of industrial and supply chains.

SMEs account for 44.5 percent of Lenovo's industrial chain, and the company will offer them help such as financing and marketing resources, especially for those with core technologies.

With all these efforts and policies, though SMEs may face a tough period amid the economic downturn, they are expected to overcome difficulties and play a bigger role in the years to come.

# BUSINESS



Visitors browse information at the products and services booth during a summit held by open source solutions provider Red Hat in Beijing in October. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Red Hat bullish about China's digital transformation drive

Both government and companies are leveraging open source market, it says

By CHENG YU  
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

US-based open source solutions provider Red Hat has expressed confidence in the vibrant Chinese market, saying it is worthwhile to invest in the nation in the long term. "China is very important for our business in terms of the company's overall strategy. The APAC region has a strong position in Red Hat's overall business, and within that region, China is critical," Marjet Andriess, general manager and senior vice-president of Red Hat APJC, told China Daily. "The fact that there is so much demand in China makes it worthwhile for us to invest here." The other reason, she said, why the Chinese market is so important for Red Hat is because of the way the country embraces open source, with both the government and companies investing big in digital transformation and leveraging open source to drive it. The country has highlighted the role of open source in driving the software industry and in construction of a Digital China in its 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) for the software and information

technology services sector. By 2025, China aims to build two to three open source communities with international influence and cultivate more than 10 high-quality open source projects, according to the plan. Andriess also emphasized the emergence of open source talent in the Chinese market, and said that one of the largest research and development centers is based in the country because of its large talent pool. Data from CSDN, a leading developer community in China, showed that the number of Chinese developers registered in 2022 was 35 million. Of these, up to 94 percent have used open source and 42 percent have participated in open source projects. "Despite the shadow of a global economic downturn, the company is seeing healthy growth in the Chinese market, and is still growing," she said. Red Hat, which entered China in 2004, has operations spanning hybrid cloud infrastructure, cloud-native application development, automation and management. Its businesses cover 40

countries and regions. "With our open hybrid platform, which includes RHEL operating system Red Hat OpenShift and the Ansible automation platform, we are absolutely in a good space to help companies go on that journey," Andriess said. On market speculation that multinational companies were retreating from China, she said that Red Hat will continue to invest in the country and that its open source technology is robust in the domestic market. "We are also seeing a lot of companies in China interested in our open source technology, either within the country or globally. We are very excited and bullish about supporting these companies that want to go into foreign markets," she added. Red Hat has made significant investments in China, including offering Red Hat Training online learning courses. Chinese companies and IT professionals can build critical skills within critical areas of Red Hat open source solutions across key fields, including cloud computing, containerization, virtualization and automation. "We want to train as many people as we can on open source and get them accreditation. We've invested

in the market because we want to continue to be one of the largest training companies in China to train people on open source and on our Red Hat technology," she said. Victor Tsao, president of Red Hat Greater China, said the company is bullish about the prospects of the Chinese market, and the opportunities brought on by the open source community. "It is really an open, transparent community that developers from anywhere in the world can contribute. It is the open source community that can really drive some innovations or breakthroughs," Tsao said. Compared with other open source companies, he said Red Hat — being fully open source — serves as a catalyst for IT innovation in China and as a bridge for internal and external communication. It also makes it easier for enterprises to use as clients only pay a subscription fee. Jiang Hua, head of IT order to delivery at BMW Brilliance Automotive Ltd, said the company has leveraged Red Hat's solution series to effectively dismantle the barriers between automation and information systems, significantly reducing the cost of future automation system development and easing the implementation of flexible manufacturing.

## Bangladeshi poultry farmers benefit from Chinese feed producer

DHAKA — Fear and uncertainty due to common diseases have long plagued poultry farmers in Gazipur, located on the outskirts of Dhaka, capital of Bangladesh. About one-fourth of Bangladesh's total poultry production comes from Gazipur. But now, farmers there are free of anxiety when dealing with common diseases, after a leading Chinese feed producer started ensuring supplies of quality feed, cutting-edge technologies, as well as timely disease and management information. Mostafizur Rahman runs his own poultry farm in Gazipur. "The chicken shed you see here houses 12,000 chickens, and on the other side there are more such sheds. I've a total of about 40,000 chickens on this farm," Rahman told Xinhua recently as workers were seen giving chicken feed from New Hope, one of China's largest feed producers.

Rahman's farm has witnessed impressive growth in the past decade since he started giving quality feed from New Hope and receiving disease management information. "I have fed this to my own chickens and also sell some outside," said Rahman, also a dealer for New Hope. "I've benefited from doing business with this company for a long time. Their products are of good quality. I've improved day by day in this poultry farm business," said Rahman, adding that he sells almost 200 metric tons of New Hope feed products per month.

New Hope, which started production at a newly built feed mill in Gazipur in 2006, is now one of the largest poultry feed producers with about a 7 percent market share in Bangladesh. Farmers in Gazipur said New Hope helps them get quality feed at a competitive price. They said poultry farming is a trigger for growth of the rural economy and a fortune changer for the villagers. Many educated youths are also taking to poultry rearing as a vocation

and turning into small entrepreneurs. "From New Hope we've learned a lot about modern farming with the help of their service team in the field," said Rashed Kabir, another poultry farmer. He said many are motivated to engage in poultry farming because of the support New Hope offers, apart from providing quality feeds, which are cheaper compared to other companies. Rabeya Sultana Soma, a veterinarian who works at a New Hope-run veterinary lab, said, "We collect samples from the farmers, then we diagnose the disease through various tests." Because of the establishment of this lab, the first in the private sector to diagnose poultry diseases in Bangladesh, marginal farmers in the area are getting services from them, she said. "They know how the disease is happening and how prevalent it is so that they can treat it at the right time to increase their productivity," the veterinarian added.

He Quanshui, the regional president for New Hope, said New Hope's production capacity of feed is 400,000 tons per year and 40 million chicks per year, currently in Bangladesh. Under the service and training of New Hope, local farmers are becoming experts in breeding through the company's high-quality veterinary pharmaceutical products and management technology.

According to He, New Hope also actively makes contributions to society. It cooperates with the Asian Development Bank in training local female farmers. It is aiming to train 7,200 female farmers, of whom 2,415 have already learned poultry farming skills. "I believe that Chinese companies like New Hope can bring better lives to the people of Bangladesh with their decades of management experience and thousands of employees," said He.

XINHUA



An employee checks a product at the exhibition stand of New Hope Group during the 7th China Brand Day event in Shanghai on May 11. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## Globally aligned rules yardstick in opening-up

## EAGLE EYE

By Zhao Zhongxiu

The annual tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference held in December listed high-standard opening-up as one of the nine priorities in economic work in 2024.

According to the meeting, efforts must be made to foster new drivers of foreign trade, consolidate the overall performance of foreign trade as well as capital, and expand intermediate goods trade, services trade, digital trade and cross-border e-commerce exports.

In fact, China has been shifting the focus of openness from trading of goods and freeing the movement of resources toward institutional opening-up.

The key task for opening-up in the next stage is to continuously expand high-level openness, like accelerating the cultivation of green trade to boost the real economy, expediting the development of green trade to make "green" the underlying factor across the entire trade chain, and actively aligning with international high-standard economic and trade rules to steadily expand high-level institutional opening-up.

China has said it will remove all restrictions on foreign investment in the manufacturing sector, but the degree of openness in the services sector remains relatively insufficient.

Particularly, there is room for increased openness in areas such as telecommunications, healthcare and financial services.

## Trade rules

The country still has potential for enhancement in the governance of, and alignment with, global high-level economic and trade rules, especially the exploration of digital trade rules. There are several ways to further this.

First, increasing openness in telecommunications and financial sectors. For instance, the State Council, or China's Cabinet, recently approved a working plan to accelerate the development of Beijing's national comprehensive demonstration zone for expanding opening-up in the services sector, which proposes further opening-up in areas such as information services and internet access services. These measures should be promoted nationwide, and continuous exploration is needed to increase the scope and depth of opening-up in value-added telecommunications services.

Second, continuously improving the negative list-based management system for services trade. Various provincial-level regions, pilot free trade zones and the Hainan free trade port should ensure that opening-up in digital trade and trade in services continue to advance, through leveraging the effect produced by pilot projects based on their different openness levels and development status.

That will lead to a continuous enhancement of investment liberalization and facilitation in services trade. However, for certain services

sectors (for instance, those related to national security), such as financial and cultural services, we should adopt a classification-based tiered management approach.

Third, in digital trade rules, comprehensive alignment with high-level global economic and trade rules should be explored based on pilot work in the Shanghai pilot free trade zone, to steadily expand institutional opening-up.

Some enterprises and individuals, due to business needs, may need to provide data to overseas entities. If this action aligns with the national requirements on cross-border data transmission security, it may be permissible. Additionally, it is also appropriate to support the trustworthy, safe and responsible use of digital technologies, including artificial intelligence.

## Institutional thrust

The key to furthering opening-up is institutional opening-up, or to improve the socialist market economy and strengthen ties and compatibility between the Chinese and other economies through aligning with international rules, regulations, management and standards.

To attract foreign investors, it is important to truly incorporate foreign companies in China's industri-

al development and enhance their national treatment.

It is necessary to eliminate discriminatory provisions in laws and regulations, and firmly establish and clarify national treatment for foreign investors through legal means, thereby improving policy predictability and stability in China.

Additionally, the government's decision-making consultation processes should further engage participation from foreign companies, and fully consider the potential impact of policy changes on foreign businesses.

To expand opening-up in the services sector, China should strive to minimize market access restrictions for foreign businesses, as well as eliminate differential treatment and hidden market barriers.

In terms of industry supervision and regulation, transparency and the rule of law should be further promoted, providing foreign suppliers with full, fair and transparent opportunities for market participation.

