

In the trade vanguard

Gansu province remains a meeting point for Eastern and Western cultures

CHINA, PAGE 5



Production will focus on mature chips

BUSINESS, PAGE 8



Swift triumph

Fans of international pop star swap the stage for silver screen

LIFE, PAGE 14

# CHINA DAILY

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## Forces of nature



A volcano in southwestern Iceland erupts on Sunday for the second time in less than a month, spewing smoke, ash and lava. Authorities evacuated the nearby fishing town of Grindavik following a swarm of minor earthquakes that preceded the eruption. ICELANDIC DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL PROTECTION AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT / AFP

## One-China principle a firm global trend

By MO JINGXI  
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China said on Monday it stands ready to work with Nauru to open new chapters in their bilateral relations on the basis of the one-China principle after the Pacific Island nation announced that it is severing "diplomatic ties" with the Taiwan authorities and is willing to reestablish diplomatic relations with China.

In a statement released on Monday, the government of Nauru said it will follow United Nations Resolution 2758, which recognizes the People's Republic of China as the sole legal government representing the whole of China and recognizes Taiwan as an inalienable part of China's territory.

The Nauru government stated that the country will no longer develop any official relations or official exchanges with the Taiwan region, which now only maintains

so-called "diplomatic relations" with 12 countries.

Speaking at a regular news briefing in Beijing on Monday, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said that China appreciates and welcomes the decision made by Nauru as an independent sovereign country.

Noting that China has established diplomatic relations with 182 countries on the basis of the one-China principle, Mao said that Nauru's decision "once again shows that the one-China principle is where global opinion trends and where the arc of history bends".

Chen Binhua, a spokesman for the State Council Taiwan Affairs Office, said that it is a prevailing consensus among the international community that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's sacred territory.

"We appreciate the correct choice made by the relevant country in conforming to the trend," he said.

At the news briefing, the Foreign Ministry spokeswoman also appre-

ciated public remarks made by Russia, Indonesia, South Africa, Kazakhstan, Hungary and other countries and international organizations that reiterated their adherence to the one-China principle and opposition to any form of "Taiwan independence".

"It is the call for justice and peace that shows the international community's broad consensus on upholding the UN Charter and the basic norms governing international relations," Mao said.

The spokeswoman said that whatever changes take place in Taiwan, the basic fact that there is only one China in the world of which Taiwan is a part will not change.

"We firmly believe that the Chinese people's just cause of opposing 'Taiwan independence' separatist activities and external interference and striving to achieve national reunification will be understood and supported by more," she said. Mao said that China firmly

opposes the United States interfering in Taiwan affairs in any way or under any pretext, after a delegation sent by US President Joe Biden's administration met on Monday with Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen and the region's "president-elect" Lai Ching-te.

"We urge the US side to handle Taiwan-related issues with the greatest prudence, stop fudging or hollowing out the one-China principle in any form and stop sending any wrong signals to the separatist forces for 'Taiwan independence,'" Mao said.

According to the spokeswoman, a series of legal instruments, including the Cairo Declaration of 1943, have made it a historical and legal fact that Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory.

"Though the mainland and Taiwan have yet to reunify, China's sovereignty and territorial integrity have never been divided. This is the true status quo in the Taiwan Strait. The complete reunification of our country will be realized and Taiwan will return to the motherland," Mao said.

### WORLD WATCH By Zhu Feng

"balloon" incident, Tsai Ing-wen's "transit" trips through the US, the visit to the Taiwan region by a US congressional delegation, and other events, China has insisted on the kind of China-US relations defined by mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.

China and the US have resumed high-level dialogues and official visits. The meeting between the leaders of the US and China on the sidelines of the APEC Economic Leaders' Meeting in San Francisco in November fostered what has been called the "San Francisco vision", opening new space for managing conflicts and stabilizing relations.

Looking back at 2023, in the face of China's stable economic growth after the COVID-19 pandemic, Beijing's flexible responses to Washington's containment efforts, the prolonged Ukraine crisis, the intensification of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other international tensions and turbulence, the administration of US President Joe Biden needs to seek alternatives in order to stabilize the China-US relationship within the framework of strategic competition. Although no substantial progress has been made

See *Collaboration*, page 4

## NATION PRESSES THE ACCELERATOR ON RAIL DEVELOPMENT

Strengthened international cooperation sees numerous projects launched

By LUO WANGSHU  
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Last year was a fruitful one for China's expertise in building railway networks, which gained wider recognition from the international community.

In April, passenger service began on the China-Laos Railway. As of Dec 5, the cross-border link had handled more than 100,000 trips by travelers from over 70 countries.

In October, the high-profile Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway commenced operation in Indonesia — the first such line in Southeast Asia. The project was the first overseas venture to rely wholly on Chinese railway systems, technology and components.

Seven months earlier, the Chinese-built Belgrade- Novi Sad section of the Serbia-Hungary Railway marked the first anniversary

### In-depth

sary of its operation. Nearly 3 million passenger trips were made on the line in its first year.

Ju Guojiang, president of China Railway International, a subsidiary of China State Railway Group, which supervises overseas railway projects, said, "The biggest advantage of Chinese rail going global is that we have a comprehensive system that includes all the elements needed and the entire industry chain."

"This means that China can offer a comprehensive plan, including surveying, designing and construction, as well as providing all supplies and materials. We can also offer operating plans following the opening of a railway," Ju added.

See *Projects*, page 2

## Xi, Iowa friend agree youths hold key to ties

President's plan for visits by 50,000 students from US hailed as a way to boost friendship

By ZHANG YUNBI in Beijing and MAY ZHOU in Houston

Sarah Lande, a resident of Muscatine in the US state of Iowa and an old friend of President Xi Jinping's, nodded with a smile when Xi unveiled an ambitious plan for China-US people-to-people exchanges at a dinner reception in San Francisco in November.

"I also wish to announce here that to increase exchanges between our peoples, especially between the youth, China is ready to invite 50,000 young Americans to China on exchange and study programs in the next five years," Xi said in his speech at the welcoming dinner, which was hosted by friendly United States organizations.

Lande went home and wrote a letter to Xi, noting that his plan was encouraging, and saying that she hoped Muscatine High School could be part of the program.

Xi wrote in a reply letter on Jan 4, "I welcome the students of Muscatine to participate in this project."

Lande said she was "honored" to hear from Xi, and that her "heart was warmed" to receive greetings as well from Xi's wife, Peng Liyuan, in the letter.

In his reply, Xi said the future growth of China-US ties "needs to rely even more on the two peoples", and he added that he hoped more young people from the US will visit China, see China with their own

eyes and "build more bridges" between the two peoples.

Lande told China Daily, "The deep, long-term friendship between old friends in China and the US has built a strong foundation for our young people to participate in student exchanges and become the citizen diplomats of the future."

Lande, former executive director of the nonprofit organization Iowa Sister States, first met Xi in 1985 when he visited Muscatine as secretary of the Communist Party of China Zhengding county committee in Hebei province. She was one of the organizers of that visit.

When recalling the 1985 visit during the November reception in San Francisco, Xi told guests including Lande: "The days I spent with them are unforgettable. For me, they represent America."

They first reunited when Xi made a trip to the US in 2012 as China's vice-president and visited Lande's home for a big get-together with people he has affectionately referred to as his "old friends" in Iowa.

In 2022, Xi sent a reply after Lande wrote to him and enclosed, as a gift, a copy of her memoir "Old Friends": *The Xi Jinping-Iowa Story*.

"Peace through friendship and trust is the hope for future China-US relations," Lande told China Daily.

Xi's recent reply letter "is part of the story about a friendship that

See *Ties*, page 3

## Cool snap



Visitors pose for photos with an ice sculpture of a giant panda on Saturday during the annual Hwacheon Sancheoneo Ice Festival in Gangwon Province, South Korea. The ice sculptures for the festival were created by artists from Harbin in Northeast China's Heilongjiang province. The festival, which also involves activities such as fishing, sledding and ice soccer, started on Jan 7 and runs through Jan 28.

YANG CHANG / XINHUA

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## PAGE TWO

## Projects: Overseas successes celebrated



A photo taken from a drone shows Tegalluar station in Bandung, Indonesia. By the end of last year, more than one million people had taken the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway. XU QIN / XINHUA

2023  
year in  
Review

From page 1

For example, when there was a shortage of a particular type of material before the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway opened, an urgent shipment from China solved the problem, Ju said.

"If a similar problem occurred in Europe, it may take six months to a year to tackle it. Thanks to China's strong industrial capability to solve comprehensive problems, we can resolve such difficulties in just one month," he added.

China State Railway Group said the nation's rail sector has strengthened international cooperation by insisting on adhering to the principles of maintaining high standards and sustainability while benefiting the people. The sector also focuses on assisting the Belt and Road Initiative and sharing the experiences of railway construction and operation globally.

## Travel time cut

The 142-kilometer Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, which has a designated maximum speed of 350 kilometers per hour, cut travel time between the Indonesian capital and the popular tourist destination from 3 hours 30 minutes to 40 minutes.

As of Dec 24, the railway had handled more than 1 million passenger trips.

The rapidly growing passenger flow prompted PT Kereta Cepat Indonesia-China, or PT KCIC, a joint venture consortium between Indonesian and Chinese companies that constructs and operates the railway, to increase services to 48 trips a day, up from just 14 previously.

Inspired by the sound of a fast-moving train, Indonesians named the bullet train "Whoosh".

Indonesian President Joko Widodo officially opened the railway on Oct 2, after taking a test ride on it with several top Indonesian officials the previous month. Services began commercial operation on Oct 17.

Widodo said the construction of the bullet train marked Indonesia's modernization, adding that it also showed the nation could operate an efficient, eco-friendly public transportation system.

Dwiyanas Slamet Riyadi, president of PT KCIC, said he hopes the railway can bring a new and efficient lifestyle to Indonesia.

Among the first passengers to use the service was Ahmad, who like many Indonesians has only one given name. He described the train as "very comfortable, stable, clean and luxurious".

"I was really amazed by how quickly we arrived in Bandung. I didn't have any time to sleep, as the trip is so short," he said, adding that



Passengers cheer during a trip on the China-Laos Railway in April. HU CHAO / XINHUA



Goods are loaded at Vientiane station on the China-Laos Railway in April. XING GUANGLI / XINHUA

the train is also child-friendly.

Since mid-October, working groups from China and Indonesia have called for high-quality operation of the high-speed railway by catering to passengers' needs. These efforts include promoting online ticket sales, improving boarding and arrival services, and integrating other transit systems with the railway.

Restaurants and convenience stores have opened at three stations along the line, and food and drinks are also available on the train.

Ju, from China Railway International, said: "Judging from current feedback, the opening of the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway has had a significant global influence. We have gained a very good reputation in Europe, Southeast Asia, and Southern Asia, and also in countries with advanced high-speed railway technologies, such as Japan, France and Germany."

"After China, Indonesia is the second country in the world to have a high-speed railway running at a maximum speed of 350 kilometers per hour."

## Progress made

As the new railway in Indonesia has attracted global attention, the China-Laos Railway has also made notable progress after operating for two years.

The 1,035-km electrified line links Kunming, capital of Yunnan province, with Vientiane, the Laotian capital.

The link has cut travel time between the two cities to 10 hours and 30 minutes, including inspections at customs clearance stations on the Chinese and Laotian borders.

The railway marked its second anniversary on Dec 2. By then, 24.2

million passenger trips had been made on the line, with 3.74 million taking place in the Laotian section. The railway has transported 29.1 million metric tons of cargo, 6 million tons of which were cross-border goods.

Passenger train services between Kunming and Vientiane began on April 13.

Since then, more than 95,000 passengers from 72 countries and regions have used the service to travel between the two cities, and the number of monthly international passenger trips on the route has risen from about 600,000 to 1.1 million.

A World Bank study titled "From Landlocked to Land-Linked: Unlocking the Potential of Lao-China Rail Connectivity" said the China-Laos Railway could raise the aggregate income in Laos by up to 21 percent in the long term.

Transit trade along the line through Laos is estimated to reach 3.9 million tons annually by 2030, which would include moving an estimated 1.5 million tons of goods from ships onto the railway, the study said.

A Beijing woman, who gave her name only as Wang, is considering taking her family on the China-Laos Railway to spend Spring Festival in Laos.

"Traveling with my child and parents, I prefer a destination that is warm and convenient, and which we can visit on a reasonable budget," she said, adding she was also attracted by the lack of a luggage limit on the trains.

A friend of Wang's, who has traveled by train to Luang Prabang, a popular tourist destination in northern Laos, strongly recommended the service to her.

Stuart Hart, a tourist from the United Kingdom visiting Laos, said, "The service is fast, efficient and pleasant." Hart, who lived in Shanghai for two years and has used the service twice, said it is as good as the trains he experienced in China.

Tourists Juliet and Dean O'Reilly, also from the UK, said Vientiane Railway Station is "big and beautiful". The couple traveled from the Laotian capital to Luang Prabang.

Vongthong Somphavath, a Luang Prabang native who works in Vientiane, said: "Before the railway opened, the bus journey between Vientiane and Luang Prabang took an entire day. It is not a pleasant experience sitting on a crowded bus during that time, and the winding mountain road made the trip even worse."

She added that the journey by train only takes about two hours.

"In addition to the speed of the train, the view along the line is much better than that from the bus. There have been some complaints about ticket prices, but the tickets always sell out very quickly," she said.

## Rewards netted

International cooperation between China and other countries on railways has not only borne fruit in Asia, but also in Europe.

March 19 marked the first anniversary of the opening of the Belgrade-Nov Sad section of the Serbia-Hungary Railway, the first high-speed railway in Serbia and also a landmark Belt and Road Initiative project in Europe.

The 80-km line, which has a designated top speed of 200 km/h, has cut travel time between the two cities from 90 minutes to about 30 minutes, significantly boosting social and economic development in the region.

Marko Jeremic, head of infrastructure at Serbian Railways, said, "The collaboration with Chinese companies made it possible for us to become the leader in the western Balkans, with the introduction of the high-speed line."

"We became the leader because no other neighboring countries — Croatia, Hungary and Bulgaria — have high-speed lines operating at more than 160 kilometers per hour."

Ju said successful overseas projects have shown that China has an advanced high-speed railway system and leads railway development in some areas of the world.

Zhao Xianghong, deputy director of the Science, Technology and Information Research Institute at the China Academy of Railway Sciences, said, "China is a world leader in some aspects of high-speed railway development."