In digital trade, it is essential to learn from international practices, and boldly experiment and explore, including significantly relaxing cross-border flow of commercial data. While ensuring national security, it is also crucial to vigorously enhance the integration of China's

digital society and digital economy into that of the world.

The Central Economic Work Conference said that market access for the telecommunications, medical and other service industries will be eased, while efforts should be made to align with high-standard global economic and trade rules, resolve issues such as cross-border data flows and equal participation in government procurement, and make "Invest in China" a more popular choice.

Digital trade has become a crucial form of international trade, with many goods and services transactions relying on cross-border data movement. Promoting liberalization and facilitation of cross-border data flow is essential for the development of international trade and attracting foreign investment.

Regarding government procurement, the conference stressed the importance of equal participation, signifying that State-owned enterprises, private enterprises and foreign companies should be treated equally while participating in government procurement. This aligns with international high-standard economic and trade rules and also supports China's swift accession to the WTO Agreement on Government Procurement.

Aligning with international high-standard economic and trade rules holds significant importance for promoting China's reform and opening-up, as they represent a crucial direction for future global economic governance and serve as a "yardstick" defining the direction of China's efforts toward increasing openness.

The obstacles to China's accession into the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership primarily exist in two aspects: the gap between China's current level of openness and that required by the CPTPP, and the potential disruption from geopolitical issues.

The first aspect does not present a big problem. Most of the CPTPP provisions will not create accession obstacles for China. Even if there are some obstacles, we can negotiate to extend transition periods or have exception clauses. Vietnam has taken a similar approach.

The real obstacle for China in joining CPTPP lies in geopolitical interference. Regarding the difficulty of specific provisions, that for labor standards, State-owned enterprises, and e-commerce are the most challenging, but all are negotiable.

Compared to the CPTPP, joining the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement is somewhat easier. The DEPA is divided into 16 specific

modules, including business and trade facilitation, treatment of digital products and related issues, business and consumer trust, and digital identities. One unique feature of the DEPA's institutional design is that applicant countries can selectively participate in specific modules. This flexible approach reduces the complexity of negotiations.

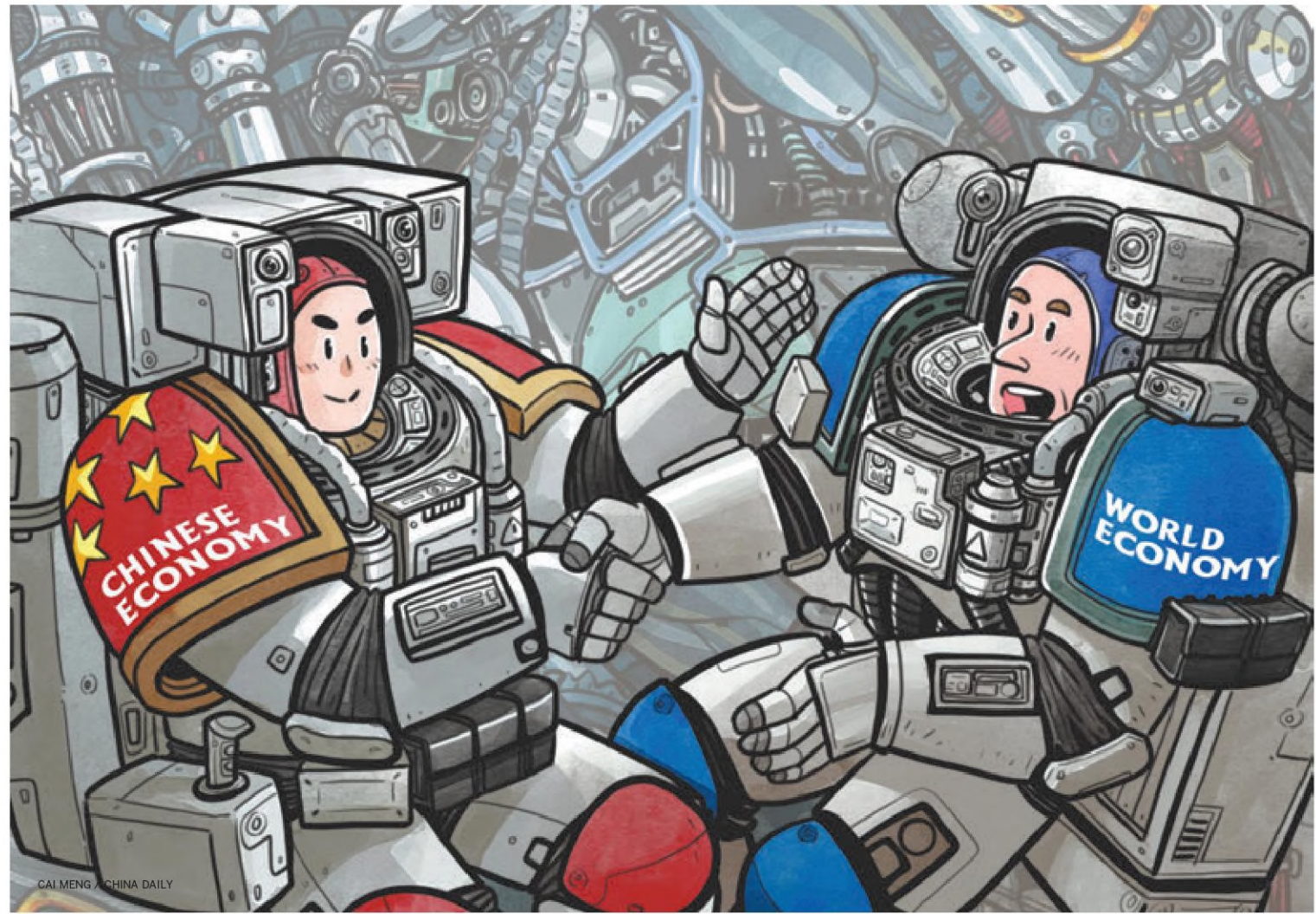
We need to further promote rule of law and policy consistency to enhance business climate and boost confidence of foreign investors. We also need to strike a better balance between pursuing development and addressing security concerns, to boost compatibility and ties between domestic and external markets.

The Central Economic Work Conference stressed that China will focus on promoting high-quality development in 2024, give prominence to key areas, grasp key points and carry out economic work in a down-to-earth manner.

That means economic development remains essential to the country, and there is no security without development.

The writer is president of the University of International Business and Economics.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



## World inflation to affect nation's growth this year

## MAIN STREET

By Zhang Ming

The world has witnessed a round of high inflation since 2021, which is more severe than most market watchers had anticipated. In response to rising inflation, central banks of developed economies have hiked interest rates one after another, having a pronounced negative effect on the global economy. China, affected by the phenomenon as well, has actively adjusted its policies to seek a way forward. As a result, both its economic growth and the external environment are now expected to improve this year.

## Causes of inflation

Four factors have jointly led to high global inflation.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict dealt a big collective blow to the global economy from the supply side.

Second, the United States and other major countries implemented extremely accommodative fiscal and monetary policies after the pandemic, greatly raising household incomes and money supply.

Third, the US Federal Reserve did not take timely action to curb the resulting inflation. Before price rises began, the previous long-lasting low inflation levels had led the Fed to adjust its monetary policies, changing from "inflation targeting" to "average inflation targeting". That means if the growth of its consumer price index runs below 2 percent for a long time, the US can tolerate a period thereafter when CPI growth remains above 2 percent. In addition, most Fed policymakers regarded inflation at the time as a temporary shock that wouldn't endure for long.

Fourth, the trend of anti-globalization since 2016 has also added to the current situation. In one prime example, the US initiated a trade conflict and reduced its imports from China, which significantly increased overall costs because the imports from elsewhere are more expensive. In addition, there is increasing frag-

mentation in global supply and industrial chains, thus reducing the efficiency of resource allocation and raising production costs worldwide.

## Interest rate hikes

Against such a backdrop, the world's three major central banks — the Fed, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England — have unleashed an extremely steep series of interest rate hikes and balance sheet drawdowns since March 2022 to manage inflation, which unfortunately has not yielded the desired results so far.

The Fed, for example, raised interest rates four times from June to November 2022, each time by 75 basis points. However, it only reduced the year-on-year growth of the core CPI, the indicator most cited by the Fed, from a peak of 6.7 percent to 4 percent in October — still well above the 2 percent target level.

Price swings and levels in the three major areas of goods, services and rent jointly determine the core CPI. Currently, US prices of goods have dropped a lot, the decline in service prices is less drastic and rent

has largely remained unchanged, eventually leading to the slow decline of the core CPI's year-on-year growth. The latter two categories remain high mainly because the US labor market is still in short supply and employers feel strong pressure to pay more.

In conclusion, if the local labor market does not deteriorate significantly, it will be very difficult for the US to drop its year-on-year growth target of core CPI to 2 percent in the short term and it will be unlikely for the Fed to cut interest rates either. There is a high possibility that the global economy and financial markets will continue to operate in the context of very high short-term and long-term interest rates in the first half of this year.

## Negative effects

The interest rate hikes by central banks spanning the globe have had several negative effects on the world's economy.

The situation has put great pressure on both local currencies and prices in developing economies.

From March 2022 to the first quarter of last year, financial crises

of varying degrees broke out in eight developing countries with relatively fragile financial systems, including Pakistan, Argentina and Egypt.

In the second quarter of last year, lenders in Europe and the US began to experience severe stress as interest rates kept rising. Silicon Valley Bank, First Republic Bank and Signature Bank in the US collapsed despite the first two being medium-sized banks ranked between 10th and 20th in the country. Europe's Credit Suisse and Deutsche Bank were also deeply ensnared in similar crises.

In addition, in the first half of this year, long-lasting high interest rates will possibly bring additional challenges.

The US corporate bond market, especially the segment of high-yield corporate bonds, may find itself overwhelmed as both benchmark interest rates and the risk premiums continue to intensify, based on the fact that financing costs are already very high.

In addition, debt pressure faced by major economies will increase significantly. In the past, these governments had high debts, but they accumulated in a climate with low economic growth, low interest rates and low prices. As a result, there was not much pressure to get

such debts under control.

## China's economy

Also affected by the interest rate hikes, this year, China's trade performance may come under more pressure. External demand may continue to decline if US import restrictions remain in place.

However, as China has made a series of policy adjustments, there is a high possibility that this year its economic growth will be more robust and the overall external environment will be more satisfactory, with foreign direct investment increasing and short-term capital outflows declining. In addition, the renminbi's recent exchange rate against the US dollar has already largely rebounded and this uptrend is likely to continue in 2024.

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The article is a translation of the writer's speech at a forum at the Renmin University of China in late November.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## DPP must accept it will not be able to impede the inevitable trend of national reunification

Immediately following his election win, Lai Ching-te of Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party said maintaining cross-strait peace and stability would be his mission as Taiwan's new leader. He also pledged to preserve the status quo, and seek to "replace confrontation with dialogue".

How the incoming Lai team behaves and how Washington handles the sensitive relations with the island will to a great extent determine whether peace can be maintained across the Taiwan Strait.

The results of the island's election will not change the basic landscape and development trend of cross-strait relations, and will not impede the inevitable trend of China's reunification. The Chinese mainland will work with relevant political parties, groups and people from various sectors in Taiwan to boost cross-strait exchanges and cooperation, enhance integrated development, jointly promote Chinese culture, and advance the peaceful development of cross-strait relations as well as the cause of national reunification.

Those that sent their congratulatory messages to Lai should be reminded that the Taiwan question is China's internal affair. Whatever changes take place in Taiwan, the basic fact that there is only one China in the world and Taiwan is part of China will not change; the Chinese government's position of upholding the one-China principle and opposing "Taiwan independence" separatism, "two Chinas" and "one China, one Taiwan" will not change; and the international community's prevailing consensus on upholding the one-China principle and long-standing and overwhelming adherence to this principle will not change.

As a Foreign Ministry spokesperson reiterated in a

statement on the result of the election, the one-China principle is the solid anchor for peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. Beijing believes that the international community will continue to adhere to the one-China principle, and understand and support the Chinese people's just cause of opposing "Taiwan independence" separatist activities and striving to achieve national reunification.

The biggest uncertainty in the relations concerning Taiwan, therefore, lies in how the island's new leadership and the US approach them. How Lai balances his own inclination for "independence" and the island's need for cross-strait peace and stability will test his political wisdom as well as credibility.

"We do not support independence", said US President Joe Biden, responding to a request for comment on the election outcomes. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken reiterated the US' commitment to "maintaining cross-strait peace and stability" and "long-standing unofficial relationship, consistent with the US' one-China policy". Their remarks align with the ongoing efforts of China and the US to prevent the China hawks in Washington from using Taiwan as a tool to provoke Beijing. This necessitates the US not having official exchanges with the island and avoiding sending encouraging messages to the secessionists on the island.

The reunification of China has always been the dream of people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, and this is the firm and clear policy of the Chinese government and strong aspiration of the Chinese people. If Lai truly wants to replace confrontation with dialogue, then this is the reality that must be faced.

## Visit carries forward momentum of cooperation

The ongoing visit by Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Egypt, Tunisia, Togo and Cote d'Ivoire, from Saturday to Thursday, continues the 34-year tradition of African countries being the first destinations of the year for China's foreign minister.

That this tradition has been maintained for so many years speaks volumes about how unbreakable and sincere the friendship between China and Africa is. No matter how the international situation changes, the country's endeavor to strengthen ties with African countries remains unchanged.

At the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue in South Africa in August last year, the African leaders thanked China for supporting African integration and for its indispensable cooperation in their quest for modernization and for the assistance it has provided in times of need.

The ninth Forum on China-Africa Cooperation will be held in Beijing later this year, which will undoubtedly further promote cooperation between the two sides. Egypt, Tunisia, Togo and Cote d'Ivoire have long been China's partners and Wang's visit will further promote China's ties with them. Wang's visit also aims to promote the implementation of what was achieved at the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue last August in Johannesburg, and make preparations for this year's Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

At last year's dialogue, China issued blueprints for its support of Africa's industrialization, agricultural modernization and the training of its personnel, which received a warm response from African countries. The cooperation between the two sides brings about win-win results, and all of China's cooperation projects with African countries are aimed at resolving the structural issues hindering their development. None of them targets any third party.

The sustainability of cooperation between the two sides in various areas points to the fact that China is a responsible partner which sincerely hopes that its cooperation with African countries will help them shake off poverty and realize industrialization and modernization.

China's support has helped provide African countries with opportunities to secure positions in the global industry and supply chains by leveraging their comparative advantages of labor costs and resources.

That China never attaches any political conditions to its investment or cooperation projects to African countries speaks volumes about the earnestness with which it extends a helping hand.

It is believed that Wang's visit will consolidate ties with the four countries and serve to further boost the cooperative relations between China and African countries.

## US continues to fan flames in the Middle East

The bombing of Houthi targets in Yemen by the United States and the United Kingdom forces last week was irresponsible and unwisely. It will only serve to make the situation in the Middle East even more complicated.

The US and its allies are worsening the situation with such actions. Since there is a causal link between the escalating tensions in the Red Sea and Israel's relentless military offensive against Hamas in Gaza, Washington should rein in the bloodlust of Tel Aviv if it wants to stop the attacks on ships in the Red Sea.

The fact that it hasn't already done so — and that US Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrapped up his fourth visit to the Middle East last week since the Gaza conflict broke out without once calling for a cease-fire — suggests that Washington intends to take advantage of the Gaza conflict to create turmoil in the region once again.

Just as Tel Aviv seems to be hell-bent on using the Hamas' attacks on Oct 7, which resulted in about 1,200 deaths and more than 200 people being taken hostage, to justify it doing something that it has been wanting to do for a long time.

US President Joe Biden said on Saturday that he has delivered an urgent private message to Iran about Iran-backed Houthis "attacking commercial shipping" in the Red Sea, but the quickly rising tensions in the region over the past week-end suggest he offered little if anything to help end the crisis.

No matter how the US tries to pretend to care about the peace and stability of the region, the whole world can see clearly that it has enabled Israel to upgrade its offensive in Gaza to a scale and intensity that go far beyond what Tel Aviv and Washington claim is "self-defense".

If the US really cares about the hostages of its ally, it should cherish mediation efforts — such as that by Qatar that will enable medicines to be delivered to the remaining hostages still held by Hamas in the following days — and any window of opportunity that is created to end the hostilities.

The Houthi militia threatened a "strong and effective response" after the US carried out another strike in Yemen overnight on Saturday, shortly after hundreds of thousands of people rallied in Sana'a, capital of Yemen, chanting slogans denouncing Israel and the US.

Washington should realize that its "surgical" strikes over the past decades in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world, including Afghanistan, have only bred animosity toward it.

The Red Sea is an important international trade route for goods and energy. All parties involved, including Washington, should seek to play a constructive and responsible role in maintaining the security and stability of the Red Sea and help bring an end to the conflict between Israel and Hamas as soon as possible, which is in line with the common interests of the international community.

Song Chen



## Opinion Line

## ROK's Supreme Court ruling a slap in the face for Yoon govt

On Jan 11, the Supreme Court of the Republic of Korea ruled that Japan-based Nippon Steel Corporation should pay 100 million Korean won (\$76,118) as compensation to the family of a forcibly conscripted laborer during World War II. In response, the Japanese government immediately lodged a protest.

The victim in the case was forcibly taken from Korea to Japan at the age of 13 in March 1943, where he was forced to work without payment. In April 1944, he was assigned to the Japanese military as a soldier, and returned to Korea after the war. After he passed away in 2012, his widow and three children filed a lawsuit in May 2015 seeking compensation.

On the same day as the judgment was announced, the ROK and Japan held their first bilateral high-level economic talks in eight years in Seoul and agreed to promote cooperation. This ruling, along with Japan's strong official response, undoubtedly put Seoul in an awkward position.

Being elected president of the ROK

in 2022, Yoon Suk-yeol under the influence of the United States actively promoted the warming of relations with Japan. In March 2023, he announced that the ROK and Japan would jointly establish a foundation, funded by local companies and supported by the ROK government, to compensate the victims or the families of victims of forced labor during the Japanese colonial period. Yet the ruling, together with the final rulings the Supreme Court of the ROK made in two similar compensation cases in December 2023, both favoring the laborers seeking compensation, indicates that diplomatic compromises will not automatically make the issue of forced labor disappear, something Japan desperately wants.

But the latest judicial ruling may not inflict significant damage on bilateral relations. The key to the US' "Indo-Pacific" strategy is to rally local countries, such as Japan and the ROK, to counterbalance countries such as China, Russia and the Democratic People's Republic of

Korea. The US is unlikely to tolerate a situation where such rulings disrupt its arrangement.

On the day of the ruling, the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it would attempt to compensate the plaintiffs through a third-party compensation system. As some observed, most families of victims, especially the descendants, are primarily concerned with receiving compensation and don't care much about whether that comes directly from relevant Japanese enterprises or the Japanese government. That's also essentially why by far none of the similar compensation rulings made by ROK courts have been truly implemented by Japanese enterprises.

But there are still more than 70 similar cases of ROK forced labor victims and their families seeking compensation from Japan awaiting rulings or final judgments, so Japan will have more protests to lodge and the ROK government will have more money to pay out.