China State Railway Group said the nation now boasts trains running at the highest commercial speeds, and the greatest variety of operational scenarios, transforming it from a follower of high-speed rail development to a true leader in technologies.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

## Hard work translates as a rewarding experience for railway interpreter

By LUO WANGSHU

Wang Zhechun majored in Indonesian at college because of her love for Bali. Her sister told her that being able to speak the language would make traveling to the popular tourist destination easier.

"I imagined having a relaxing vacation in Bali, and quickly decided to study Indonesian at college," Wang, 28, said.

Just a few years later, she had the opportunity to study, work, and live in several cities in Indonesia, including Jakarta, Bandung, and Yogyakarta. However, she still hasn't been able to visit Bali, as she is busy working for the high-profile Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway.

Wang is employed as a translator and interpreter for the railway.

During her college years, she heard about the upcoming opening of the line, and wanted to be part of the project. After graduating in 2020, she received an offer and joined the China Railway Beijing Group. However, she faced a significant challenge, as she had little knowledge of railways, let alone the technical terms associated with them.

Wang immersed herself in textbooks, learning about equipment, including rail tracks, and signals. In January 2021, she joined a group tasked with preparing for the railway to open. Her job involved translating Chinese and Indonesian railway terms, specifically focusing on those related to signals.

Her work had a tight schedule, high standards, and involved numerous railway terminologies.

"At that time, I began to understand the importance of acquiring railway knowledge. As a railway interpreter, technical expertise is essential," Wang said.

Thanks to her diligent studies and other hard work, she translated more than 2,000 terms relating to railway signals within a month.

In October 2021, Wang traveled to Indonesia to start work, and in addition to her desk duties, she served as an interpreter at conferences.

Recalling her first international conference as an interpreter, she said her hands shook and she struggled to hear herself speak. Afterward, she could barely recall what had taken place.

Determined to overcome such challenges, she devoted herself to becoming familiar with the material in advance. For meetings the following day, she stayed up late the previous night to learn words not commonly used in business discussions.

Now, Wang not only translates railway policies and other material, but also excels as an on-site interpreter at conferences, particularly in relation to transportation, signaling, information, and passenger services.

"As a translator and interpreter, I have witnessed many important moments for the railway," she said.

For her work, Wang frequently travels on the bullet train between Jakarta and Bandung.

"When I hear passengers praising the train and its services, including its cleanliness and tidiness, and the excellent facilities, this brings me great joy," she said.

"I also feel extremely proud and happy when I see many passengers on the high-speed train applauding and cheering its smooth operation when it reaches a speed of 350 kilometers per hour."

Although she still hasn't had the chance to visit Bali, she hopes that day will come soon.



Wang Zhechun poses with an Indonesian colleague in Jakarta. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A train on the China-Laos Railway travels through Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture, Yunnan province, in April, heading to Vientiane, the Laotian capital. JIANG WENYAO / XINHUA

## TOP NEWS

## Nation's efforts to mediate conflict win recognition

By ZHOU JIN  
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China has signed two joint statements on the peaceful settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, respectively with Egypt and the Arab League, as its fair and balanced stance has received wide recognition.

The core of the two joint statements includes urging an immediate and comprehensive cease-fire, calling for enabling humanitarian access and implementing the two-state solution.

The statements were issued on Sunday during Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Egypt, where he held talks with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry and Ahmed Aboul Gheit, secretary-general of the League of Arab States, in separate meetings.

Observers said the release of the two joint statements is China's latest effort through various diplomatic channels to resolve the conflict, which has dragged on for over 100 days and killed more than 23,800 people and displaced 1.9 million civilians.

## Inside

• See more, page 6

• Editorial, page 11

Liu Zhongmin, a professor of Middle East studies at Shanghai International Studies University, said China and Arab countries share common aspirations and similar positions on promoting the de-escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, protecting civilians and resolving the Palestinian issue in a just manner.

The joint statements, along with China's position paper on the conflict and a United Nations Security Council resolution under China's presidency focusing on humanitarian concerns and the protection of children, have clearly reflected the country's stance on the conflict, he said.

Although the joint statements could not lead directly to a cease-fire due to the complexity of the Palestinian-Israeli issue, they show China's ongoing efforts to seek consensus, he said.

"China has not given up diplomatic efforts to promote peace, although ending violence between the two sides faces challenges," he said.

The statements also expressed concern over the escalation of the situation in the Red Sea and called on relevant parties to cool down the situation to prevent further spillover effects.



China has not given up diplomatic efforts to promote peace, although ending violence between the two sides faces challenges."

Liu Zhongmin, professor of Middle East studies at Shanghai International Studies University

Gong Xiaosheng, China's former special envoy on the Middle East issue, said in a recent interview with the Paper that the Middle East is not far away from China, and what happens in the Middle East will affect regional and international security, as well as China's interests.

But he stressed that China's interests in the region are different from those of some countries, such as the United States. China's interests are not to be realized at the expense of others, and it seeks to achieve common interests featuring peace, cooperation and common development, Gong said.

The new round of conflict has also brought the Palestinian issue back to the center of Middle East politics, while the two-state solution was highlighted in the two joint statements during the foreign minister's visit.

The joint statement between China and the Arab League also calls for convening a larger-scale, more authoritative and effective international peace conference, and formulating a specific timetable and road map for the implementation of the solution, in order to resume peace talks between Palestine and Israel.

China has been closely following the Palestinian issue and is a strong supporter of the two-state solution, which has been recognized by Palestine and the Arab countries, said Liu from Shanghai International Studies University.

The current conflict is the result of failing to implement the two-state solution, he said, adding that after the conflict, it requires all parties involved to change their attitudes as well as the ways of dealing with each other, to address the issue and seek peace through negotiation.

## Upgrade eyed for Sino-Swiss FTA

Beijing says it will grant unilateral visa-free treatment to European country

By CAO DESHENG  
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China and Switzerland announced on Monday the completion of a joint feasibility study on the upgrade of their free trade agreement and agreed to support the prompt launch of formal negotiations.

The announcement was made during Premier Li Qiang's official visit to the European country. Li held talks on Monday with President of the Swiss Confederation Viola Amherd in Bern, the Swiss capital.

Both sides also agreed to hold a new round of strategic dialogue at the foreign ministerial level as well as meetings of the financial working group, energy working group, education policy dialogue and consultations on United Nations Security Council affairs within this year, according to a statement released after the meeting.

China will grant Switzerland unilateral visa-free treatment, while Switzerland said it will provide greater visa convenience for Chinese nationals and Chinese enterprises investing in the country, the statement said.

During the talks, Li said that both sides should explore more areas of shared interests, strengthen cooperation in areas such as free trade and customs, and nurture and expand new growth drivers of cooperation in green development, finance and the digital economy, thus upgrading bilateral economic and trade cooperation.

The premier expressed his hope that Switzerland will continue to provide an open, fair and non-discriminatory business environment for Chinese enterprises in Switzerland.

Both sides should also enhance communication and coordination within multilateral mechanisms such as the United Nations, strengthen cooperation in areas such as financing for interconnectivity of infrastructure, international development assistance and climate change, and jointly make positive contributions to



Premier Li Qiang (second from right) talks with President of the Swiss Confederation Viola Amherd (second from left) on Sunday on a special train from Zurich to Bern, the capital of Switzerland.

WANG YE / XINHUA

## Inside

Editorial, page 11

world peace and development, he said.

Amherd said that Switzerland is willing to work with China to promote high-quality bilateral dialogue.

Switzerland is ready to work with China to jointly address global challenges such as climate change, public health and cybersecurity, and achieve greater development in the Switzerland-China strategic partnership featuring innovation in the new year, she said.

The two leaders witnessed the signing of a document on bilateral economic and trade cooperation after their talks.

Switzerland is China's sixth-largest trading partner in Europe, and China is Switzerland's largest trading partner in Asia. In 2022, trade between the two countries reached

\$57.33 billion. From January to August 2023, their bilateral trade stood at \$40.86 billion, up 15.7 percent year-on-year.

In July 2013, China and Switzerland signed a comprehensive free trade agreement, which waived most tariffs on goods and took effect in July 2014, making Switzerland the first continental European country to conclude and implement a free trade agreement with China.

The two countries agreed to upgrade their free trade agreement as both countries expressed opposition to protectionism during President Xi Jinping's state visit to Switzerland in 2017.

Juerg Burri, the Swiss ambassador to China, said that Sino-Swiss relations are based on trust in the sense that Switzerland was one of the first Western countries to establish diplomatic relations with China.

China's first industrial joint venture with a Western company was with a Swiss company and the first free trade agreement with a Western European country was

with Switzerland, Burri said in an interview with China Global Television Network.

"And all that shows that the partnership between Switzerland and China is really something which is a pioneering partnership", he said, adding that the free trade agreement has proved beneficial to both nations and calling for the further development of bilateral relations.

He said there are more than 700 Swiss companies in China. "They're very innovative companies and they benefit a lot from the very qualified and very motivated Chinese workforce. And they have brought Swiss innovations into Chinese manufacturing, Chinese pharmaceuticals, and so on. This is really a success story where you can see that both economies correlate and help each other."

"In other fields, like finance or foreign affairs, we have a lively dialogue, and I think it's a good moment to make a plan for the future."

## Safety concerns



Demonstrators protest in front of the Japanese embassy in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Sunday against Japan's discharge of nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean. They also urged Japan to ban exports of its seafood to Indonesia. ZULKARNAIN / XINHUA

## China seen as key to rebuilding international trust

By WANG MINGJIE  
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Borge Brende, president of the World Economic Forum, has emphasized the critical role China plays in global economic growth, saying that the world's second-largest economy will continue to foster new sources of sustainable growth due to its investment in research and development and green energy.

"The world needs China's contributions, and China's role is critical because of its size. The United States and China altogether represent almost half of the global economy, so if China doesn't succeed, it will also have big implications for the rest of the world,"

Brende said in an interview with China Daily during the 54th Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Themed "Rebuilding Trust", the meeting is scheduled to run through Friday. Brende highlighted the unique challenges of this year's meeting, which takes place against the backdrop of the most complex geopolitical landscape in decades.

He underscored the need to steer clear of any further escalation in these complexities, stating, "We must avoid a further escalation, as it could adversely affect the revival of economic growth and trade."

Brende, who was Norway's foreign minister before taking up his current post, praised the positive

developments stemming from the San Francisco summit between President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden in November.

"The meeting was very positive because there will be competition between the US and China moving forward, but they should also be able to collaborate on important topics like climate change, rules for AI, cybersecurity and reviving economic growth," Brende said.

China's economic strength, coupled with its significant trade influence, makes its contribution to rebuilding international trust crucial, he said.

"China is the second-largest economy in the world, the biggest exporter, and it contributes 35 percent to overall global growth."

Brende said he remains "very optimistic" about the medium- to long-term prospects for the Chinese economy, and commended

China's strategic pivot toward digital trade services and cross-border e-commerce, saying, "China is reallocating resources to sectors that produce higher up in the value chain."

Addressing sustainability concerns, he highlighted China's robust investment in green energy and R&D.

The nation leads global energy transition investment, reaching \$546 billion in 2022, nearly half the global total, according to BloombergNEF. China's 2022 R&D expenditure surpassed 3 trillion yuan (\$418.2 billion), according to the National Bureau of Statistics.

"One of China's strengths is the annual graduation of 12 million students, including nearly 2 million engineers," Brende said, highlighting the nation's growing impact on the international scientific discourse.

## Ties: Advancing two-way exchanges urged to sustain momentum in relations

From page 1

has lasted nearly 40 years", Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said.

This year also marks the 45th anniversary of China-US diplomatic ties.

"Over the past 45 years, it is the reaching out to each other by our peoples that has time and again brought China-US relations from a low ebb back onto the right track," Mao told a news conference on Friday.

Those who advocate Sino-US friendship have been impressed by how institutions and communities in China as well as the US are moving quickly to advance the student visits plan.

"As we speak, government agencies in China, universities and civil society organizations are gearing

up to send out invitations," senior Chinese official Liu Jianchao said when addressing the nonpartisan US think tank Council on Foreign Relations last week in New York.

Liu, head of the International Department of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, said in his speech that "we believe communication is the only way of increasing common understanding."

Observers from both countries have highlighted the dire need to secure momentum in the improvement of ties by advancing two-way exchanges, given the political atmosphere in the US and the anti-China voices.

Dan Stein, chairman of the Muscatine-China Initiatives Committee and a native of Muscatine, a city with a population of around



Over the past 45 years, it is the reaching out to each other by our peoples that has time and again brought China-US relations from a low ebb back onto the right track."

Mao Ning, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman

24,000, said: "Just totally blasting each other is not going to solve anything. I think you've got to try to talk, and if the US and China can find stable relations, then it makes everything else better and easier for the rest of the world."

Wang Dong, a professor and executive director of the Institute for Global Cooperation and Understanding at Peking University, said the plan for visits by 50,000 US students over five years is "one of the most visionary measures" included in the consensus reached by Xi and US President Joe Biden during their San Francisco summit in November.

"The plan could potentially 'revolutionize' China-US relations for years and decades down the road. Should it be accomplished, the

ambitious plan will amount to one of the largest people-to-people exchange initiatives in history," he said.

By engaging the young generation from the US, China will help cultivate a next generation of US leaders who will be more empathetic to Chinese culture and history, hold fewer ideological prejudices, and be more willing to accept China on an equal footing, Wang added.

Earlier this month, a delegation of students from New York-based Columbia University concluded a trip in China.

In Chengdu, they joined a China-US Youth Gala Dinner, interacted with Chinese peers, and enjoyed local delicacies, local folk traditions such as face-changing and

other intangible cultural heritage.

During the gala, many of them went onstage to join in the dancing and singing.

"This is just the start of making friends here, so we shared a bit about how our academic courses work, and what it is we are learning at our universities," said Patrick Alexander Fitz, one of the Columbia University students.

Speaking to local media, he said that such exchanges are "the first opportunity" for them to forge relationships and bonds.

"If we hope for a better tomorrow, a more peaceful tomorrow, it is important that we, the youth, take on that responsibility of learning more about each other and finding ways to work together even in times of difficulty or when maybe we don't agree," he said.

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## CHINA

# Research reveals clues to jade mystery

Once thought to be accessories, Hongshan pieces now thought to be spiritually significant

By XU ZHESHENG

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Recent archaeological research has busted a myth about unique pieces of jade that are among the most enigmatic artifacts of the Hongshan culture.