— BEIJING NEWS

## Ghost of Japan's militarist past rises again

Hiroki Kobayashi, deputy chief of staff of the Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force, has defended his visit to Yasukuni Shrine on Jan 9 by claiming it was personal. But his visit to the shrine during office hours together with subordinates of a Ground Self-Defense Force committee investigating aircraft accidents had all the appearance of being an official deed.

Which is something that even the Japanese Ministry of Defense thinks is improper as it would violate a directive issued in 1974 prohibiting a group visit by SDF members to a religious facility. The ministry has launched an investigation into the matter.

Kobayashi's visit has done great

harm to Japan's relations with its neighbors as it makes it more difficult for Japan to gain the trust of neighboring countries.

According to officials of the Defense Ministry's Bureau of Personnel and Education, Kobayashi and his subordinates, both SDF members and administrative staff visited Yasukuni Shrine out of uniform and paid for ritual offerings of *masakaki* sprigs with their own money for the stated purpose to "pray for the safety of aircraft". That's not an excuse for members of the Japan Self-Defense Forces to pay an official visit to the shrine. And considering that the Imperial Japanese Army resorted to *kamikaze* suicidal

attacks at the end of World War II, praying to the war criminals "for aircraft safety" seems particularly far-fetched. Yasukuni Shrine is controversial because 14 Class-A war criminals are enshrined there. By giving his visit to the shrine an official veneer, Kobayashi has rubbed salt into the wounds of its neighbors and raised alarm that Japan is once again set on a militarist path.

While Japan is supposed to have learned the lessons from its militarism before and during World War II, the move by Kobayashi and some of his subordinates undoes all the efforts of those working toward lasting peace in the nation.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Huge home market hones competitiveness

Official data shows that in 2023 China's automobile production and sales reached 3.02 million and 3 million respectively, with a year-on-year growth of 11.6 percent and 12 percent. Although the complete data of relevant economies of 2023 is yet to be announced, China is expected to be the world's largest exporter of automobiles for the year.

It's beyond doubt that China's automotive industry is thriving, especially in the electric vehicle sector.

China has a huge domestic market and large production capability, in which domestic entrepreneurs must go through fierce competition in order to seek a chance to compete in the global market. Yet once they win in the domestic competition, the nation's huge market and large production capability provide strong support to them. In comparison, overseas markets lack the

manufacturing capacity and scale of the Chinese market.

As a result, Chinese companies in emerging industries either fall at the bottleneck of domestic competition, or find themselves with quite a big advantage upon entering the international market because of the high threshold. For example, Chinese companies may have to introduce new cars every six months to survive the domestic competition, while quite a majority of overseas car companies have at least a three-year cycle. Even in traditional industries Chinese companies have higher efficiencies.

In emerging industries, some Western observers blame Chinese companies for price competition but that's not the case.

The sustained growth in demand for photovoltaics and new energy vehicles in China gradually forms

the market scale, boosting R&D investment and lowering manufacturing costs, which ultimately results in a significant advantage that overseas competitors find challenging to overcome, namely higher technology and lower price.

A study showed that in December 2023, the production cost of a solar module in China was \$0.15 per watt, much lower than India's \$0.22, Europe's \$0.3, and the United States' \$0.4. Similarly, when China exports new energy vehicles to Europe, even if the price doubles compared to the domestic market, it remains significantly lower than similar models produced in Europe. This advantage stems from China's manufacturing scale, supply chain efficiency, and the production efficiency brought about by technological progress.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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## COMMENT

## China and the World Roundtable | Chinese Economy

**Editor's note:** In the face of increasing uncertainty in the external environment and given the arduous task of achieving low-carbon, green development, China has to overcome some serious challenges this year to further revive its economy. And while doing so, it should accord priority to promoting sustainable economic growth and making breakthroughs in advanced technology. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Otton Solis

## China's economy still much better than West

The global economy has not been performing at its full potential, especially since the subprime mortgage crisis of 2008, which started in the United States and spilled over the banking system of most of the developed Western economies, evolving into the global financial crisis. And before the global economy had recovered, it faced the COVID-19-induced recession, the trade wars initiated by the US government, the near collapse of supply chains, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the ensuing economic sanctions, all of which have slowed the rates of growth of almost all economies.

Through a combination of expansionary monetary and fiscal policies, the US has been able to reduce unemployment and keep a healthy rate of growth during the past two years. But as a result, inflation increased, which forced the authorities to raise interest rates, thereby placing a brake on GDP growth. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, this is expected to reach just a dismal 1.5 percent in 2024, lower than the projected 2.4 percent in 2023.

In 2024, the other large Western economies are going to fare even worse. Japan's GDP growth is expected to be 1 percent, while Germany, France, the United Kingdom and Italy will all grow at even lower rates. In fact, the average for the OECD nations will be just 1.4 percent.

In the case of China, the OECD has forecast a 4.7 percent growth rate for

2024. This is lower than the 10 percent-plus growth rates reached by China until 2010, but still higher than the rate forecast for the other large economies and the 2.4 percent predicted for the world economy.

The Chinese economy's extraordinary dynamism may be lackluster because of the convergence of structural with conjunctural problems. There might be a problem of diminishing returns of capital. China after reform and opening-up facilitated very high rates of private and public capital accumulation.

However, even after most of the unemployed and underemployed workers were incorporated into the economy (the main factor that explains the lifting of massive numbers of people out of poverty), capital accumulation continued at impressive rates. With fewer workers available the labor-capital ratio started to fall and consequently the economy started to endure diminishing returns on capital and slower GDP growth.

Part of this fast rate of capital accumulation is the reason behind the over-investment in housing and office space that has led to one of the conjunctural issues that are hurting the economy at present. These cycles are not unusual in market economies. For the most part, China is a market economy substantially integrated into the world value chains. Therefore, it is also vulnerable to the economic cycle of the Western economies. The difference is that China's pragmatism allows for a more inten-



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sive use of countercyclical intervention policies to correct market imperfections.

The current crisis in part of the real estate sector is similar to what happened in the financial sector of the US in 2023 when several banks (among them, Silicon Valley Bank, Silvergate Bank, First Republic Bank and Signature Bank) went bankrupt causing fears of an economic meltdown.

In spite of the constant attacks from Western politicians and opinion pundits toward the economic authorities of China because of their willingness to use government policies to control the economy, no sooner had the bank crisis occurred that the US government stepped in with the Federal Reserve Funding Program to rescue some of the banks and, more importantly, to prevent a wider contagion that could place the economy in stretches. Far from letting the invisible hand of the market to run the show, the crisis was overcome with the visible hand of the government playing a critical role.

The Chinese government could use

sufficient financial leverage to acquire the debts and the assets (unsold building space) of the real estate giants at discount prices and to sell that empty space at low prices to houseless families and small businesses. In this way, the balance sheets of the creditor banks would be cleared, thereby avoiding a financial crisis and economy-wide negative effects, while real estate ownership would be further democratized.

The sole possible obstacle for the adoption of such a policy is the weight that the real estate bankrupt (and possible corrupt) corporations might have in government circles. However, if past behaviour is a good guide, under the central leadership that likely weight won't play any role.

There are other reasons for China to be optimistic. Protectionism might have peaked given the negative consequences that it has had on the performance of the US and other Western countries without undermining the Chinese trade balance. On the other hand, given the late opening of the Chinese tourist market, a lot will be gained by just recovering the pre-COVID-19 tourist levels. Hence, this year could see a boom in the hospitality business.

In short, there are ways to overcome current anxieties and to retrace the Chinese path of fast economic growth, low unemployment and social mobility in 2024.

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

Liu Xinghua

## Low-carbon progress not equal to slow growth

China saw notable improvement in its ecological environment last year, making admirable progress in its transition to a low-carbon, green economy. And despite the significant increase in economic activity in the post-COVID-19 pandemic period, China remains committed to maintaining the positive trend of improved air quality.

That is because China has intensified efforts to combat air pollution, making the fastest improvement in air quality in the world after having addressed coal-related pollution. Its energy structure, too, is fast improving thanks to the fast-paced development of renewable and new energy sources. In fact, from January to September 2023, China added 172 million kilowatts of renewable energy capacity, up 93 percent year-on-year, making renewable energy an important source of electricity supply.

New green and low-carbon industries and models are thriving in the country, exemplified by the rapid development of new industries — solar photo-voltaic panels, lithium batteries and electric vehicles. Also, while the hydrogen industry is developing at a faster pace, the new energy storage industry has been making swift progress.

Besides, ecosystem protection and restoration efforts have been advancing well, with more than 600 billion yuan (\$83.8 billion) invested in over 10,000 projects in the eco-environmental sector from January to August 2023. And initial successes have been achieved in the construction of the first batch of five new national parks, with an additional 49 national park candidates selected. The parks will cover about 1.1 million square kilometers — making them cumulatively the largest protected area in the world.

But despite China's intensified efforts to achieve the green, low-carbon development goals, some new challenges have emerged in recent years. For instance, some local governments now prioritize meeting the low-carbon assessment targets without assessing the economic rationality of their measures. This has led to phenomena such as "campaign-style carbon reduction", "assault carbon reduction", and a one-size-fits-all approach.

Other challenges include the ad hoc setting of low-carbon environmental standards by some local governments during or after investments in or launch of enterprises, creating confusion in the market. And disorderly development in some areas of the low-carbon industry, exemplified by the new energy vehicle sector, has created problems like oversupply and potential financial risks, as well as underdeveloped carbon trading market and ecosystem degradation.

To solve these problems and realize green and low-carbon development, China has laid out a detailed plan to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060 that mainly focuses on five aspects — building a green, low-carbon and circular development economic system; making energy utilization more efficient; increasing the proportion of non-fossil energy consumption; reducing CO2 emissions; and increasing the carbon sink capacity of ecosystems.