These ancient treasures, made of local greenish nephrite and mostly resembling a horse hoof with both ends open, have baffled researchers for decades, with various theories about their origins and purpose.

The tubular objects are known for their remarkable details, with borings and polished surfaces both inside and outside, leaving generations of researchers debating the techniques and tools used to make them.

Now, recent research on a groundbreaking excavation at the Lingjiatan site in Anhui province conducted in 2007 may offer more clues about the jade pieces.

The Hongshan (red mountain) culture was a Neolithic culture in the West Liaohe River basin in Northeast China. Hongshan sites have been found in an area stretching from the Inner Mongolia autonomous region to Liaoning province and date from 4,700 to 2,900 BC. The culture is named after Hongshanhou (behind the red mountain), a site in the Hongshan district of Chifeng, Inner Mongolia.

Guo Dashun, a renowned archaeologist, elaborated on the significance of the circular jade tubes.

"This unique jade ware is abundant, with more than 50 pieces found to date — a substantial number considering the scarcity of Hongshan culture jade," he explained.

Unlike other jade that features intricate designs, the hoof-shaped pieces are simple and hollow, with one end beveled and the other end flat, often punctuated with small borings on both sides of the small-



**Clockwise from left:** A tubular jade artifact of the Hongshan culture is displayed in an exhibition at the National Museum of China in Beijing on Nov 10. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A turtle-shaped oblate vessel and a jade stick from the Lingjiatan site in Anhui province is on display at Anhui Museum in Hefei, on Dec 6, 2022. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A jade turtle from the Lingjiatan site is on show at the Palace Museum in Beijing on Feb 2, 2022. DING HAIJIU / FOR CHINA DAILY

er end. Their origin and connection to other Hongshan artifacts remain elusive, making them a perplexing puzzle in an otherwise highly symbolic and animal-stylized culture.

The turning point came when archaeologists unearthed a Neolithic tomb at the Lingjiatan site, thousands of kilometers from the

Hongshan region.

More than 200 jade artifacts were discovered in the tomb, with three possessing unique shapes that captured the attention of researchers.

Based on their observations, Zhang Jingguo, the lead excavator, and Taiwan jade experts Deng Shuping and Huang Cuimei, said that the three jade pieces were a



turtle and two turtle-shaped oblate vessels with flat mouths at one end and beveled mouths at the other end, which instantly reminded them of the jade artifacts of the Hongshan culture.

The flat mouth resembled the head of the turtle, while the oblique end signified the tail. This led to a new hypothesis that

the hoof-shaped jade tubes were inspired by the form of a turtle shell — a simplification and deification of this revered animal in ancient times.

Previous theories suggested the Hongshan jade tubes might have been used as bracelets, arm ornaments or even hair fasteners. These interpretations now appear

less accurate in light of recent discoveries, Guo said.

He said the unique jade artifacts were, in fact, sacred divination tools revered in the worship of turtle spirits. This fresh perspective provides a deeper understanding of the spiritual beliefs and rituals of the Hongshan culture.

These ancient jade pieces have emerged as powerful conduits connecting the culture's people with the mystical world of the turtle spirits, unveiling a captivating chapter in the cultural and spiritual heritage of ancient China.

Guo said he supported this breakthrough, revealing that the three jade turtles were placed around the tomb owner's waist, with different orientations.

"The jade turtle on the tomb owner's right was kept in a normal position, with the head facing south toward the tomb owner's head," Guo explained. The oblate jade vessels were on the left and middle of the tomb owner, with the one on the left holding a similar position to the jade turtle and the one on the middle overturned.

Turtle shells had previously been unearthed at archaeological sites, demonstrating a historical practice of burying turtle shells with individuals. Comparing the hoof-shaped tubes with physical turtle shells and turtle-themed artifacts from the same period, researchers found striking similarities, with the evidence forming a compelling pattern.

What was the purpose of these jade turtle shells? Guo said he believes they were divination items used in the worship of turtle spirits, and were closely related to the spiritual beliefs of the Hongshan culture.

These discoveries have added a fascinating chapter to the understanding of ancient Chinese civilization, revealing that even the simplest of artifacts can carry profound significance across millennia.

## 43 critically endangered ducks seen during survey of Sichuan waterbirds

By CHEN LIANG

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A waterbird survey in 13 cities in Sichuan province on Jan 6 spotted 78,593 waterbirds belonging to 74 species, including 43 scaly-sided mergansers, a critically endangered duck.

"The survey recorded the largest number of scaly-sided mergansers since it began in 2017," said Que Pinjia, an ornithologist with the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding and the Sichuan Key Laboratory of Conservation Biology for Endangered Wildlife, who is the technical adviser to the annual survey. "The second-highest count was 14 birds, recorded last year."

Que, who took part in the survey in the city of Ziyang, said it aims to understand the species composition, population size and distribution status of waterbirds wintering in the Sichuan Basin and to protect migratory birds and their migration routes.

A total of 337 volunteers from home and abroad took part in the survey, which was originally

launched by the Chengdu Bird-watching Society and the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding. Its scope has gradually expanded from the Chengdu Plain to most areas in the Sichuan Basin, Que said.

"This year, for the first time, we managed to cover all major rivers in the basin, including the Yangtze River and its tributaries such as the Minjiang, Tuojiang, Fujiang, Jialing, Qingyi and Dadu," he said.

As a result, the name of the survey was changed from the Chengdu Plain Wintering Waterbirds Census to the Sichuan Basin Wintering Waterbirds Census.

From 8 am to 7 pm on Jan 6, the volunteers from bird-watching organizations, nature education institutions, research institutes, universities, forestry departments and other organizations went to 81 survey spots in 47 districts and counties in the 13 cities to conduct the survey.

Compared with the results of last year's survey, the populations of waterbirds fluctuated in different cities, with a total decrease of about 10,000 birds.



Volunteers count waterbirds on the bank of a reservoir in Sichuan province during the Sichuan Basin Wintering Waterbirds Census on Jan 6. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"We speculate that the warmer winter climate this year may have caused some waterbirds to winter in more northern regions," Que said. "We have to wait for the survey results from other areas in the country to analyze the specific reasons."

The five most abundant waterbird species recorded in the survey were the mallard with 9,960 birds, the Eurasian coot with 9,472 birds, the spot-billed duck with 6,591 birds, the black-headed gull with 5,121 birds, and the gadwall with 4,855 birds.

Of the 74 species recorded, one less than last year, five were spotted for the first time in the survey. Four of them — the black-necked crane, the Dalmatian pelican, the Oriental white stork and the glossy ibis — are under first-level State protection.

The other new bird was the gray-headed lapwing.

"The surveys since 2017 have recorded a total of 94 waterbird species," Que said. "That accounts for nearly 56 percent of the waterbirds distributed in Sichuan province."

## Shanghai hands out cash rewards to residents

By QUAN ZHANFU

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Effective rural governance is an important part of rural vitalization, according to a guideline issued in 2019, and to achieve that end Shanghai's Fengxian district has adopted a "points-based rating system" that has resulted in more than a billion yuan in cash rewards being handed out.

To fully leverage the economic, ecological and aesthetic values of its rural areas, Fengxian's rating system offers shopping vouchers to encourage villagers to make their homes more beautiful.

In Fengxian's Xinye village, 86-year-old Yang Yaqin recently bought a box of eggs, a bag of flour and a bottle of soy sauce from the community supermarket. She paid 60 yuan (\$8.40) of the bill using three 20-yuan shopping vouchers that were rating system rewards, and only had to pay 0.5 yuan in cash.

Yuan earned the vouchers by keeping her yard clean for three months. She praised the system, saying it not only improved the village's appearance but also provided benefits to villagers.

Gu Lifeng, the village's Party secretary, told Xinmin Evening News

that in order to create a beautiful and harmonious rural living environment, the village had adopted the points-based rating system to guide villagers in self-management. The score reflecting the condition of each household's home is displayed publicly, and each household that passes a monthly assessment receives a sticker that entitles it to a 20-yuan shopping voucher.

"For example, in the case of Yang, as long as she refrains from growing vegetables in the green belt in front of her residence and keeps her courtyard clean, she can receive rewards," Gu said.

In recent years, Fengxian has fully implemented the points-based rating system with the aim of tackling illegal land use, construction, commercial operations and discharge of pollutants, as well as clearing illegal group rental accommodations and garbage and enhancing rivers, greenery and rural customs.

Under the system, which has seen 1.05 billion yuan in cash rewards distributed so far, village and community groups are categorized into different star levels based on their performance and adherence to standards. The allocation of rewards to each household depends on the star level achieved.

## Collaboration: Breakthroughs made but challenges remain

From page 1

in Sino-US ties, the Biden administration has repeatedly stressed peaceful coexistence between the US and China.

The "San Francisco vision" marked a breakthrough in China-US relations in 2023. To start with, there has been pragmatic cooperation between China and the US. In terms of global affairs, the leaders of the two countries have reached consensus on climate change, artificial intelligence governance and nuclear power control and regulation. This reveals positive notes from both sides to deepen cooperation, provide public goods for the

international community, and promote world peace, prosperity and sustainable development.

Furthermore, with respect to stabilizing and managing China-US relations, President Xi Jinping and President Biden have agreed to resume military communication and to maintain dialogues between the two governments. This not only marks the imminent resumption of exchanges, communication and cooperation between the Chinese and US militaries after a hiatus of nearly four years, but is also conducive to increasing mutual trust and jointly managing and responding to unforeseen incidents that might arise during encounters between

ships and aircraft of the two sides.

The resumption of exchanges and dialogue between the two militaries has always been a "guardrail" that the Biden administration has emphasized as indispensable to the US-China relations. However, the US alone cannot decide how to set up the "guardrails". The final decision of the San Francisco summit to resume dialogue and exchanges between the two militaries reflects a new height of consensus between the heads of state.

In addition, it was also agreed during the San Francisco summit to establish a negotiation mechanism for the resumption of normalization of trade and market ties

between the two countries, through the establishment of special working groups and further strengthening communication and consultation on economy and trade. This signals constructive progress in China-US relations in the context of the Biden administration's further intensification of the technology, trade, market and digital wars against China since Biden took office.

Finally, in the field of social and people-to-people exchanges, it was further agreed at the San Francisco summit to resume and strengthen people-to-people exchanges, jointly manage narcotics control, simplify visas and increase the number of

flights between the two countries. The "San Francisco vision" once again demonstrates the irreplaceable and strategic leading role of the summit between the two countries in handling and developing China-US relations.

However, 2024 will not be an easy year for the bilateral ties, due in part to factors such as the leadership election in the Taiwan region and the US presidential election in November. At the conference to commemorate the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China-US cooperation is not something dispensable or optional, but rather is "a compulsory question that must be addressed in real earnest".

At the San Francisco summit,

President Xi proposed that the two countries build "five pillars" to support stable, healthy and sustainable relations. China and the US should not only accurately interpret each other's domestic and foreign policies but, more important, should also deepen their cooperation in accordance with the consensus reached by the leaders of the two countries. Creating mutually beneficial and cooperative relations between China and the US is a test for both countries.

*The author is executive dean and a professor of the School of International Relations at Nanjing University, and the article was contributed to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## CHINA



**Left:** A green horse head mask based on the bronze galloping horse, a cultural relic unearthed in Gansu province, on sale at the Gansu Provincial Museum in Lanzhou on Jan 4. CHEN BIN / XINHUA **Middle:** Green horse stuffed toys on sale at the museum in Lanzhou, Gansu. ZHANG YI / CHINA DAILY **Right:** A herdsman drives horses at Shandan horse farm in Gansu on Aug 8. FAN PEISHEN / XINHUA

## Gansu remains in vanguard of global trade

The horse is a legendary animal in the northwestern province of Gansu, a key part of the ancient Silk Road that long witnessed exchanges between China and the West. Today, the animal is still winning people's hearts.

The latest favorite is a stuffed "green horse" toy that wears a big grin on its face and whose design is based on a national treasure unearthed in Gansu.

The toy's cute, goofy appearance has seen it gain great popularity among young people. Since it was launched in June 2022, nearly 100,000 have been sold, making the toy the best-selling souvenir at the Gansu Provincial Museum and encouraging people to learn the story behind the famous local cultural relic. The smiling toy stands on one leg, with an innocent wide-eyed bird under its hoof, replicating the posture and details of the relic, a bronze galloping horse that is displayed at the museum.

The bronze galloping horse, made during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), was unearthed in the 1960s in a tomb in Leitai, Wuwei, Gansu. It is famous for being perfectly balanced as all its weight is supported by the thin rear right leg that rests on a flying swallow.

Also known as "the galloping horse treading on a flying swallow", its profile is printed on the Chinese tourism logo.

Jia Jianwei, director of the museum, said: "To illustrate the high speed of the horse, the designer showed one foot standing on the

The province has long been famous as a meeting point for Eastern and Western cultures. **Zhang Yi** and **Shi Xuefan** report from Lanzhou.

back of a fast bird in flight. The galloping horse is not a specific species, but an artwork that mixes the best features of various kinds of horse."

He added that the artifact was made at a time when different Western equine species were being bought and bred with local horses.

### Geography, climate

Throughout China's history, Gansu has been one of the key areas for horse breeding and trading as a result of its geography and climate. As such, the Shandan Army Horse-breeding Farm, the oldest royal horse farm in the world, is based in the province. It was founded sometime around 121 BC on the grassland of the northern slopes of the Qilian Mountains in Gansu's Zhangye city to breed horses for the army by mixing the genes of local and Western species.

In around 139 BC, Emperor Wudi sent a convoy headed by a man named Zhang Qian on a westward journey that eventually took them to Central Asia. One of Zhang's tasks was to look for suitable horses.

"A lot of cultural relics relating to horses have been discovered in Gansu. Horses hold great significance in the province and were considered regional deities during the Silk Road period," Jia said. Like

the galloping horse, many cultural relics found in Gansu reflect the absorption and innovative development of Central and West Asian cultures, illustrating a spirit of openness and inclusiveness. Even before the ancient Silk Road, Gansu played an important role in cultural exchanges between East and West, and extensive trade was conducted using camels and horses, he added.

Situated on the legendary trade

route, Gansu served as a crossroads for China and Central Asia. Good horses, monks and caravans traveling between various countries greatly accelerated cultural exchanges, making Gansu one of China's most culturally rich provinces.

Zhao Shengliang, head of Gansu's Dunhuang Academy, said that during the Silk Road period, Chinese and Western cultures met in Gansu for about 1,000 years.