The central authorities also plan to shift national dual control from "single control" to "system control", notably by easing restrictions on clean energy consumption. This will create more ways of reducing CO2 emissions, achieving energy transition and promoting economic development, providing institutional support for peaking carbon emissions and achieving carbon neutrality.

As the world enters the era of low-carbon, green economy, countries across the world are taking the needed steps to expedite energy transition and green industries' development. Accordingly, the competition between countries in green industries is intensifying.

Therefore, to achieve the twin carbon targets on time, and promote overall green socioeconomic development, China needs to make greater efforts, especially in areas such as energy structure transformation, renewable energy integration capacity, and photovoltaic lithium battery production, to achieve the targets.

China is a major carbon emitter, but it has played an important role in global carbon emission reduction. It is the biggest producer of renewable energy and an indispensable force in establishing an effective international carbon market. As a responsible major country committed to helping build a community with a shared future for mankind, China has been working tirelessly to achieve sustainable development across the economic, social and environmental sectors, and following the path of resource-efficient, eco-friendly, green development, to realize the twin carbon goals.

At the industrial development level, China adheres to the green development philosophy in securing all the chains of the industrial, agricultural and service sectors, and is helping build a production system that will promote low-carbon and green circular development, with the focus on creating a market-oriented green technology innovation system. The goal is to enhance the greenness of traditional industries, realize the benign transformation of ecological values and facilitate high-quality development.

China is also committed to promoting the establishment of carbon pricing and carbon reduction mechanisms globally, contributing Chinese solutions to climate change problems.

In conclusion, China's journey toward green, low-carbon development involves overcoming challenges and making greater efforts to build a sustainable future. On Thursday, the central authorities unveiled a guideline for promoting the Beautiful China Initiative, a top-level development blueprint detailing specific targets for a wide range of sectors for the nation's green and high-quality development. Indeed, China is at the forefront of global efforts to combat climate change and build a better, greener future.

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

Shen Yang

## AI will continue to make waves in 2024

In the fast-changing global economic landscape in 2023, artificial intelligence emerged as a driving force behind global development across industries, marking a pivotal moment in technology revolution.

The close relationship between AI technology and hardware advancement is apparent. The potential shortage of global GPU processors is driving hardware innovations, and thus pushing developers to create more economical alternatives. This adaptability to market demands and resource constraints represents a natural selection within the technology ecosystem.

The development of AI agents and intelligent systems signifies a shift from singular to multifunctional AI. The progress extends beyond simple conversational tools to complex tasks such as travel bookings and multimedia processing, showcasing technological maturity and reflecting the diversity and adaptability to market demands, and facilitating the advance of AI across industries.

The integration of AI with other fields, such as autonomous driving, humanoid robots and spatial computing, exemplifies the interconnectedness of industrial ecosystems. It not only fosters innovation but also boosts collaboration across sectors, creating interdependence for mutual growth.

In sectors such as retail and healthcare, generative AI's application illustrates technology's response to the specific needs of industries, providing users with customized solutions and presenting new growth opportunities.

Simultaneously, the transformation of the information and communications technology industry and changes in regulations reflect the dynamic balance in the technology ecosystem. The advancement of AI technology may be constrained by infrastructure fluctuations and skill mismatches. And regulations for AI development reflect society's con-

cerns over the impact of technology on people's lives.

A significant development in 2024 is the potential listing of AI chips (AI Pin), which is a major breakthrough in hardware development, and demonstrates technological advancement and the market's demand for specialized and efficient AI solutions, injecting new vitality into the technology ecosystem.

The permeation of AI in almost all sectors of the economy and its impact on various aspects of human life are a significant feature of internet science and technology and the industrial ecology. This has helped create a diverse and interconnected technological network.

The "emergence of industrial ecology" is clearly evident in the rapidly evolving industrial ecosystem. Thanks to growth of the AI industry, new AI applications have been emerging continually, particularly in the field of AI companions. These companions are the result of not only technological innovation but also adaptation to human needs, marking the diversification of the technology ecosystem.

In 2024, AI developers may primarily focus on achieving breakthroughs in autonomous learning and deep learning, facilitating the widespread application of AI in the healthcare sector and driving intelligent manufacturing, thus leading the transformation of several industries.

The transportation and logistics sectors could see breakthroughs in making autonomous driving safer and more efficient, while the financial sector could undergo further transformation, as AI could make financial services more intelligent and efficient. And the healthcare sector could see more accurate diagnostic and better treatment methods.

As for the competition between China and the United States, it is complex in the field of AI, as the private sector, represented by companies such as

OpenAI and Alphabet Inc, plays a crucial role in AI's development in the US. The US has also realized the importance of maintaining its competitive edge in science and technology and continuing to be the preferred destination for global AI talents.

China, on the other hand, has made significant strides in AI, particularly in image recognition and practical applications. But despite China's massive user base being an advantage in data collection, challenges, including a technological gap, remain. Nevertheless, China's pursuit of AI technology and substantial investments in the sector show its determination to become a global leader in AI.

In terms of global positioning, the US focuses on generative AI to boost its economic and technological advantages, while China extensively applies AI in the security sector and for data integration. And while the US faces challenges in using

advanced AI technology for military purposes, the Chinese government's close ties with the private sector will enable smoother application of AI technology.

Considering text-based large models, the gap between China and the US may narrow, while in multi-modal large models, the gap may widen. In data integration and industrial intelligence, China has the potential to become a leader in several industries, but it may lag behind the US in multi-lingual global applications.

In conclusion, the competition is dynamic involving technological, economic, military and political factors, making it a continually evolving affair. The development of AI will continue to shape the future, with both China and the US playing crucial roles in this transformative journey.

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



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

## GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHANG WEIWEI

## Finding the same wavelength

China and the US share broad common interests that offer a solid foundation on which to build cooperation in tech sector

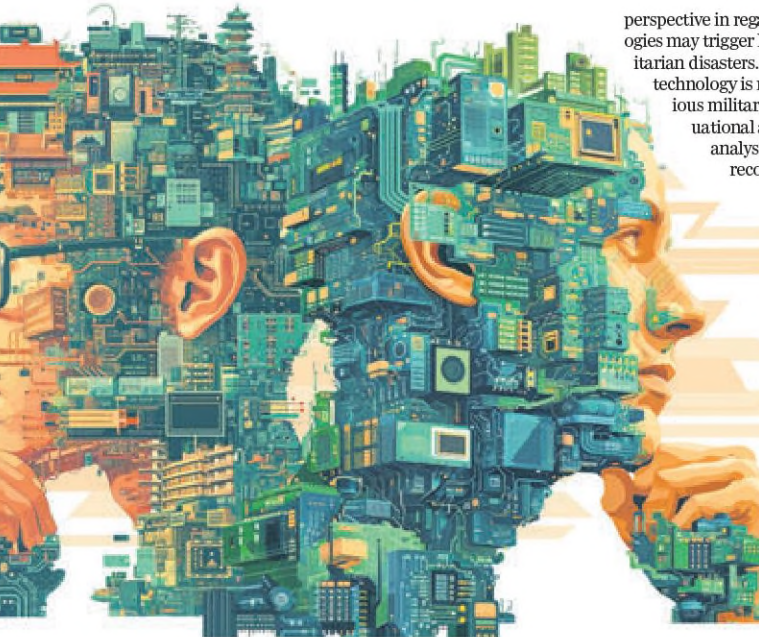
The United States has continuously ramped up its export controls and investment restrictions in a bid to slow down China's technological progress. The relentless escalation of US tech pressure on China will be a drag on innovation for both countries. For China, export controls targeting Chinese entities hinder their access to specific advanced technologies, materials and equipment, impeding technological progress in related industries. Some of China's high-tech products are being squeezed out of developed markets, reducing the profits and growth opportunities for Chinese businesses. The uncertainty in the business climate has significantly reduced both Chinese investment in the US and the inflow of US capital to China. Chinese direct investment in the US has plummeted from \$23.4 billion in 2017 to \$3.2 billion in 2022. Many Chinese tech companies have voluntarily withdrawn from the US market or halted the expansion of their operations. In 2021, US investors reached 426 deals with Chinese tech startups, with a total funding volume of \$87 billion. But in 2022, the numbers dropped to 283 deals and \$46.3 billion respectively, and by the first four months of 2023, they further decreased to fewer than 50 deals and \$8.1 billion.

For the US, severing ties with the Chinese tech market and talent pool poses significant challenges for its tech industries and other sectors. In the field of artificial intelligence, the US is highly dependent on Chinese talent, which accounts for 30 percent of the talent pool in the AI sector. In clean energy, China has successfully reduced the manufacturing costs of solar and wind energy equipment, and it plays an irreplaceable role in promoting a low-carbon economy and addressing climate change for the US. A study published in Science magazine in 2022 warned that the risk of

the US decoupling from China in clean technology would outweigh the benefits. In the biotechnology sector, the US not only relies on Chinese companies for important materials and services but also international students from China. The US also needs international cooperation, including with China, to share the massive costs and risks of research and development.

Erecting barriers to technology and capital flows in an effort to contain China in the technological sector fundamentally reflects the US' economic and technological nationalism and protectionism in recent years. Putting America first, the US has deliberately excluded competitive Chinese innovations from major international markets, forcing other countries to choose higher-priced and lower-quality products. In doing so, it has increased the cost of obtaining high-end products and services for other nations. Its attempts to deliberately suppress China's voice in the formulation of cutting-edge technology standards and rules are also creating a division in the technological system.

The absence of cooperation in the tech sector between China and the US will increase the difficulty of global technology governance. Global technology governance can be divided into three aspects: governance of global issues related to technology, governance of the risks inherent in technological development, and governance rules for



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technological innovation. In the governance of technological issues, the lack of collaboration between the two countries impedes the effectiveness of relevant international mechanisms while weakening the impact of using their respective technological strengths to promote the resolution of relevant issues.

As for the governance of the risks involved in technological development, the ideological framing of technological issues can lead to delays in risk governance. From AI to biotechnology, many emerging technologies have already presented safety and ethical risks, necessitating discussions and strategies to be developed by major countries. These risks are borderless by nature, and a purely competitive

perspective in regard to new technologies may trigger large-scale humanitarian disasters. For example, AI technology is now applied in various military areas such as situational awareness, data analysis, intelligence reconnaissance and unmanned warfare. In the future, the development of weapons that are increasingly intelligent and miniaturized will significantly amplify the catastrophic consequences of international conflicts.

As time goes by, emphasizing the competitive aspect of technology will have increasingly serious and far-reaching negative consequences. Therefore, it is necessary for China and the US to engage in in-depth dialogue on the key issues as soon as possible. During the leaders' summit in San Francisco, the two sides agreed to initiate negotiations to renew the China-US Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement and to establish a government-to-government dialogue mechanism on AI. These are two positive signals sent by the two sides.

The technology ecosystems of China and the US are still highly interdependent. The two sides still share broad common interests, which forms the basis for establishing a positive relationship for competition and cooperation in the tech sector. Both sides can make efforts in the following areas.

First, it is important to restore and expand communication channels, strengthen discussions among think tanks and scholars on strategic and directional issues in bilateral relations, and work toward restarting official strategic dialogues. Second, both sides should focus on building their own capabilities, developing their comparative advantages, and avoiding disruptions to the international technology ecosystem. Once both sides choose not to deliberately exclude each other, more opportunities for cooperation can be identified. Third, it is imperative to clarify rules and broaden their shared interests. In the economic and social application of technologies, the two sides can conduct cooperation to some extent on cost reduction, mutual learning of business models, market segmentation, or engage in differentiated competition. Consensus can be reached on how to expand increments and fairly distribute benefits. Fourth, the two sides should engage in dialogues to jointly address global challenges, such as climate change, environmental transformation, energy security, infectious diseases, and biodiversity protection, and this would also help the two sides to accumulate mutual trust. They can also hold discussions on the responsible application of technology in order to establish behavioral norms. China and the US share a common responsibility for global technology governance. They should cooperate to jointly tackle the major technological challenges related to the future of humanity.

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CHEN SHUMEI

## Chance favors the prepared

Chinese tech companies should be aware of the risks when venturing into overseas markets with their core technologies

After more than 40 years of reform and opening-up, the private sector has become a dynamic part of the Chinese economy.

In 2022, private enterprises accounted for 93.3 percent of the total in China. By April 2023, registered private firms surpassed 50 million. According to data from the General Administration of Customs, the import and export volume of private enterprises in 2022 accounted for 50.9 percent, exceeding half of the country's total foreign trade for the first time. In the first 10 months of 2023, the share reached 53.1 percent.

Leveraging the opportunities from China's continuous opening-up, private tech companies have been expanding their overseas business, from exporting products, to expanding their channels and brands in the overseas markets. While they have made some achievements, they are also exposed to risks.

In the era of globalization, the nature of major power competition has changed. The focus has shifted from traditional security to non-traditional security issues, such as ensuring the stability and security of industry and supply chains.

One of the United States' long-term strategic goals is to maintain a competitive advantage in high-end industries to prevent a structural crisis in its economy. That makes China's growing high-tech industry a target in the eyes of the US and its allies.

It is a common strategy among Chinese tech companies to venture into overseas markets with their core technologies. However, there are risks of being copied and losing

**To prevent risks, Chinese tech companies need to understand the approval processes and geographical limitations for intellectual property protection in the destination market, and draw up their plans accordingly.**

core advantages.

Moreover, when Chinese tech companies leverage domestic-born technologies to expand overseas businesses, they can face restrictions imposed by the destination country or region. Some host countries, under the pretext of protecting intellectual property rights, make it difficult for Chinese companies to transfer the technology developed overseas back to the Chinese market, preventing Chinese technologies from upgrading.

Competitors' strategic use of intellectual property is the primary risk faced by Chinese tech companies when going global, apart from their own technical issues. If a company loses a lawsuit over overseas intellectual property, it often has to pay a large sum of fees and may even be forced to withdraw from the overseas market. Infringement disputes can lead to a decline in customer trust and purchasing intentions, resulting in

a loss of market share. Being entangled in lawsuits can affect market expansion and even threaten national security.

Currently, Chinese companies continue to face a large number of intellectual property disputes in developed economies such as the US. The US and its allies also keep imposing interventions and restrictions on Chinese tech companies such as Huawei. This not only seriously hinders the development of these companies, but also threatens the security of related Chinese industries and supply chains, and endangers China's national security.

To prevent risks, Chinese tech companies need to understand the approval processes and geographical limitations for intellectual property protection in the destination market, and draw up their plans accordingly. It is necessary to leverage the overseas service network for intellectual property dispute response guidance created by the Chinese government, and gradually improve the pre-risk analysis and post-risk response mechanisms as part of a sound prevention and control system for overseas risks.

Second, private tech companies should make their best efforts to meet the intellectual property rights compliance requirements in the target markets. Take the automotive industry as an example. One of the major risks faced by Chinese car exporters is the Standard Essential Patents (SEP) risk. To make the "going global" journey easier, companies must carefully study the SEP risks, make strategic patent plans in advance, and identify potential security risks related



TONG JIAHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

to intellectual property, in order to effectively avoid patent infringement lawsuits from competitors.

Last, it is important to strengthen international cooperation between tech companies. On Aug 25, 2023, Huawei and Ericsson, major mobile communication SEP contributors, announced the signing of a long-term global patent cross-licensing agreement, granting both parties global access to each other's patented, standardized technologies. It is noteworthy that Huawei was on the US Section

337 investigation list 10 years ago, but was removed from the list recently.

Over the years, Huawei has been committed to independent innovation and intellectual property rights protection, and has established a sound intellectual property risk control mechanism. Once a follower and practitioner of intellectual property rules, it has become a contributor of intellectual property rights. In 2022 alone, Huawei's intellectual property revenue reached approximately \$560

million, mainly from SEPs. Huawei's cumulative payments for patent licensing fees are about three times the licensing income.

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# LIFE

## A shared celebration of cultures

China and France mark a key anniversary with events that showcase exchanges, **Fang Aiqing** reports.



For the first time, portraits and belongings of three emperors of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) — namely Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong — and three contemporaneous French kings — Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI — will be on show at one exhibition in Beijing.

Entitled *The Palace of Versailles and the Forbidden City*, the exhibition will be unveiled at the Palace Museum, also known as the Forbidden City, from April 1.

More than 180 exhibits collected by the two museums will provide a glimpse of the interactions between the Chinese and French royal courts from the end of the 17th century to the end of the 18th century.

They will showcase their diplomatic, cultural and artistic exchanges, as well as their mutual trust and respect in political activities, and shared interest in and admiration of each other's cultures, according to Guo Fuxiang, deputy director of the Department of Court History at the Palace Museum and the curator for the exhibition on the Chinese side.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and France, and the exhibition will be part of the celebration.

In 2014, the Palace of Versailles held an exhibition featuring China-related oil paintings, sketches, woodblock paintings, textiles, pottery and lacquerware, among other items, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations.

It was on the basis of the 2014 exhibition that the two museums decided to host a larger-scale and more comprehensive version, Guo said at a news conference on Jan 4.

The Palace of Versailles will bring to Beijing its new collection of Chinese art pieces or those objects inspired by Chinese art, including a Chinese-style silver pot from the envoys of Siam (now Thailand) in 1686 as a tribute to King Louis XIV and Chinese porcelain tableware decorated with armorial bearings



of King Louis XV.

The 105 pieces of cultural relics from the French museum to be on show represent the French court's fascination with Chinese culture and civilization, and the inspiration French artists and intellectuals got from Chinese art, according to Guo.

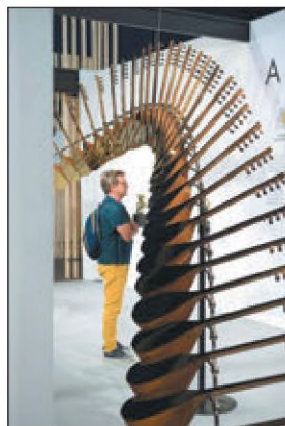
By seeing another 72 pieces housed at the Palace Museum in Beijing, including French paintings, antique clocks and watches, scientific instruments and books, visitors can feel the French influence at the royal Qing palace.

They will learn about direct interactions between Emperor Kangxi and King Louis XIV — a pocket watch sent by the French monarch to the Chinese ruler as a gift, for example — tailored artworks from France that were ordered by the Qing court and pieces made by French artisans working for the Qing court.

To celebrate the 60-year diplomatic bond between the two countries and enhance friendship, a variety of other events for the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism will be held in both countries.

France's Ambassador to China Bertrand Lortholary says the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism is to demonstrate the fruitful achievements and vitality of cultural and people-to-people exchanges and highlight cooperation.

He hopes that these events will



**Clockwise from top:** Events for the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism include the ballet *La Sylphide* by France's National Opera of Bordeaux; an exhibition featuring palaces from the Napoleon Bonaparte era; a Sino-French collaboration opera *Romeo and Juliet*, to be staged in Beijing; a Beijing crafts fair, part of France's Revelations International Biennial of Crafts and Creation, in September; and *Les Misérables*, directed by Jean Bellerini and starring actor Liu Ye (right), later this month.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



make the people in both countries know more about — and rediscover — each other's cultures and arouse interest in visiting each other's nation to experience travel attractions and cultural heritage in person.

On Jan 5, when the 40th International Ice and Snow Festival kicked off in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism was also unveiled, with giant ice sculptures of the Temple of Heaven in Beijing and Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, which will reopen at the end of the year after restoration, standing shoulder to shoulder at Harbin Ice and Snow

World, a landmark theme park.