"People from various nations lived in Dunhuang, and from the content of murals in the ancient Mogao Caves, we can see that people from different countries communicated with each other," he said.

To this day, people still talk about the Silk Road as well as the

Tea Horse Road, another popular horseback trade route. As time passed, the sound of hoofs on the Silk Road gradually faded away, but now their spirit is being replicated by the Belt and Road Initiative.

### Great endurance

For more than 50 years from 1949, the year New China was founded, the Shandan horse farm was managed by the People's Liberation Army, which bred horses boasting supreme physical fitness and great endurance.

The farm now serves as a major facility where horses are bred and trained for racing and also equestrian competitions. Species are brought in from abroad to interbreed with the Shandan horses and improve their speed.

"My father was a herdsman, so I could ride a horse at age 6. The horses are like my own children," said Liu Guonian, 43, who has been breeding and herding horses at the farm for more than 20 years. "As the grassland environment improves, more people are visiting the farm, and our income is rising. In addition to horse breeding, local herders also work in the tourism industry."

Lin Wei-kang, a young person from Taiwan who visited the farm last year, said, "Standing on the grassland, I seemed to see the galloping military horses from ancient times, and I thought of

those brave generals and soldiers."

Bai Yihan, a middle school student from Shanghai, visited Gansu in July with her classmates to learn about Silk Road history and culture. "It was amazing to actually see the things I had learned about in textbooks," the 14-year-old said.

Legend has it that in Dunhuang, Emperor Wudi had a *Tianma*, or "heavenly horse" — an Akhal-teke, a fabled breed from Turkmenistan that is famous for its speed, endurance and intelligence. The horse's coat has a distinctive metallic sheen, which led to the nickname Golden Horses — as a result, he wrote *Tianma Song*, a poem that praises the horse's strength.

In 2014, a China-Europe freight train named *Tianma* sounded the whistle for its maiden journey from Wuwei in Gansu to Germany, carrying goods ranging from kitchen appliances to hardware fittings.

The journey signaled another first for the Belt and Road Initiative, which had been proposed by China a year earlier to improve connectivity and cooperation among countries. Trains pass through the Alashankou Port in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, before finally arriving in Germany within 18 days. The nearly 9,000-kilometer journey takes the galloping "heavenly horse" 30 days less than traditional ocean transportation.

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The bronze galloping horse at the Gansu Provincial Museum. WANG YUGUO / XINHUA

## Cosplay 'general' guards famous pass

By ZHANG YI and SHI XUEFAN

Tourists visiting the ancient pass of Jiayuguan, a famed section at the western end of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) Great Wall, can immerse themselves in replica scenes from hundreds of years ago by interacting with the gatekeepers.

The pass, located near the city of Jiayuguan in Gansu province, was a key waypoint on the ancient Silk Road, from which foreign merchants and envoys from Central and Western Asia mostly entered China, and Chinese merchants traveled west.

To provide visitors with a vivid historical experience, staff members at the scenic area play the role of gatekeepers. They "check" tourists' identities and issue them with passes, thus letting them participate in a simulated departure ceremony.

The most popular "gatekeeper" is Li Sen. As he is familiar with ancient place names across China, the 43-year-old plays the role of a general in the army guarding the pass and engages tourists in humorous conversations.

With a broad forehead and goat-beard, the bald man is tall and strong, and he dresses in a garment adorned with dragon patterns. However, his rough appearance contrasts sharply with the knowledge he displays.

When visitors come to pass through the gate, Li asks about their hometowns and the reason for their departure. After "verification", he uses a brush to write the ancient name of the visitor's

"I could feel the soldiers guarding the border in the past. Sometimes I even wonder if I was a general at Jiayuguan in a previous life."

Li Sen, "gatekeeper" of the Jiayuguan Pass in Gansu province

hometown on a simulated passport, then stamps it with a seal he engraved himself.

After waiting in line for a long time, Yen Pei-yu, a tourist from Taiwan who traveled to Jiayuguan

this summer, had the chance to interact with Li. She told him that she planned to go to the West to sell pearl milk tea, a Taiwan specialty.

Li replied humorously that it would be a great business opportunity, wished her a safe journey and handed her "passport". In response, Yen clenched her fist in a salute to Li.

She said: "I was amazed when I mentioned that I am from Taipei and he immediately said the city's ancient name. He is knowledgeable. No wonder he has become an internet celebrity."

After some of Li's conversations with tourists were shared on short video platforms, he gained overnight fame, attracting tens of thousands of new followers and encouraging tourists to visit Jiayuguan.

"My goal is to bring joy to others and help them gain some historical knowledge along the way," he said.

The yellow hue of the buildings helps the pass blend harmoniously with the surrounding desert under the scorching sun. As a local saying goes: "Leaving Jiayuguan, tears won't dry. Ahead lies the Gobi Desert, beyond is the gate of Hell." Accompanied by the wind and yellow sand, Li said: "I could feel the soldiers guarding the border in the past. Sometimes I even wonder if I was a general at Jiayuguan in a previous life."

Several years ago, he decided to attract more visitors by developing souvenirs that would give them a sense of cultural experience and help them share stories about the place.

He started by writing pass certificates on paper, and then developed printed scrolls that are mounted on wood. He also wrote suitable lines for the general he plays and even made armor and battle boots for himself. During the spring and autumn seasons, he dons a suit of thick armor.

On the desk at his outdoor stall, there is a history book and also a booklet with notes he has made about historical events, including battles that happened in Jiayuguan, and ancient place names from all around the country.

Li said he gained all the knowledge from books and his daily interactions with visitors from different places. To interact with foreign tourists, he has taught himself basic phrases in more than 20 languages.



Li Sen (left) interacts with visitors and gives them souvenir passes for Jiayuguan Pass. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

### FIRST PERSON

## Popular toy brings history home

Cui Youxin, manager of the design team at the Gansu Provincial Museum



The horse has a skewed mouth and its teeth are visible as it is "running" at high speed. We have retained this exaggerated expression in the plush toy.

In terms of its posture, we maintained the image of one foot stepping on a flying swallow while raising the other leg high like a person, hoping to make it more appealing and funny.

Many people can't help but laugh when they see the toy. They find it relaxing and lighthearted, and many tourists even imitate its posture.

In addition, numerous bloggers on various short-video platforms have created funny videos using this toy, which has helped to raise awareness of it.

Of course, there has been some criticism, suggesting that we have made it look comical and ugly. We accept those opinions because people always have different opinions. So far, we have developed nearly 800 cultural and creative products based on the museum's relics. Our design team comprises people born in the 1990s and later, who can bring a lot of vitality to the traditions.

We hope to use more creative and interesting methods to encourage young people to learn the stories behind cultural relics and raise their cultural pride.

Cui Youxin spoke with Zhang Yi and Shi Xuefan.

Our cultural and creative product, the "green horse", inspired by the bronze galloping horse, has gained popularity among netizens since it was launched in June 2022.

It has helped raise the number of visitors to the museum. Many tourists visit specifically to buy it and have their photo taken with it.

The popularity of this toy horse has brought economic and social benefits to the Gansu Provincial Museum. Through widespread recognition of the horse, more people have become acquainted with the museum and have stepped inside its doors.

The bronze galloping horse is a must-see cultural relic for many visitors. However, many young people may be familiar with the bronze horse itself but not aware of its profound cultural significance.

Therefore, our initial goal is to attract young people to learn about the story behind it in a more innovative way that they will enjoy.

During the toy's design process, the overall shape of the original relic and its cultural background provided abundant inspiration for the creators.

# WORLD

## Parties seek way out of impasse in Ukraine crisis

By REN QI in Moscow  
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The West should stop supplying Kyiv with weapons if they want talks on Ukraine, the Russian Foreign Ministry said on Sunday in response to the statement made by Switzerland's top diplomat that Russia should be included in peace discussions.

Addressing a news conference at the World Economic Forum in Davos earlier that day, Swiss Federal Councilor for Foreign Affairs Ignazio Cassis said efforts are being made to bring Russia into peace discussions on Ukraine mediated by other countries, and stressed that a peace conference could not be held without Russia's participation.

"We should find a way to bring Russia into peace discussions. There will be no peace if Russia cannot have its say," he said.

Cassis said delegates from 83 countries are taking part in a meeting of national security advisers on the Ukrainian "peace formula", which is being held in Davos at the initiative of Switzerland and Ukraine on Sunday.

The meetings were co-chaired by Cassis and Ukrainian presidential aide Andriy Yermak.

"The purpose is to prepare so that we are ready and ripe to launch a process with Russia — when the time comes," Cassis said.

Yermak said the talks were open, constructive and detailed on the key principles of reaching a "comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine".

Yermak added that Ukraine was looking at hosting summits with African countries and with South American nations to explain its position more broadly.

In response, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova told the Izvestia news-

paper that the prerequisites of solving the "dead end" are to stop supplying weapons to Ukraine, stop imposing anti-Russian sanctions, and stop making Russophobic statements.

"If this rhetoric is geared toward drawing Russia into some sort of a psychedelic process on the West's terms to influence Russia's principled approaches, we won't be lured into this trap," she said.

Addressing the G20 summit in November 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Kyiv had a "plan to achieve peace" consisting of 10 points. Among them are nuclear, food and energy security, and an "all-for-all" exchange of "detainees", as well as the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity. The plan however totally ignores Moscow's position.

Zelensky was due to visit Switzerland on Monday.

### Peaceful settlement

Russian presidential press secretary Dmitry Peskov said Zelensky's statements on a peaceful settlement were out of touch with reality. Moscow sees no progress in the settlement process around Ukraine and that is why it is continuing its military operation.

On the front line, Russia launched dozens of attacks over Ukraine overnight, the Ukrainian Air Force said on Saturday, as Kyiv pushes for more air defense.

Ukraine's military spy chief Kyrylo Budanov said Kyiv's attacks against Crimea would intensify, adding that Moscow's economy was proving surprisingly resilient despite sanctions.

He acknowledged that the front lines were largely frozen in Ukraine, and the resilience of the Russian economy surprised him as "the current Western sanctions were not enough to force the Kremlin to change its behavior".



Palestinian children displaced by Israeli bombardments play near the border with Egypt in Rafah on Sunday. The UN says the conflict has displaced about 85 percent of Gaza's population. FATIMA SHBAIR / AP

## No solution in sight yet for Gaza conflict

Casualties rise as intl calls grow for end to hostilities between Palestine, Israel

GAZA/JERUSALEM — The Israel-Hamas conflict reached a grim milestone of 100 days on Sunday, with more civilian deaths in Gaza, and relatives of dozens of hostages still awaiting their freedom.

There were also casualties in the West Bank and on the Israel-Lebanon border.

Tens of thousands of families in both Palestine and Israel are still grieving the loss of their loved ones.

Despite the repeated calls from the international community for an end to the ongoing violence and a return to peace, the Israel-Hamas conflict, which has shaken the Middle East's geopolitical landscape, shows no signs of abating anytime soon.

The conflict, sparked by unprecedented attacks on Israel, has created a humanitarian catastrophe for the 2.3 million people in Hamas-ruled Gaza, the United Nations and aid groups warned.

The Palestinian death toll from Israeli attacks has exceeded 24,000, the Gaza-based Health Ministry said on Monday. Israel said the Hamas assault has killed more than 1,200 people.

"It's been 100 days and our situation is very bad," said Mohammad Kahil, displaced to Rafah, in southern Gaza near Egypt, from the territory's north.

"There's no food, no water, no heating. We are dying from the cold."

Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, said diseases were spreading with "the clock ticking fast toward famine".

Violence involving militant groups in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria has surged since the conflict in Gaza began in early October.

With fears growing of a wider conflict in the Middle East, the US Navy air force shot down an anti-ship cruise missile fired by the Houthis in Yemen toward a navy battleship, the US Central Command said in a statement.

The missile, which was fired at approximately 4:45 pm on Sunday toward a destroyer of the US Navy operating in the southern Red Sea, was intercepted in the vicinity of the coast of Hodeidah by US fighter aircraft, it said, adding that no injuries or damage were reported.

Nearly at the same time on Sunday, the Houthis claimed that a warplane of the US-Britain maritime coalition hit a camp of the group in northern Hodeidah port city. But US officials reportedly denied the allegation.

The Houthis have escalated their attacks in the Red Sea since the Israel-Hamas conflict flared up. They said the attacks targeted Israel-linked commercial ships in a bid to pressure Israel to end the conflict and siege of the Palestinian enclave of the Gaza Strip.

In the latest fighting in Gaza, the Hamas-affiliated Palestinian Press Agency SAFA reported on Monday that Israeli aircraft and artillery were bombarding the Khan Younis area in the southern part of the enclave.

In a statement, the Israeli military said it killed two Palestinian fighters in an airstrike on their vehicle which was transporting weapons in Khan Younis and also raided a Hamas command center in the city.

### Differences seen

The White House said on Sunday that "it's the right time" for

Israel to scale back its military offensive in the Gaza Strip, as Israeli leaders again vowed to press ahead with their operation.

The comments exposed the growing differences between the close allies, The Associated Press reported.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has brushed off calls for a cease-fire, saying Israel will keep going until "total victory" is achieved.

During his weekly cabinet meeting, Netanyahu presented a 2024 budget proposal to his government, seeking approval for a plan that involves tax hikes and the implementation of a uniform 3 percent reduction in the budgets of all government ministries to secure funding for its ongoing fight against Hamas.

His remarks came as Israel awaited a ruling by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, with a possible decision against its massive and crippling offensive in Gaza. Since Saturday, thousands of Israelis have rallied in Tel Aviv and other major cities, calling for the return of the hostages and the replacement of the government.

Hamas on Sunday aired a video showing three Israeli hostages it is holding in Gaza and urged the Israeli government to stop the offensive against the group.

On Sunday, from Berlin to London and Limassol to Karachi, tens of thousands of people took to the streets to mark the 100th day of the conflict. Demonstrations either demanded the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas or called for a cease-fire in Gaza.

In the heart of London, thousands of people chanted "Bring them home now" in a demonstration to demand the freedom of the remaining hostages.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## French govt reshuffle edges to the right

By EARLE GALE in London  
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France's new prime minister will lead a Cabinet that has edged to the right, with the reemergence of several key figures from the government of former right-wing president Nicolas Sarkozy.

Gabriel Attal, 34, who President Emmanuel Macron named as prime minister on Jan 9 after the resignation of Elisabeth Borne, will still have several major players from Borne's Cabinet to call upon, but new members, including Stephane Sejourne as minister for foreign affairs and veteran Cabinet member Rachida Dati as culture minister, give the hitherto centrist government a right-wing feel.

Olivier Faure, leader of the Socialist party, said the government, which had previously tried to appeal to both left-wing and right-wing voters, now looks set on heading off the threat from the far right by resurrecting "Sarkozy's dinosaurs" and moving itself to the right.

The Liberation newspaper also pointed out the Sarkozy influence after the reshuffle, with the headline "The Sarko connection".

Socialist party lawmaker Boris Vallaud told The Guardian that Macron had followed up on the government's hard-line overhaul of France's immigration system, which many lawmakers said was suggestive of the ruling Renaissance party drifting to the right, by confirming it with the reshuffle.

Attal countered by telling TFI television that he simply favors people who can get things done. "What I want is action, action, action" and "results, results, results", he said.

### Challenge ahead

The new Cabinet surrounding Attal, France's youngest prime minister, is, however, mainly about ensuring Macron withstands the challenge from the far right in European elections on June 9.

Macron, who was vilified last year during violent protests against his pension reforms, reportedly said at the new Cabinet's first meeting that he wants "quick results" and is not looking for "managers" but "revolutionaries".

The Guardian noted that eight of 14 key ministers have backgrounds in former president Sarkozy's Republicans party.

Dati, who served as justice minister under Sarkozy between 2007 and 2009, is joined by Catherine Vautrin, who served under former right-wing president Jacques Chirac, and Emmanuel Moulin, former adviser to Sarkozy, who is the new prime minister's chief of staff.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin, who also served in Sarkozy's government but who was in Borne's Cabinet too, hung onto his job, as did Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire.



Attendees wait in line on Sunday outside Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa, before a campaign event with former US president Donald Trump. AL DRAGO VIA GETTY IMAGES

## US presidential election heats up in frigid Iowa

DES MOINES, Iowa — Voting was set to begin on Monday night in icy Iowa as former US president Donald Trump eyes a victory that would send a resounding message that neither life-threatening cold nor life-changing legal trouble can slow his march toward the Republican Party's 2024 nomination.

His top rivals, former United Nations ambassador Nikki Haley and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, are banking on good showings in Iowa to puncture Trump's air of inevitability. But the extreme cold could scramble those calculations by suppressing voter turnout.

At a rally in Indianola, Trump urged his supporters to dress warmly and joked that single attendees might meet their future spouses if they show up on Monday night.

"You can't sit home ... Even if you vote and then pass away, it's worth it," Trump said to laughter. More than 500 supporters wearing trademark red baseball hats as well as heavy coats, earmuffs and boots had packed into the venue.

The highly regarded NBC News/Des Moines Register poll has Trump at 48 percent among likely caucusgoers, with Haley surging into second place but still only at 20 percent.

"I'm voting for Trump again," 37-year-old trucker Jeff Nikolaus told Agence France-Presse, adding that "he may be bullheaded, but he can actually get stuff done".

Haley posted a video of herself speaking outside next to a mound of snow as the wind blew through her hair. "I know it's cold, but we need you out there," Haley said. "Let's finish this strong."

The poll was more bad news for DeSantis, who scored just 16 percent and has seen his claim to be the heir apparent to the post-Trump Republican Party eclipsed by Haley.

But DeSantis insisted on Sunday that his "very motivated" backers would turn out in sufficient numbers to vote, open only to registered Republicans.

### Dangerous conditions

With the coldest temperatures in caucus history expected and dangerous travel conditions in virtually every corner of the rural state, the campaigns are bracing for a low-turnout contest that will test the strength of their support and their organizational muscle.

The final result will serve as a powerful signal for the rest of the nomination fight to determine who will face Democratic President Joe Biden in the November general election.

The ultimate nominee will not be confirmed until the party's national convention in July, but with big wins in the opening contests, Trump will be difficult to stop.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Extreme weather, lowest rainfall take toll on Amazon

By SERGIO HELD and GERMAN SANCHEZ in Bogota  
For China Daily

The Amazon rainforest, home to an unparalleled diversity of flora and fauna, is under severe strain due to a combination of heat and the lowest rainfall in more than four decades. The extreme drought is having a devastating impact on the Amazon basin's rivers and biodiversity.

The picture of the region's water resources is grim. In Brazil's Amazonas state, rainfall ranged from 100 to 350 millimeters below average. This led to a significant drop in river levels, posing a threat to the livelihoods of indigenous communities that rely on the rivers and disrupting the natural functioning of the ecosystem.

"We have been dealing with this since last year," said Andres Losada, manager of Fundacion Amazonas Sin Limites (Amazon Without Limits Foundation).

"Last year's effect was caused by the 'La Nina' weather phenomenon, which impacted river levels all the way from their sources to their outflows into the ocean. It is catastrophic to see what climate change is doing to the entire ecosystem,



Residents carry food and water supplies amid drought in Careiro da Varzea, Amazonas, Brazil, on Oct 24. EDMAR BARROS / ASSOCIATED PRESS

including the river, affecting over 1 million people. In Peru, Colombia, and Brazil, we do not have effective programs against this type of phenomenon. The issue of global warming and river pollution affects our coexistence," he added.

The drought has triggered a humanitarian crisis across the Amazon region. On the Brazilian side of the rainforest alone, more than 590,000 people currently face a state of emergency, with many communities struggling to access drinking water and food.

Reduced river flows have hindered transportation, making it difficult for people to access essential services. "The situation is really worrying,"

said Laura Gomez, an environmental engineer and researcher at Colombia's Alexander von Humboldt Biological Resources Research Institute. "The water levels are exceptionally low. It's an unprecedented situation with more sandbanks than water."

The drought has also eroded biodiversity, particularly across parts of the forest in Bolivia and Peru, and rivers like the Solimoes, Purus, Juruá, and Madeira in Brazil.

The reduced water flows and altered habitats have forced many species to relocate to more suitable areas, leading to an overall decline in biodiversity.

"A sequence of extreme heat waves is exacerbating the impact of the lack

of precipitation, and the average temperature is abnormally high for the austral spring," said a recent report from the European Union's Joint Science Center published on Dec 20.

Austral spring denotes the season of spring in the southern hemisphere when the highest amount of ozone is lost. The season usually begins in September.

"From July to September 2023, all Amazon basin countries recorded the lowest rainfall in over 40 years. Satellite data showed widespread vegetation stress across the basin, particularly affecting southeastern regions and extending into Bolivia."

Experts warn these challenges may worsen in the coming months, as the expected El Nino phenomenon this year could intensify drought conditions and further endanger the fragile Amazon ecosystem.

Maryory Pantevis Giron, territorial director of Amazonas state at Copoamazonia, the environmental regulatory body on the Colombian side of the Amazon, said more precise weather and environmental monitoring is needed to address future challenges.

The writers are freelance journalists for China Daily.

## WORLDUS

## Chinese expert questions US' tech approach

By RENALI in Los Angeles  
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China's technological advancements in recent years have raised concerns in the US about competition and so-called national security, according to experts.

The topic of US-China tech competition was discussed at a forum hosted by The Carter Center in Atlanta earlier last week, and experts say that the governments should produce a roadmap to avoid a divided technological world.



I think the most important thing is we have to find a balance, and each side could cooperate on some cutting-edge technologies such as chips and AI, because the US and China are the critical partners globally."

Yang Nan, associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of American Studies

The Biden administration put forth a set of rules in October to tighten export controls to China on semiconductors used in artificial intelligence, with the aim of restraining Chinese technological development.

The way the US keeps its technological superiority "has been changing China's view of the technology policy from the US", Zhao Hai, research fellow at the Institute of World Economics and Politics, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, told the forum.

The restriction was made in the name of national security, but China said that abuses the concept.

"The US government should define parameters of national security regarding technology," said Zhao. With US restrictions on technology transfers, China has responded by investing in domestic technology and pursuing self-reliance in the semiconductor industry.

"The recent report shows that Chinese companies are much less likely to be interested in those (US) chips, because domestically, Chinese companies including Huawei can produce relatively capable or similar chips," according to Zhao.

Huawei released the Mate 60 Pro smartphone last August by using its own chip designs for the new 5G handset. In fact, when US sanctions blocked companies from supplying chips to Huawei for its phones, the Chinese manufacturer had no choice but to rely on HiSilicon, a chip company that is a Huawei subsidiary.

"This kind of unreliable supply and tightening control of the chips and other semiconductors' production is making Chinese companies and markets less likely to accept American technology and American companies in China. This is a lose-lose situation

for both countries," Zhao told the forum.

Zhao warned that there will be an accumulative impact from the technology controls, not only in chip production but also on AI and business investments.

"So, (it takes) political courage to find out the parameters of national security and ... both sides need to have extensive dialogue on the strategic level," Zhao said. Open science should be the health for those civilian markets on both sides, instead of gradually increasing the small-yard high fence to a big yard of higher fence."

With tighter US tech-export controls on China in 2024, business communities might continue re-evaluating their relations with China. However, said Zhao, there's still an opportunity for global business in the Chinese market.

There is still a strong desire for Chinese companies and the Chinese government to cooperate globally, and it's good to see both countries begin to talk about AI and its implications, he said.

"If the US is really true to their idea of small yard and high fence, I think both sides including the business community need to work together to make sure that that yard is continuing to be small and that fence does not prevent the holding of all the technologies' flow across borders," Zhao added.

"The emerging technologies, especially in AI supercomputing, quantum mechanics, will create even more uncertainty about these potential applications that could be for commercial (uses), it could be for financial, it could certainly be for military," said Daniel Aum, who was awarded the Howard W. Rosenthal Fellowship in International Relations in 2022. He served as a fellow with the US House Foreign Affairs Committee and the Subcommittee on Asia.

The global semiconductor supply chain is concentrated in the hands of a few firms in the US, South Korea, Japan and Taiwan. Chinese policymakers are pursuing self-reliance in chip production and calculated countermeasures to mitigate Western export controls and "national security" concerns.

Yang Nan, associate research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of American Studies, told China Daily that the emergence of digital data has been a new form of power in geopolitical competition between the US and China. Yang said that free cross-border data flow and digital trade will benefit most American and Chinese companies.

"I think the most important thing is we have to find a balance, and each side could cooperate on some cutting-edge technologies such as chips and AI, because the US and China are the critical partners globally," said Yang.

Zhao told China Daily that "China's domestic competition is market driven, not just government facilitating", adding that the competition will continue for the next decade.

"However, that does not mean that the two sides need to conflict. The relationship can be managed effectively if national security can be clarified," Zhao said.



People participate on the day of the Republican US presidential caucuses in West Des Moines, Iowa, on Monday. JEEHAH MOON / REUTERS

## Trump coasts in Iowa caucuses

By HENG WEILI in New York  
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Former US president Donald Trump coasted to victory in the Iowa caucuses on Monday evening — according to early vote counts and media projections — as voters braved subzero temperatures in a Republican contest that officially kicked off the 2024 US presidential campaign.

Both The Associated Press and CNN called the contest for Trump about a half-hour after the results started coming in.

As of 10 pm ET, with 38 percent of the votes tallied, Trump had 52.8 percent, followed by Ron DeSantis with 20 percent, Nikki Haley with 18.7 percent, and Vivek Ramaswamy with 7.7 percent, according to the AP.

Trump was heavily favored in the caucuses, which were being billed as a battle for second place between Florida governor DeSantis and the former South Carolina governor Haley. Also still drawing some enthusiastic crowds was Ramaswamy, a biotech entrepreneur.

Five polls in the last two days on the Real Clear Politics website showed Trump's lead ranging from 28 to 55 points, with Haley and DeSantis averaging in the teens, and Ramaswamy in single digits.

More than 1,600 caucus meetings started in Iowa at 7 pm CST (8 pm ET) Monday, with complete results expected as late as 1 am ET Tuesday.

Despite his polling advantage, Trump, 77, has directed his

signature name-calling at his opponents, referring to DeSantis, 45, as "DeSanctimonious" and "DeSanctis", while declining to participate in any of the several Republican debates.

On Monday, Trump, however, called DeSantis "MAGA-Lite", a backhanded compliment. In 2016, Trump campaigned on the slogan "Make America Great Again" (MAGA).

Trump has called Haley, 51, a former US ambassador to the United Nations, an "unwanted globalist" and "RINO" (Republican In Name Only).

And for the first time, Trump on Saturday went after Ramaswamy, 38, who has been supportive of the former president.

"Vivek started his campaign as a great supporter, 'the best President in generations,' etc." Trump wrote on his Truth Social social media site. "Unfortunately, now all he does is disguise his support in the form

of deceitful campaign tricks. Very sly, but a vote for Vivek is a vote for the 'other side' — don't get duped by this."

Ramaswamy told The New York Times in Waterloo, Iowa, on Monday that Trump "probably had the B team around him" and said the barbs showed that his own campaign was "surging here on the ground".

Trump also has had to contend with four indictments at the state and federal levels, along with attempts in some states to remove him from the November ballot over the Jan 6, 2021, uprising at the US Capitol. Trump has called the charges a politically motivated "witch hunt".

DeSantis, 45, had spent the most time of any candidate in Iowa, and many pundits said a less than decent showing in the Midwestern state could irreparably damage his campaign.

But DeSantis told NBC News: "We're going on with this. We've been built for the long haul."

Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds endorsed DeSantis, much to the consternation of Trump.

DeSantis, who campaigned in all of Iowa's 99 counties, is trailing Trump and Haley in the more politically moderate state of New Hampshire, which will hold its primary election on Jan 24.

"Today's the day we make history because we tune out the noise of the media, we tune out the noise of the politicians, and we raise the voices of Americans that say we want a

better day," Haley told supporters at a diner in Iowa on Monday.

The winner of the Republican nomination is expected to run against President Joe Biden, 81, a Democrat who has been facing consistently low job-approval ratings. A recent ABC News poll had Biden at 31 percent approval.

Unlike a regular election, Iowa's caucuses require voters to gather in person in small groups at churches, schools and community centers, where they cast secret ballots after hearing speeches from campaign representatives, Reuters reported.

Iowa Republican Party Chair Jeff Kaufmann said on Sunday that the speeches could play an important role because candidates had to cancel several events due to the weather, Reuters reported.

The temperature in Iowa's capital city of Des Moines at 6:20 pm CST Monday was -3 F, according to AccuWeather.