Chinese and French artists will work together to stage French composer Charles Gounod's five-act opera *Romeo and Juliet* at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing from Jan 25 to 28.

A theater version of *Les Misérables* and popular musicals *Notre-Dame de Paris*, *Don Juan* and *Mozart, l'Opera Rock* will tour the country.

Solo exhibitions of French contemporary artists, such as sculptor Jean Cardot, a member of the French Academy of Fine Arts, installation artist Annette Messager and conceptual artist Bernar Venet, will

be launched. And an augmented reality show will be leading the audience into an immersive voyage through the 850-year history of Notre-Dame, from its construction to the restoration after the catastrophic fire in 2019.

The Tandem festival, featuring Chinese and French contemporary literature, and the award ceremony of the Fu Lei Translation and Publishing Awards, both initiated by the French embassy in China, will mark the yearlong celebration with an insightful ending, according to Nicolas Pillere, minister counselor for culture, education and scientific affairs of the embassy.

Conductor Li Xincao, the China National Traditional Orchestra and the Northern Kunqu Opera Theatre will give a concert at the Royal Opera Versailles in Paris, together with its resident orchestra, on Jan 31, as an overture for events spanning the whole year in France, according to Zheng Hao, a first-level inspector at the Bureau of International Exchange and Cooperation of China's Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Renowned composer and conductor Tan Dun and the China National Symphony Orchestra, in collaboration with influential local soloists, will be touring French cities with classical musical pieces from both countries.

A Tang Dynasty (618-907) artifact exhibition will be held at the Guimet Museum, also known as the National Museum of Asian Arts, in Paris, featuring more than 200 exhibits, including pottery figurines, *tangsancai* (tricolored glazed pottery), textiles, calligraphy and paintings, among others.

China's regional cultural traditions, such as the lanterns of Zigong, Sichuan province; porcelain from Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province; as well as kites from Weifang, Shandong province, will also be highlighted in various events in cities like Paris, Bellac, Amneville and Montauban.

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### What's on

#### Paper-cuts



Since its establishment, the National Art Museum of China has regarded the collection, and research into, folk arts and crafts as one of its core commitments. It has accumulated a diverse assembly of paper-cuts created in various areas by different ethnic groups. At *A Magic Touch on Paper*, an exhibition running through to Jan 23, the museum is

showing a vivid selection of such works. Paper-cuts are one of the best folk arts to reflect agriculture, as well as social and cultural diversity. The craft is practiced by people of many ages and inspires their imaginations and creativity. The works depict fairy tales, mythological characters and stories from history to entertain, educate and pass on traditions. Works on show include those by famed folk artists, who spent their whole lives in the countryside. *9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 1 Wusi Dajie, Dongcheng district, Beijing. 010-6400-1476.*

#### Shanbei music

The folk songs that have long been

sung on the Loess Plateau, in the extensive Shanbei region in the northern part of the Shaanxi province, are an encyclopedic collection of melodies to reveal the history, social life, culture, customs and beliefs of the communities in the area. The tunes are free-spirited, and the emotions are rich. An ongoing exhibition at the Chinese Traditional Culture Museum zooms in on how this unique tradi-



tion had been preserved in Yulin, Shaanxi. It re-creates the social and cultural atmospheres of Shanbei to bring people into the history of how those songs were created amid farmwork, festival celebrations and marriages. Their happiness, sadness, pain and anger have been given full expression in the melodies. The exhibition will end on June 27. *9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 16 Hujing Donglu, Chaoyang district, Beijing. 010-8799-1766/1866.*

#### Master's circles

Qi Baiishi was one of the most accomplished and productive artists of the 20th century. His career spanned decades and was marked by several turning points associated



with his mentors and close friends. For example, he was invited by his friend, Xia Wuyi, to travel in Shaanxi province in 1902. This became the first of a series of extensive journeys in the country. These trips helped expand his vision and inspired him to carry out important

explorations in art. *Splendid and Rich*, an exhibition at the Liaoning Provincial Museum, focuses on Qi and his circle of mentors, friends and disciples, and how these relationships influenced his creation and career. It shows paintings, calligraphic pieces and engraved seals, some of which were co-created by Qi and people who had special places in his life, such as Hu Qinyuan, his teacher and sponsor in his younger years. The exhibition marks the 160th anniversary of Qi's birth. It runs until March 23. *9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 157 Zhuhai Sanjie, Hunnan district, Shenyang, Liaoning province. 024-2320-5102.*

CHINA DAILY

LIFE



# Legacies longer than lifetimes

Excavations of an ancient cemetery in Shaanxi are uncovering stories about its elite occupants, **Wang Ru** reports.

People perish but can still tell so many stories long after.

Since the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), the Hongdu Plateau in the north of what is now Xianyang, Shaanxi province, was a popular final resting place for those of high social status.

As a result, archaeologists have discovered a large number of prominent figures' tombs there, including nine emperors' and their family members' mausoleums dating to the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24).

Now, in the central area of the plateau, a new discovery has unveiled the largest independent cemetery consisting of tombs ranging from the Sixteen Kingdoms period (304-439) to the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

The latest discoveries at the Beichengcun (Beicheng village) cemetery site in Shaanxi's Xixian New Area, near the provincial capital Xi'an, were recently announced by the National Cultural Heritage Administration in Beijing.

The archaeological excavations from 2021 to 2023 were carried out by the Xi'an Municipal Institute of Cultural Relics Conservation and Archaeology.

Archaeologists have uncovered a moat surrounding the cemetery, identified 301 tombs and excavated 285.

According to Chai Yi, a researcher at the institute, they have basically determined the more than 80,000-square-meter graveyard's scope and layout.

The moat is 350 meters long and 260 meters wide, and dates back to the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534).

The tombs are well-organized in rows from west to east, with their passages facing eastward, says Chai.

### Time and place

The tombs can be divided into three periods.

The first one, the Sixteen Kingdoms period, has 38 tombs in four rows in the northeast. These are all catacombs with long sloping passages, a common design in central Shaanxi since the Western Han, says Chai. Artifacts unearthed from these tombs include clay figurines, lamps and cooking stoves.

In this year's excavation, archaeologists have found a tomb containing carved earthen replicas of wooden structures and engravings on the soil walls of the burial rooms that resemble wooden beams' frames that were commonly used by the Han ethnic group. This practice is rare and is believed to have emerged during the Sixteen Kingdoms period in central Shaanxi, according to Wei Zheng, an archaeology professor at Peking University.

According to Chai, this is often

viewed as a reflection of ancient Chinese people's ideas about life and death — that is, to serve the dead as if they were living — and shows other ethnic groups' absorption of Han culture in the Sixteen Kingdoms period.

The five rows of 101 tombs of the second period — from the Northern Wei to the Western Wei Dynasty (535-556) — are to the south and west of those of the earlier period. The majority of them are also catacombs with long, sloping passages. But only a few artifacts have been unearthed from these tombs, including coins, clay jars and a model couch.

No 325 tomb yielded a tomb brick with the inscription "Year 13 (AD 489) of the Taihe era" from the Northern Wei Dynasty. No 135 yielded another with "Year 15 (AD 549) of the Datong era" from the Western Wei Dynasty.

The other 146 tombs are from the Northern Zhou (557-581), Sui (581-618) and Tang dynasties, in the west, northeast and other empty areas of the cemetery. They are either catacombs with long slopes or vertical passages. The latter were also common in central Shaanxi at that time, according to Chai.

Not many artifacts have been unearthed from these tombs, except for a few clay pots, cups, coins and inscribed bricks.

Archaeologists have also analyzed the human bones discovered there.

"Through analysis, we have found the bones belonged to about 400 individuals, and the sex ratio is generally balanced — 100 females per 130 males. Most were between 25 and 50 years old," says Chai.

Since the scale of the cemetery is much larger than that of a single clan and the tombs' orientations remain consistent across different periods, unlike the neighboring tombs outside the moat from the same time period, archaeologists believe that they belong to a tribe, and those buried there must have a blood or geographical relationship.

### Extended connections

"This cemetery demonstrates that these people have maintained the traditional funeral customs of their own group for a long time. ... Moreover, archaeometric analysis reveals they probably had close links with some groups like the Qiang ethnic group, and Di and Rong tribes," says Chai.

Although owners of the cemetery probably belonged to a non-Han group, the features of the cemetery, including the layout of the tombs and the unearthed artifacts like clay figurines, coins and bronze mirrors, are not very different from those of the contemporaneous culture from Central China. This reveals cultural



**Top left:** A clay artifact of a soldier riding a horse unearthed from Beichengcun cemetery site in the Xixian New Area, Shaanxi province. **From top:** Clay figurines discovered at the cemetery; tombs dating back to the Sixteen Kingdoms period in the graveyard; engravings on the soil walls of a burial room resemble wooden beams' frames in a tomb. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

communication and integration at that time, says Jiao Nanfeng, a researcher at the Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology.

The Sixteen Kingdoms period marked a time of wars and short-lived regimes established by many different people. But it was also crucial to the cultural exchanges that formed the shared community of the Chinese nation.

Chai also mentions most of these people mostly ate plant-based food, complemented by some meat.

Moreover, the grades of the tombs seem to gradually decline across the three periods.

During the Sixteen Kingdoms, the tombs were large and for middle-class officials or aristocracy, as demonstrated by their scale and unearthed artifacts. But from the Northern Wei to Western Wei, the tombs were middle-sized, with far fewer burial objects. In the latest period, the tombs were small and probably for ordinary people, according to Chai.

"Through these discoveries, we can infer that these people had a high social status during the Sixteen Kingdoms period," she says.