"An already unpredictable and quirky process is even more so this year, thanks to dangerously cold weather and an unusually uncompetitive contest," wrote New York Times political reporter Jonathan Swan.

Some of the state's Democratic voters had registered as Republicans to try to influence the caucus results.

"I just want to be able to look back and say I did what I could to keep Donald Trump from getting elected," said Tom Van Voorhis, 65, a cross-over voter who plans to support Haley, reported Reuters.

## No solution in sight yet for Gaza conflict

GAZA/JERUSALEM — The Israel-Hamas conflict reached a grim milestone of 100 days on Sunday, with more civilian deaths in Gaza, and relatives of dozens of hostages still awaiting their freedom.

There were also casualties in the West Bank and on the Israel-Lebanon border.

Tens of thousands of families in both Palestine and Israel are still grieving the loss of their loved ones.

Despite the repeated calls from the international community for an end to the ongoing violence and a return to peace, the Israel-Hamas conflict, which has shaken the Middle East's geopolitical landscape, shows no signs of abating anytime soon.

The conflict, sparked by unprecedented attacks on Israel, has created a humanitarian catastrophe for the 2.3 million people in Hamas-ruled Gaza, the United Nations and aid groups warned.

The Palestinian death toll from Israeli attacks has exceeded 24,000, the Gaza-based Health Ministry said on Monday. Israel said the Hamas assault has killed more than 1,200 people.

"It's been 100 days and our situation is very bad," said Mohammad Kahil, displaced to Rafah, in southern Gaza near Egypt, from the territory's north.

"There's no food, no water, no heating. We are dying from the cold."

Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, said diseases were spreading with "the clock ticking fast toward famine".

Violence involving militant groups in Yemen, Lebanon, Iraq and Syria has surged since the conflict in Gaza began in early October.

With fears growing of a wider conflict in the Middle East, the US Navy air force shot down an anti-ship cruise missile fired by the Houthis in Yemen toward a navy battleship, the US Central Command said in a statement.

The missile, which was fired at approximately 4:45 pm on Sunday toward a destroyer of the US Navy operating in the southern Red Sea, was intercepted in the vicinity of the coast of Hodeidah by US fighter aircraft, it said, adding that no injuries or damage were reported.

Nearly at the same time on Sunday, the Houthis claimed that a warplane of the US-Britain maritime coalition hit a camp of the group in northern Hodeidah port city. But US officials reportedly denied the allegation.

The Houthis have escalated their attacks in the Red Sea since the Israel-Hamas conflict flared up. They said the attacks targeted

Israel-linked commercial ships in a bid to pressure Israel to end the conflict and siege of the Palestinian enclave of the Gaza Strip.

In the latest fighting in Gaza, the Hamas-affiliated Palestinian Press Agency SAFA reported on Monday that Israeli aircraft and artillery were bombarding the Khan Younis area in the southern part of the enclave.

In a statement, the Israeli military said it killed two Palestinian fighters in an airstrike on their vehicle which was transporting weapons in Khan Younis and also raided a Hamas command center in the city.

## Differences seen

The White House said on Sunday that "it's the right time" for Israel to scale back its military offensive in the Gaza Strip, as Israeli leaders again vowed to press ahead with their operation.

The comments exposed the growing differences between the close allies, The Associated Press reported.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has brushed off calls for a cease-fire, saying Israel will keep going until "total victory" is achieved.

During his weekly cabinet meeting, Netanyahu presented a 2024 budget proposal to his government,

seeking approval for a plan that involves tax hikes and the implementation of a uniform 3 percent reduction in the budgets of all government ministries to secure funding for its ongoing fight against Hamas.

His remarks came as Israel awaited a ruling by the International Court of Justice in The Hague, with a possible decision against its massive and crippling offensive in Gaza.

Since Saturday, thousands of Israelis have rallied in Tel Aviv and other major cities, calling for the return of the hostages and the replacement of the government.

Hamas on Sunday aired a video showing three Israeli hostages it is holding in Gaza and urged the Israeli government to stop the offensive against the group.

On Sunday, from Berlin to London and Limassol to Karachi, tens of thousands of people took to the streets to mark the 100th day of the conflict. Demonstrations either demanded the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas or called for a cease-fire in Gaza.

In the heart of London, thousands of people chanted "Bring them home now" in a demonstration to demand the freedom of the remaining hostages.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

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## BUSINESS

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# Experts: Rate cut seen likely this quarter

Central bank emphasizes preserving lenders' profitability, effective policy

By ZHOU LANXU  
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It remains likely that China's monetary policymakers will cut interest rates in the first quarter as pressure of insufficient domestic demand remains pressing while external constraints on monetary easing wane, political advisers and experts said.

However, the decision by the People's Bank of China — the country's central bank — to hold a key interest rate steady on Monday suggested that any further aggregate easing moves may be moderate, they said. This caution reflects the central bank's emphasis on preserving bank profitability and a preference for structural policy tools that offer greater efficacy.

The PBOC conducted a one-year medium-term lending facility operation of 995 billion yuan (\$138.66 billion) on Monday, with the operation rate — a key lending rate benchmark — remaining unchanged for the fifth consecutive month at 2.5 percent.

The move ran counter to market anticipations that the PBOC may implement an interest rate cut on Monday after the country's weak inflation data pointed to the need for easing policies to bolster subdued demand.

China's consumer price index, a key gauge of inflation, reported negative growth year-on-year for the third month in a row in December — for the first time since 2009 — standing at -0.3 percent versus -0.5 percent in November.

Experts said the decision to keep interest rate steady might have signaled the central bank's intention to preserve the policy scope for any potential further downward economic pressure.

At the annual PBOC work meeting earlier this month, it was decided that reforms should be deepened to promote reductions in social financing costs while keeping things stable overall as part of the central bank's efforts to make monetary policy flexible and effective.

Gong Liantang, a professor of applied economics at Peking University's Guanghua School of Management, said it remains essential to reduce lending rates for businesses to stimulate their

willingness to lend and invest, as their actual financing costs — as measured by real interest rates, which are equivalent to nominal interest rates minus inflation — remain relatively high as December's uptick in inflation was limited.

Corporate financing demand is still in need of support as new renminbi loans decreased year-on-year in December, said Gong, who is also a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body.

New yuan-denominated loans came in at 1.17 trillion yuan in December, the PBOC said on Friday, down by 240.1 billion yuan from a year earlier.

"It is clear there remains scope for monetary policy to step up support as demand remains insufficient, with the CPI and producer price index lingering in negative territory," said Shao Yu, a board member of Shanghai Institute for Finance & Development, a think tank.

Cuts in interest rates and the reserve requirement ratio may still be in the pipeline in the first quarter, Shao said, adding that pressure from US monetary tightening on China's monetary policy will diminish as the US Federal Reserve is poised for rate cuts this year.

Capital outflow pressure on China due to US tightening has eased as foreign investors made net purchases of Chinese onshore bonds for months, including a net purchase of \$24.5 billion in December, the State Administration of Foreign Exchange said on Monday.

"Yet the more important question is how to ensure that lower funding costs or increased money supply would effectively translate into lending to businesses and households, thereby stimulating investment and consumption," said Shao, who is also an expert member on the PBOC's monetary policy committee.

In this sense, structural monetary policy tools — which are possibly designed to support specific investment projects or in coordination with fiscal policy — could be more effective in jazzing up the economy and be more commonly utilized, he added.



Employees pack imported chips at a distribution center in Shanghai. SHEN CHUNCHEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## More mature chip units to come up

By CHENG YU  
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Chinese chipmakers are increasing efforts to manufacture mature chips in order to prepare for the expected recovery in the global semiconductor sector this year, industry experts said on Monday.

Another goal is to reduce reliance on imported chips amid US export controls, they said.

Most of their new production capacity will focus on mature chips, mostly 28 nanometers and above. Although these are not at the forefront of current innovations, such chips are used in a wide range of applications, from home appliances to automobiles, experts said.

They made the comments after the latest Customs data showed China's imports of integrated circuits or ICs fell in 2023 as domestic production capacity increased.

China imported 479.5 billion units of ICs worth \$349.4 billion last year, down 11 percent in scale and down 15 percent in value.

By contrast, Chinese chipmakers' production capacity may have increased 12 percent to 7.6 million wafers per month last year, global chip consultancy SEMI said in a report.

"The sharp decline in China's IC imports was mainly due to sluggish global market demand," said Sheng Linghai, an analyst from market consultancy Gartner.

Several market consultancies, including IDC, predicted that overall IC sales will recover this year and are expected to drive global demand.

Industry experts, however, said that amid global geopolitical uncertainties, Chinese chipmakers have been beefing up local production capacity to not only meet soaring domestic demand for mature chips, but also accumulate mature technologies and then slowly grow toward advanced chip technologies.

Guo Junli, a research director at IDC Asia-Pacific, said in an interview that China urgently needs to improve supply capabilities given the huge domestic demand for semiconductors. Much of that demand is from fields like electric vehicles, industrial intelligence and artificial intelligence.

"On the supply side, China faces international policy risks and restrictions and is in urgent need of a supply chain that is free of such pressures," Guo said.

This year, Chinese chipmakers are forecast to make 18 projects operational. They are also expected

to lead the expansion of the global semiconductor industry, SEMI said.

After examining the plans of 48 Chinese chipmakers, analysts at British bank Barclays said China could expand its chip production capacity by 60 percent over the next three years.

"Local players are still underappreciated," analysts Joseph Zhou and Simon Coles wrote in the note. "There are materially more local semiconductor manufacturers and fabs (fabrication units or semiconductor production facilities) in China than suggested by mainstream industry sources."

IC research company TrendForce said in a recent note that China has 44 semiconductor wafer fabs in operation and a further 22 are under construction. By the end of this year, there could be 32 new Chinese fabs for mature chips in all.

Such expected massive expansion, which has alarmed the United States and the European Union, will likely see China's global share of mature process capacity reach 39 percent by 2027, up from 31 percent in 2023, with room for further growth if equipment procurement proceeds smoothly, TrendForce said.

### Briefly

#### Shares worth 56.95 billion yuan to be tradable

Lock-up shares worth around 56.95 billion yuan (\$8.02 billion) will become eligible for trading on China's bourses this week. From Jan 15 to 19, lock-up shares of 58 listed companies will start trading on the Shanghai and Shenzhen stock exchanges.

#### Bond market starts trading

The corporate and enterprise bond market of the Beijing Stock Exchange started trading on Monday, marking a key step in the bourse's high-quality development. Three enterprise bonds worth 2.48 billion yuan (\$348.9 million) in total have been issued

on the first day of trading. The bourse said it has so far established a fundamental bond product system consisting of 10 special categories which include central government bonds, local government bonds, corporate and enterprise bonds, sci-tech innovation bonds and green bonds.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## Dragon-themed product sales surge

By LIU YUKUN  
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Though the Chinese Year of the Dragon will kick in about a month later, the consumer frenzy around products characterized by the auspicious mythical creature — such as dragon-shaped gold jewelry and gold phone decals adorned with dragon-year motifs — is already palpable.

Data from e-commerce platform Taobao show that searches for dragon-related products have surged by 640-fold from Dec 27 to Jan 2. Among these, gold jewelry in the shape of dragons saw a 500-fold increase in search volume.

"Dragons are considered symbols of authority and honor in Chinese culture, and gold, which serves as both jewelry and a safe-haven asset, is particularly welcomed as the Spring Festival approaches. Buyers seeking dragon-shaped gold jewelry are hoping for good luck in the new year," said Xie Zhihui, deputy head of e-commerce sales at Chow Tai Seng, a Shenzhen Stock Exchange-listed gold brand.

Chow Tai Seng's e-commerce

branch experienced a significant sales surge for dragon-themed gold jewelry in November, exceeding 10 million yuan (\$1.4 million), nearly doubling from the previous month's sales.

Sales continued to grow in December, and reached around 5 million yuan in the first week of 2024.

The brand's newly launched dragon-shaped pendants adorned with jellylike enamel became a bestseller, with the red enamel variants generating over 1 million yuan in December.

Contrary to the perception that gold is somewhat old-fashioned and appeals mainly to older residents, Xie said the company's statistics show that the majority of buyers are youngsters born in the 2000s.

The sales boom of dragon-themed gold jewelry is expected to last throughout the year with total volume topping the list of other animal-themed items, she said.

Beyond dragon-themed gold jewelry, the potential of traditional products has given rise to new businesses, said Hong Yong, deputy researcher at the e-commerce branch of the Chinese Academy of International Trade

and Economic Cooperation.

"The relatively higher sales of dragon-themed products, compared to those characterized by animals symbolizing other Chinese years, may be linked to the reverence for dragons in Chinese culture. To tap into the business potential of traditional culture and capitalize on the heritage, companies need to innovate on product design, adopt digital marketing and customize services," Hong said.

Dragon-themed Chinese "good luck bags" used as car ornaments, handmade embroidery and several other products derived from traditional culture have all experienced a sales boom recently.

The shopping craze over dragon-themed products has also sparked enthusiasm among collectors.

Data from the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, showed that dragon banknotes have all been booked out as of Jan 4 across 32 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, totaling 99.98 million pieces.

Globally renowned brands are also capitalizing on the traditional culture.



An employee displays a dragon-themed gold ornament at a jewelry store in Suzhou, Jiangsu province. WANG JIANKANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Shu Uemura has unleashed a limited edition lipstick, Fila has launched embroidered dragon hoodies, and Shanghai Disney Resort has produced dragon plush toys.

Su Anke, founder of marketing company Shenzhen Yiben Zhengjing Culture and Creativity Co Ltd, said many brands have rushed to speed up product development to tap the dragon-themed product buying spree.

Su's company is currently responsible for the development of derivative products of the short-video series *Dragon Family*, a com-

edy about the daily life of a dragon father, human mother and half-dragon son that has garnered about 30 million fans across all platforms.

*Dragon Family*-themed products are now available in more than 3,000 offline stores across the country, with its Taobao store officially launched in January.

"Such a quick product launch is faster than the average in the IP derivative development industry. The goal is to fully leverage the timing to quickly make more products known and accepted by consumers," he said.

## New rules vitalize housing hopes

By WANG YING in Shanghai  
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Shanghai's easing of some rules on Saturday to enable singles to own homes in two districts more easily will boost rational demand in the city's outskirts, local property experts said on Monday.

The move also signals that more restrictions will likely be lifted in the future, they said.

On Saturday, Shanghai's Qingpu and Fengxian districts announced they will reduce homebuying restrictions on non-local talent.

According to the latest policies, non-local families and single buyers who have been working in the two districts, paying local taxes for the last three years, and do not own any residential property in Shanghai, will now be eligible to buy an apartment.

The previous requirement was that only families that had been paying local taxes for at least five years were eligible to buy homes in Shanghai.

"Targeting a specific group of homebuyers, the new measure will mainly benefit non-local talent, and singles in particular," said Guan Rongxue, a senior analyst with the Zhuge Real Estate Data Research Center.

Guan said he believes the policy optimization will help the market to sell residential properties unsold so far in certain parts of the city and increase the attractiveness of Shanghai's suburban areas among professionals.

Zhang Wenjing, general manager of data in Shanghai with the China Index Academy, said the new policies will encourage professionals to settle down in the two districts, which will accelerate local development.

Zhang said new home transactions shrank 11 percent year-on-year in Qingpu last year, and contracted more than 24 percent in Fengxian.

Prior to the two districts' policy adjustments, Shanghai's Jinshan district and Guangzhou's Huangpu district had made changes to their home purchase restrictions, according to Li Yujia, chief researcher at the Guangdong Planning Institute's residential policy research center.

"All these areas are emerging industrial regions where real estate has played an important role in the financing of infrastructural facilities, attracting both investment and talent. Their policy changes will now help stabilize the housing market and create opportunities for local governments' land transactions," said Li.

Li also said he believes areas beyond downtown in more first-tier cities will likely ease their homebuying restrictions.

"Many of the suburban areas in hot spot cities, including first-tier cities, are becoming new cities of industries where large populations can settle down, and property plays a big role in local development."

Monday marked the completion of the first month of new housing policies in China's two biggest cities. Beijing and Shanghai had announced adjustments to their home purchase policies on Dec 14.

Their measures ranged from redefining ordinary housing to lowering the down payment ratio, which helped reduce costs for homebuyers.

In the past month, local homebuyers' willingness to buy property in Beijing and Shanghai has improved, boosting market sentiment, said Chen Wenjing, director of research with the China Index Academy.

Qingpu and Fengxian districts have raised market expectations of further policy optimization in Beijing and Shanghai, which would help stabilize the local property market and deepen recovery in coming months, Chen said.

# BUSINESS

## Railways key priority for infra investment

By ZHUANG QIANG  
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China will continue to see investments in railways increase this year amid the nation's pursuit of high-quality development in various sectors, said officials and experts.

The nation will continue to enhance efforts to drive transformation and upgrading of the railway sector through continuous innovation in key areas, including railway engineering construction, equipment manufacturing, safety improvements and enhanced operational management, Minister of Transport Li Xiaopeng said during a recent meeting in Beijing.

With reinforcing the integration of comprehensive transportation channels, hubs and networks across regions being a work priority this year, China will further expand effective investments in the railway sector with prudent approaches to advance railway infrastructure investments and innovative financing mechanisms, Li said during the annual meeting of China State Railway Group, or China Railway.

Motions were proposed during the meeting to ensure smooth and unimpeded transportation and logistics, coupled with cost reductions and quality enhancement.

Infrastructure investment this year is likely to see a significant rise compared to previous years, as the newly issued 1 trillion yuan (\$139 billion) treasury bonds covering the sector will attract inflows of



A technician guides the installation of a bridge beam at the construction site of the Hefei-Xinyi High-speed Railway in Anhui province in November. LIU YUCAI / XINHUA

### 45,000 kilometers

total length of China's high-speed railway network by end-2023

social capital, Lian Ping, chief economist at Zhixin Investment and head of the Zhixin Investment Research Institute, said at a forum in Shanghai on Saturday.

While propelling the railway sector's high-quality development push this year, safe operations will remain the bottom line that the railway operator should "resolutely hold to always", the transport minister said.

High-speed railway construction, which is key to China seeking

high-quality development, gained more traction last year, with the total HSR network extending to 45,000 kilometers by the end of last year, increasing the nation's overall railway system to 159,000 km, said China Railway, the national railway operator.

Last year, a total of 3,637 km of railways were added nationwide, with 2,776 km being HSR. State railway builders are seen further gearing up on HSR construction going forward.

For instance, China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp, a unit of the centrally administered China Railway Construction Corp, said its builders on the Hefei-Xinyi High-speed Railway achieved major construction progress as they completed precision alignment

work on the Dingyuan No 2 railway bridge on schedule, laying a solid foundation for further work.

The alignment work is a key milestone in the building of the bridge, which is being constructed above the operating G329 national highway, CR24 said.

Upon completion, the 324-km Hefei-Xinyi line will run from Hefei, capital of Anhui province, and pass through the counties of Dingyuan, Fengyang, Mingguang, Wuhe and Sixian before entering Jiangsu province and terminating in Xinyi.

The work aims to help spur the coordinated economic development of regions along the railway line, serving the high-quality development of the Yangtze River Delta integration.

## Munich Re bullish on biz in China

Financial giant keen on opportunities given broader catastrophe coverage

By ZHOU LANXU  
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Amid a more complicated geopolitical environment, Munich Re, a global leader in reinsurance, still sees China as an increasingly important market as the business opportunities it offers remain promising.

Having established a branch company in China two decades ago, Munich Re may scale up the Chinese part in its global business pie chart over time as its footprint here may hopefully outgrow other markets, Joachim Wenning, Munich Re's chair of the board of management, said in an exclusive interview with China Daily.

In essence, reinsurance is a type of insurance business whereby a reinsurer offers coverage to other insurance companies, allowing them to transfer a portion of their insured risks to it.

Wenning said that Munich Re logs an annual premium income of approximately 2 billion euros (\$2.19 billion) in China, a figure that is on the rise due to the significant potential for a broader spectrum of risks in the country to be insured and reinsured, especially those associated with natural disasters like floods and earthquakes.

Globally, Munich Re reported 67.1 billion euros in gross premiums written in 2022. According to Munich Re's estimate, about 5 percent of natural catastrophe risks in China currently are covered by insurance or reinsurance, up from roughly 3 percent two decades ago.

However, compared to the global average ratio, which stands at around 38 percent, China's insurance penetration rate for such risks remains relatively low and offers significant growth potential, Wenning said.

Though not having disclosed the official estimate of catastrophe risk coverage in China, the National Financial Regulatory Administration recognized in November that the catastrophe insurance business is entering an upward cycle. Last summer, the insurance industry disbursed claims of more than 10 billion yuan (\$1.39 billion) to 16 regions that were heavily impacted by typhoons and floods.

Wenning said Munich Re also identifies emerging opportunities in China's advancements in green technologies and energy investments, which generate new risks

that require insurance coverage.

"The need for reinsurance and the need for global expertise in China is unchanged. I could even say (it) is as vivid as it ever was," Wenning said, adding that such market potential is supporting Munich Re's unaltered commitment to the Chinese market, even amid an evolving geopolitical landscape marked with more tensions.

"It is strategic for Munich Re to be in the economy and in the market, locally present, which over time is going to be the largest economy in the world, which over time is going to be the largest insurance market in the world."

Wenning said what also reinforces Munich Re's confidence in the Chinese market is the progress China has made in improving the business environment, such as better respect for the rule of law and the good job being done by the insurance regulator.

The tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference, held in December, has reiterated the country's ambition of fostering a world-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized, vowing to promote the brand of "Invest in China".

"I think they (Chinese regulators) have learned a lot from foreign experience. They were open to listening to foreign experience and building this into their current policies."

Wenning added that China's pursuit of high-quality development is a "very meaningful ambition", which, if it succeeds, will raise the sophistication level and core functionality of China's insurance sector to one of the world's best in the coming 10 to 20 years.

Swiss Re, another global leader in reinsurance, has also expressed optimism about the Chinese market. Paul Murray, CEO of life and health reinsurance at Swiss Re, recently told China Daily that the country's robust economic growth and expanding middle-income population are driving the rapid growth of China's insurance market.

The NFRA said insurance companies across China reported 4.3 trillion yuan in primary insurance premium income in the first three quarters of 2023, up 11 percent year-on-year. By the end of September, total assets held by China's insurance sector reached 29.6 trillion yuan. Of this, reinsurance companies contributed 769.2 billion yuan.

## Italy's top fashion school to expand presence in nation

SHENZHEN — Italy's top fashion school, Istituto Marangoni, recently expanded its presence in China by doubling the size of its campus in the southern metropolis of Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in a bid to further boost the tech hub's fashion industry.

The fashion school will move its Shenzhen campus from Nanshan district to a new one in Futian district, which will be about twice the size of the original.

"Our overall enrollment will also at least double," said Robin Fang, president of the Shenzhen School of Istituto Marangoni, at the Shenzhen campus relocation signing ceremony.

Fang revealed that the school expects to welcome the first batch of new students to the new campus in September this year and has already received inquiries from students in China, South America, Europe, and elsewhere.

In 2016, with joint support of the

Italian government and the Shenzhen municipal government, Istituto Marangoni established its Shenzhen school in Nanshan district.

The fashion school offers a variety of courses in the areas of fashion design, fashion communication, and fashion management, as well as luxury brand management and marketing.

"If you want to learn about Chinese women's clothing, you should visit Shenzhen, especially Futian," said Fang, adding that since China's reform and opening-up, Futian has gathered a large number of women's fashion brands, which demonstrated Shenzhen's advantages in the fashion industry in addition to technology and finance.

Futian district boasts over 2,000 fashion brand enterprises, including Koradior, Marisfrolg, Ellassay, and Yinger — all well-known brands at home and abroad. Its fashion industry's scale has surpassed 120 billion yuan (\$16.89 billion), accounting for

around a quarter of Shenzhen's total fashion industry scale.

A research report on Shenzhen's fashion industry released in March last year showed that the metropolis has developed into one of the domestic fashion industry bases with the most comprehensive industry categories, the most original brands, the most well-developed industrial support and the most significant agglomeration effect.

Now, the industry volume of Shenzhen's traditional fashion fields, such as clothing, watches and jewelry, and emerging fashion fields like consumer electronics and creative design, have both exceeded 1 trillion yuan, the report said.

Emanuele Colombo, teaching director of the Shenzhen School of Istituto Marangoni, has lived in Shenzhen for nearly two years and feels that the fashion industry is quite dynamic there.

"We see a lot of different trends coming out of this place, and I

believe these trends will influence China and the world," he said.

"Shenzhen is also a very open coastal city with a wide variety of sources of inspiration and is friendly to young local designers as they can build their brands here," he added.

According to Fang, the Shenzhen school will become an important bridge connecting China and Italy, and even the world's fashion industry, bringing high-level international market education concepts, international market ideas, and global fashion resources and creating a platform for talent training, external exchanges, and fashion innovation for Shenzhen.

"Istituto Marangoni will always be committed to nurturing designers with creativity, skills and forward-thinking, and we look forward to seeing more fashion designers go out from here in the future and shine on the international stage," Fang said.

XINHUA

IVORY IS NO LONGER A COMMERCIAL ITEM

Buying and selling ivory are now illegal.  
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WILDAID

# BUSINESSFOCUS



## Blueberry fields forever: How a town reinvented itself

Chentuan accounts for 30 percent of Shandong's total production of the popular fruit with health benefits

By ZHAO RUIXUE  
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The remarkable transformation of Chentuan town in Rizhao, a coastal city in Shandong province, is a story worth telling.

Once known for its polluting stone mining and processing industry, the town is now a picturesque place with the largest blueberry production base in the province.

Vast areas of its surrounding hills are adorned with blueberry bushes, with a planting area of over 1,660 hectares that produced 8,000 metric tons of fresh blueberry last year, according to the township government, accounting for 30 percent of the total blueberry production in Shandong.

In fact, blueberry production and consumption have been on the rise in China in recent years.

The country surpassed the United States as the world's largest blueberry producer in 2021, with Guizhou, Liaoning, Shandong, Sichuan and Yunnan provinces being the main blueberry-producing regions, according to a report.

The blueberry market is expected to witness further growth in the years ahead, the 2023 State of the Global Blueberry Industry Report, released by the International Blueberry Organization, said.

Meanwhile, China is also the world's leading importer of blueberries, bringing in — mainly from Peru and Chile — 42,847 tons of the blue fruit last year, a year-on-year increase of 45 percent, the report showed.

China was not a traditional consumer of blueberries.

However, higher standards of liv-

ing and growing awareness of the health benefits associated with a diverse range of fruits have made consumers increase their intake of blueberries.

About 80 percent of Chinese aged 18 to 35 consumed blueberry-related products, including fresh fruits and processed products, last year, according to iiMedia Research.

"Chinese consumers prefer larger blueberries with relatively higher brix levels (level of sugar, vitamins, minerals, proteins, etc) and longer shelf-life," said Yao Ming, deputy manager of Yuhai Agricultural Tourism Co Ltd of the Rizhao Agricultural Development Group.

"This preference has led to the cultivation of new blueberry varieties tailored to the domestic market," said Yao, who has been working in blueberry business for five years.

It is difficult to expand the blueberry planting area because of strict measures aimed at protecting arable land that is used to grow grain. This makes cultivation of new varieties that can produce a higher quantity of blueberries more important, he added.

To meet these demands, Chentuan has been strengthening its technological research and development capabilities to promote the high-quality development of blueberries from seedling cultivation to production.

### Seedling breeding

Even during winter, the laboratory at the blueberry production, education and research base in Chentuan emanates warmth. Rows of small transparent bottles that house blueberry seedlings are neatly arranged there.

"Seedlings play a crucial role in the



Top: Growers pick blueberries at an orchard in Rizhao, Shandong province, in June 2021. XU CHUANBAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Above: Workers sort blueberries at a production line in Rizhao, Shandong province, in 2020. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

success of the blueberry market, so we need to prioritize seedling cultivation," Yao said.

The town has deepened its cooperation with more than 20 universities and research institutes, including Jilin Agricultural University, to develop core technologies for blueberry cultivation.

In 2022, eight new blueberry varieties were bred and recommended as the top varieties for future planting.

"In our town, the peak harvest season of blueberries is from June to July. Thanks to the new varieties, blueberries can reach the market as early as the end of March," Yao said, adding that some blueberries planted in the town are available even before the Spring Festival.

Compared to traditional varieties, the new ones are better suited to the local climate, he said.

"The new varieties produce larger and sweeter blueberries, and each plant can yield 10 percent more than

traditional varieties," Yao said.

In a greenhouse in the town, Li Chunlei, who has devoted himself to blueberry cultivation for the past 18 years, was watering blueberry seedlings in mid-December. These seedlings are the new varieties that they are trying to cultivate.