"Although they still had some status from the Northern Wei to the Western Wei periods, they obviously saw it decline as compared with before. In the last period, they were not different from ordinary people. It shows the dynamic changes in the cemetery across time," says Chai.

According to Jiao, the cemetery can be regarded as an important discovery in the history of China's archaeological studies of tombs.

"The Beichengcun site is a large-scale graveyard from the Sixteen Kingdoms period, Northern Dynasty (386-581), Sui and Tang periods. It has a long history and is well-preserved," says Jiao.

"It was used for more than 300 years. In ancient China, about 20 years was a generation. By this measurement, about 15 generations of people were buried in this cemetery.

"Its legacy spans such a long time, and its tombs, which are around the same sizes, are distributed in an orderly fashion. ... We haven't seen another contemporaneous cemetery like this in China," he adds.

According to Jiao, archaeologists didn't know much about tombs from the Sixteen Kingdoms period until recently. This graveyard hosts the largest number of graves dating to that period discovered at a single site, he adds.

Chai says DNA analyses will be conducted on all of the human bones to get more information about these people.

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CHENGDU — Nestled in a gorge near the upper reaches of the Minjiang River in Southwest China's Sichuan province, Taoping Qiang village has existed for over two millennia.

Originally constructed for military defense, the village's watchtower has seen the flames of war extinguished over the ages and is now a tourist attraction. Surviving the devastating 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, the tower still stands tall and now bears witness to the area's transformation.

The village was reconstructed in the aftermath, and a new village in the same architectural style was built nearby, with many residents choosing to move there for a better quality of life. Today, visitors are drawn to the picturesque village, bringing prosperity to the local tourism industry.

By Dec 25, the Taoping village area had welcomed 189,000 tourists in 2023, driving sales of local farm products to 30.8 million yuan (\$4.35 million) and generating over 95.2 million yuan in tourism revenue.

The skyrocketing sector has brought new opportunities and tangible benefits to locals, such as Maixi, who is a member of the Qiang ethnic group. Her journey has mirrored the remarkable development of her hometown.

Maixi, one of eight children,

## Tourism revives millennia-old Qiang village



**Left:** Ethnic Qiang people dance to greet the new year according to their traditional calendar in Taoping Qiang village, Aba Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture, Sichuan province. HE HAIYANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



**Right:** The village's traditional-style architecture. XU JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

worked as a shepherd when she was a girl. Now 60, she has achieved prosperity by converting her ancestral home into a homestay business.

And she has expanded her hospitality venture by opening a four-story homestay in the new village, drawing in a steady stream of repeat

customers, who enjoy her signature dish of a hearty soup with cornmeal and pickled vegetables.

Maixi is committed to quality and insists on offering only organic ingredients to her customers, even if it means narrowing her profit margins. She harvests many of the ingredi-

ents herself, and homegrown plums are provided to all guests as a complimentary after-dinner snack.

She is not shy about saying she now leads a life that seemed unattainable in her youth. The income her family brought in by selling Sichuan peppers was essential dur-

ing her childhood, she remembers, and the children would work alongside the adults all day long throughout the harvest season as sun-dried peppers fetched a high price.

"With over 440 households and a population of more than 1,300, the village no longer relies on herding.

Half of our workforce is now involved in tourism, and we also cultivate over 1,000 *mu* (67 hectares) of cherries and various other fruits. In recent years, the average income per *mu* has been about 60,000 yuan," says Yang Buyi, Party chief of Taoping.

People of the Qiang ethnic group have not only witnessed the post-quake reconstruction of their hometown and watched it transform into a thriving tourist destination, but also experienced the resurgence and flourishing of the Qiang culture.

"My family has lived here for generations, so I am delighted to witness the prosperity of the village and the continuation of the Qiang culture," says Wang Jiajun, standing amid a crowd of visitors in the folk culture museum he established.

Wang, who is over 80 years old, spent more than 20 years collecting over 1,000 Qiang artifacts for the museum, where they are displayed today.

"Look at these three sets of local artifacts — cauldrons crafted from clay, copper and iron. Despite the passage of over 1,000 years, their forms remain unchanged," Wang says. "This is a symbol of cultural inheritance, and I hope that our excellent traditional culture will continue to be passed down."

XINHUA

# CULTURE



Professor Liu Hongli and international students at a Spring Festival calligraphy event at Beijing University of Technology in January 2023. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## The write way

International students experience depth of Chinese culture through its calligraphy, **Cai Hong** reports.

Every Wednesday afternoon, Le Duc An, a Vietnamese PhD student at Beijing University of Technology, practices what he says is a way to elevate his "mind, body and spirit."

Le, 33, has practised Chinese calligraphy for nearly three years at the campus calligraphy club.

"Chinese calligraphy has not only cultivated qualities of patience, care and perseverance in me, it has also significantly helped me learn more about China, especially its culture," Le said.

Chinese calligraphy has been widely regarded as a good way to strengthen one's will and to lead a healthy life. While one is practicing Chinese calligraphy, one has to calm the mind, body and breath, and focus on writing, according to its adherents. The breath is smooth, and the mind is peaceful and joyful, they say.

"I was exposed to Vietnamese calligraphy when I was a child and it was one of the things that impressed me the most," Le said.

As Le saw films about Chinese culture, the seeds of his interest in Chinese calligraphy grew, he said.

When he came to Beijing in 2019 for his PhD studies focusing on the environment, Le also spent more time on Chinese calligraphy. He joined the calligraphy club in 2020, embarking firmly on his journey of learning the art.

"I have a lot of projects and a busy schedule as a PhD student," he said. "But I still conscientiously attend calligraphy classes on time."

Le said he did not understand the techniques for Chinese calligraphy initially, but at the calligraphy classes taught by the university's Professor Liu Hongli, 40, Le said he steadily began to grasp the art's basic strokes.

All Chinese characters are formed from the strokes. Liu started by having the international students meticulously follow the way she wrote the Chinese characters. She also encouraged them to write the characters on fans and lanterns, which greatly increased their interest in practicing calligraphy.

"I tell them what each character

means," Liu said. "Le has shown a great interest in Chinese characters, and he is very conscientious and persistent!"

To obtain a deeper understanding of Chinese calligraphy, Le has visited many ancient buildings in Beijing, including the Confucius Temple and the Forbidden City. He also frequents art galleries.

These places where he has seen numerous treasured scrolls of calligraphy have left a profound impression on him and are a major source of inspiration, Le said.

He has also participated in many calligraphy competitions in the school and beyond, including international events.

"The international students have a feeling of accomplishment in calligraphy class not just for the art itself, but also because of their love for traditional Chinese culture," Liu said.

For Le, Chinese calligraphy can be also a way to make friends who have the same interest in Chinese culture. One of his friends is Kim Joon-yeop, 23, from South Korea, majoring in international Chinese at the university. Kim joined the calligraphy club in 2021.

"Le is a PhD student and I am an undergraduate, so basically we may not have had a chance to really know each other," Kim said.

"But our common interest in Chinese culture brought us together at the calligraphy club," he said. "Le is a classmate who treats practicing calligraphy with great dedication."

Kim himself began learning the Chinese language at high school in his country. When he arrived in China and began to understand the history of its oracle bone inscriptions, an ancient form of Chinese characters, he was amazed.

"It was the first time I really understood that writing had its own history," he said.

The earliest known examples of Chinese writing include the inscriptions on animal bones and tortoise shells, offering records of divination and prayers to gods by people in the Shang Dynasty (c.16th century-11th century BC). Omens were deciphered from the cracks made by burning the bones.

Since the fourth century, calligraphy has been practised, prized and collected as an elite visual art.

From as early as the 10th century, calligraphy was also a key component of the imperial civil service examinations. Honing one's writing could pave a path to power and prestige.

### Spiritual elevation

In the 20th century, calligraphy remained central to Chinese art, expressing an enduring relationship with history. In the 21st century, it gives Chinese artists a distinctive voice in global art.

"The first time I dipped brush into ink, I didn't like the strong smell," Kim said.

With the help of professor Liu, Kim said he gradually understood the meaning behind Chinese characters and the techniques for calligraphy.

"Now I find an aroma of calligraphy in the ink," he said.

Kim also has participated in many major calligraphy activities, such as competitions for foreign students in Beijing.

"I once signed up for an event where we were required to write 50 Chinese characters and I practised my writing skills on 20 sheets of paper," he said.

Like Le, Kim said he experiences a kind of spiritual elevation from Chinese calligraphy.

The Korean student has also begun sharing calligraphy works with his family and friends.

"If I have my own students in the future, I will also teach them about the culture of Chinese calligraphy, just like Professor Liu," Kim said.

Le, who plans to return to Vietnam after completing his studies, said he also wants to continue practicing calligraphy.

"Calligraphy has become a part of me," Le said. "Whenever I see Chinese calligraphy works from different dynasties, sculptures and other historical sites, I'm very impressed by the vastness and depth of Chinese culture."

Cao Chenyuan, Chang Aohan and Yu Jia'ao contributed to this story.

Chinese calligraphy has ... significantly helped me learn more about China, especially its culture."

Le Duc An, Vietnamese PhD student at Beijing University of Technology



Clockwise from top: Calligraphy works by Vietnamese PhD student Le Duc An and his classmates are on display at a class on Sept 8, 2023. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY. Le Duc An shows an example of his calligraphy at Beijing University of Technology in August 2023. PHOTOS BY CHANG AOHAN. Le Duc An paints and makes seals at an event at the Beijing Ceramic Museum on May 5, 2023. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



From left: Professor Liu Hongli teaches international students to write calligraphy at Beijing University of Technology in October 2019. Vietnamese PhD student Le Duc An attends a cultural event to make seals at the Beijing Ceramic Museum on May 5, 2023. Korean student Kim Joon-yeop practises calligraphy during a class on Sept 13, 2023. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