"Breeding new varieties is a slow and meticulous process that requires patience. It typically takes seven to eight years to cultivate a new variety," said Li.

Li and his colleagues planted more than 200 new varieties of blueberry seedlings in the greenhouse last March. After observing their growth and comparing the results, they eliminated more than 40 seedlings.

Chentuan has also adopted technological advancements in planting blueberries.

At a blueberry industrial park, all 95 standard blueberry greenhouses are equipped with a smart internet of things platform.

Sensors in the greenhouses upload data, such as temperature, soil moisture, and humidity to the platform, allowing blueberry growers to monitor real-time soil and air temperatures.

The blueberry IoT information management and control system also provides quick access to information on agricultural diseases, pests and disasters in the park.

"Standardized cultivation has significantly improved the quantity, quality and fruit safety of blueberries," said Yao.

### Industrial shift

Chentuan is located at the upper basin of Rizhao's biggest reservoir, which supplies water for both production and daily use in the city.

A decade ago, the stone mining and processing industry was a major contributor of revenue to the local government, with an annual output value of around 120 million yuan (\$16.76 million).

However, the industry posed risks to safe drinking water and the physical health of residents.

Local statistics show that stone processing in Chentuan produced over 100,000 cubic meters of slurry and sawdust each year.

To address these issues, local government departments adopted various measures.

They assisted stone business units that wished to continue their operations in relocating to a stone industrial park and guided those who wanted to transition away from the business to explore new opportunities, such as growing blueberries.

In 2014, all stone extraction and processing facilities in Chentuan

were shut down. Since then, the town's environmental quality has steadily improved, creating a positive atmosphere for blueberry cultivation.

"As early as in 2005, an agricultural professor from Dalian University planted some blueberries in a village of our town because the soil of the hills suits the growth of blueberries," said Yao.

Two years later, the blueberry saplings produced a good harvest and were sold out quickly.

"When local government departments shut down the stone business, they started to guide local farmers in expanding the growing area of blueberry as an option to enrich the local people," said Yao.

"I work at a blueberry production base from March to July harvesting open field blueberries, earning a decent income," said Wang Peiyun, a resident of Dongshidun village.

The blueberry industry has provided a large number of jobs for villagers in the town. During the annual harvest season alone, it creates jobs for over 10,000 farmers.

Thanks to the blueberry industry, the per capita bank deposits in the town, which now has a permanent population of 19,000, had increased from 18,000 yuan in 2012 to 80,000 yuan in 2022, said the township government.

"We will establish a complete industry chain, from seedling breeding to deep processing, and promote the integrated development of the agricultural and tourism sectors to contribute to rural vitalization," said Feng Pengzhan, head of the township government.

## Growers taste sweet success from cultivation biz

By ZHAO RUIXUE  
in Rizhao, Shandong

Miao Ning, 38, who runs a blueberry orchard in Chentuan town in Donggang district of Rizhao, Shandong province, is familiar with every stage of the fruit's growth.

Fifteen years ago, when he was employed by an agricultural company in the town, little did Miao expect that the blueberry seedlings he planted would blossom into such a thriving industry.

These days, rows of neatly arranged blueberry bushes are spread across the expansive hilly terrain that dots Chentuan.

"At that time, our company was the first to attempt blueberry cultivation in the town," said Miao, who graduated from Weifang University in Shandong in 2008 with a master's degree in biological sciences.

His academic background

equipped him with extensive agricultural knowledge in seedling cultivation and soil-related studies, which he applied effectively to blueberry cultivation.

"In the initial years after I arrived at the town, we faced challenges including a lack of infrastructure, such as roads and electricity," said Miao.

The primary industry in the town then was stone mining, he added.

Miao was unsure if the land in Chentuan could support the development of a blueberry industry. However, as he delved deeper into growing blueberries, he quickly found the answer.

Rizhao's abundant sunshine — owing to its location in the southern part of Shandong — and the sandy soil with optimal pH levels (which measure acidity or basicity) create an ideal natural environment for blueberry cultivation.

"Rizhao experiences limited rainfall in June, precisely when blueberries enter the harvesting season, ensuring a bountiful harvest," he said.

Blueberries are particularly sensitive to rain during the flowering and harvesting seasons. Rain during the flowering period hampers proper setting of the fruit, leading to reduced yields, while rainfall during the harvesting season negatively affects the picking process, Miao explained.

In addition to the favorable natural conditions, the local government has played a crucial role in promoting the blueberry industry as a means of improving the livelihoods of local farmers.

"Significant improvements have been made to the infrastructure in the town, including the construction of roads," said Miao.

The stone industry, which caused

damage to the environment, has also been shut, providing a better growing environment for blueberries.

"The local government has been providing us with supportive policies such as subsidies in land use, which have facilitated the rapid growth of the blueberry industry," said Miao.

In 2014, Miao established his own company dedicated to blueberry cultivation and production, which has since become a leading agricultural enterprise in the district.

His blueberry growing base now spans over 120 hectares, providing jobs to many villagers during the peak picking season.

"When the harvest season is in full swing, we require a workforce of over 600 farmers to pick and sort the blueberries on our farm," said Miao, whose story is a testa-



Miao Ning, a blueberry orchard owner, checks the growth environment of blueberries in Chentuan town, Rizhao, Shandong province, in May. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ment to the remarkable potential of the blueberry industry in Chentuan.

Looking ahead, he hopes to take

the blueberries to overseas markets, which can benefit not only the local economy, but also the surrounding villages.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Ill-intentioned election 'congratulations' nothing but flash in the pan histrionics

That Taiwan was not a country in the past, and will never be one in the future is an everlasting truth. Once the dust raised by staunch secessionist Lai Ching-te winning the local leadership election on Taiwan island settles down, the hoopla created by the "congratulatory messages" in support of that cause will be but a flash in the pan.

That's a core message Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi delivered while taking a question on Taiwan at a news conference in Cairo on Sunday, as well as a warning to the secessionist-minded Democratic Progressive Party authorities of Taiwan.

"Taiwan independence" has never been possible. It was not possible in the past, and it will never be possible in the future. Anyone on the island who wants to pursue "Taiwan independence" is trying to split China's territory and will be severely punished by history and law. Anyone who violates the one-China principle is interfering in China's internal affairs and infringing on China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and will surely be opposed by the entire Chinese nation and even the international community, Wang said.

After Nauru announced it was severing "diplomatic relations" with Taipei and trying to establish ties with Beijing on Monday, only 12 out of the 193 United Nations member states, mostly small nations in the Pacific Ocean and Latin America, as well as the Vatican, still maintain "diplomatic ties" with the island. As of Monday, Taipei has lost 10 of its "diplomatic allies" to Beijing during the DPP's eight years in power. That reflects the fact that an unjust cause finds scant support.

Cairo has actually provided Wang with an ideal venue to drive home his Taiwan-related message. It was in Cairo that China, the United States and the United Kingdom issued the Cairo Declaration 80 years ago, which clearly stipulated that "Taiwan, the Chinese territory stolen by Japan, should be returned to China".

After that, Article 8 of the Potsdam Declaration jointly issued by China, the US, the UK and the Soviet Union in 1945 stipulated that the provisions of the Cairo Declaration must be implemented. Japan accepted the Potsdam Declaration and declared unconditional surrender. These series of documents with binding power in international law form an integral part of the postwar international order. They also established the historical and legal foundation that Taiwan is an inalienable territory of China.

The Taiwan question is China's internal affair, and the one-China principle is the political foundation of any country's diplomatic ties with Beijing, including those of the US, which is in a better position than any other country to know that Taiwan is an integral part of China. It is only because of Washington's geopolitical goal of encircling the communist camp during the Cold War that Taiwan became a piece on its game board. It is only because it continues to play the Taiwan card to put pressure on Beijing that the Taiwan question has become a flashpoint today.

The whole world sees clearly that were it not for the US' support of the secessionists on the island, the national reunification of China would not have been postponed for so long. Although the US has tried to water down the wording of its statement on the local election of the island, its intention to butter its bread on both sides belies the hypocrisy of its stated commitment to not support "Taiwan independence".

The fundamental status quo across the Taiwan Strait is that the two sides of it belong to one China with the central authorities in Beijing being the sole legitimate government. The US, as well as its allies, must realize that they are in breach of their commitments to China and international law in sending encouraging messages in support of secessionism. They should uphold the one-China principle in good faith.

## Gaza spillover-sparks risk igniting wider war

The Red Sea tensions have escalated rapidly since the United States and the United Kingdom launched air strikes against Houthi military targets in Yemen on Thursday. In light of this, Sunday's joint statement issued by China and the Secretariat General of the Arab League was a sharp rebuke of their actions even if the two sides did not say so directly.

The statement, issued in Cairo during Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to Egypt, expressed the two sides' "deep concern" over the recent escalation of the situation in the Red Sea and stressed the need to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen while ensuring the safety of international commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

The Red Sea crisis is clearly a spillover consequence of the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, and China and Egypt called for an immediate and comprehensive cease-fire and the cessation of all violence against civilians and violations of international law and international humanitarian norms. They called on the members of the UN Security Council to heed the call of Arab, Islamic and other countries that oppose Israel's ongoing war against civilians in Gaza, and to earnestly shoulder their responsibility to take actions to fully and effectively implement the relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly on the situation in Gaza and the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Indeed, allowing the situation to escalate further will only exacerbate the crisis. Since last month, the Red Sea as an important international trade route for goods and energy has been under constant threat as the Houthi militia has intensified its attacks on "Israel-linked" ships using the waterway, demanding an end to Israel's military actions in Gaza.

While the Houthi militia must stop targeting commercial ships in the Red Sea, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Yemen must be respected. The US-led attacks on Houthi targets have only complicated the situation and ratcheted up tensions in the region.

The UNSC has never authorized any country to use force against Yemen, a move that will obviously "add fuel to the fire" in the Red Sea and raise the overall security risks in the region.

The flare-up of the Red Sea tensions reinforces the urgency for the world community to step up efforts to put an end to the ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, which has now been raging for 100 days.

Both restraint and diplomatic efforts are needed to bring an end to the conflict as soon as possible to prevent the humanitarian crisis in Gaza from worsening and the conflict from escalating further.

## China working to overcome global trust deficit

The 54th annual gathering of the World Economic Forum, which opened at the Swiss ski resort of Davos on Monday, provides another opportunity for more than 60 heads of state and government and some 800 chief executives, among a total of 2,800 participants, to discuss ways to deal with the many challenges the world is facing today.

That the five-day gathering "is taking place against the most complicated geopolitical and geoeconomic backdrop in decades", as WEF President Borge Brende put it, underscores how crucial it is that the participants engage in these discussions in good faith and with a sincere desire to work together in the spirit of the forum's theme of "rebuilding trust".

Premier Li Qiang, who is expected to deliver a key speech at the Davos meeting, will put forward China's solutions to many pressing global issues, including slower world economic growth.

The International Monetary Fund has forecast that global growth will slow from 3 percent in 2023 to 2.9 percent in 2024, well below the historical (2000-19) average of 3.8 percent. The subdued growth prospects are mainly due to geopolitical strife, tight financing conditions and the disruptive impact of artificial intelligence, according to a survey of top economists conducted ahead of the

WEF meeting that was released on Monday.

China, which is pivoting from growth based on investment and real estate to one based on innovation, can contribute to rebuilding trust among nations because of its significant economic and trade strength and its role as a major engine for global growth, as Brende said in a recent interview.

China's GDP represented about 2 percent of the world's total in 1979 when the country first attended the annual WEF gathering. Today, it accounts for nearly 20 percent of the world's GDP. China has been a direct beneficiary of economic globalization and the mutual trust that trend embodied. Cherishing this trust, it is doing its best to reverse the trend of de-globalization and forge trust with its trade partners.

Decoupling, as advocated by the United States and some of its allies, in the name of "de-risking", is a politicized concept intended to fuel mistrust against those countries the US is at odds with for one reason or another.

Contrary to these US-led efforts, China is seeking to promote trade liberalization and keep the global industry and supply chains functioning smoothly. In doing so, it is not only striving to maintain its own development momentum but to continue to bring cooperation opportunities to other countries and give more impetus to the global recovery and growth.

Lu Jun



## Opinion Line

## Unlocking potential of data factors will help drive growth

Tapping new economic growth drivers is one of the priorities of China's economic work this year, with the data factor expected to play a bigger role given that its accelerated development is likely to breed new development momentum.

As the world's largest producer of real-time data, China enjoys significant advantages in the development of the digital economy. Surveys indicate that Chinese internet users spend an average of seven hours a day online on mobile terminals. China has the world's largest manufacturing system, and its real economy is accelerating the pace of "cloud usage". China also creates the world's largest amount of data every day at the production end. This, together with the large quantities of urban activity data produced by the operation of smart cities, has built the foundation for its digital economy.

As the value of data becomes increasingly prominent, accelerating the entry of data factors into industrial production and giving play to their multiplier effects in

energizing various industries will greatly promote the high-quality development of the digital economy. To this end, the authorities have recently issued a number of documents aimed at activating "dormant data", exploring and expanding the application scenarios of data elements in typical fields, accelerating the bridging of the "digital divide", and promoting the realization of the value of data elements and the release of digital dividends through high-quality development of the digital economy.

Data elements can be reused in multiple scenarios, and a group of data can release new value in repeated usage and thus promote diversified business operations. To promote the "multiplier effects" of data elements, the reuse of data in different scenarios and different fields should be encouraged to foster new products and services, and create new industries and models for economic development.

Despite the digital economy enjoying huge development potential, in the process of promoting the

marketization of data elements, it is necessary to properly handle the open sharing of public data and the development and utilization of data resources. China's public data has a large volume, good quality and excellent structure, but it faces such shortcomings as insufficient open sharing and low utilization efficiency. Some legal breakthroughs are also yet to be made concerning privacy protection in its development and utilization.

As an important infrastructure of the digital economy, the construction of China's data factor market also needs to be improved. On the one hand, explorations of market-oriented allocation models of data elements adapted to different industries and fields should be encouraged. On the other hand, on the basis of respecting the development law of the digital economy, the authorities should accelerate the formulating of a scientific, reasonable and efficient data system that conforms to the characteristics of China's data factor market.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

## Sign of universities upping their game

On Jan 8, the Department of Industrial Engineering at Tsinghua University published a notice announcing the dismissal of a US student studying in the department who applied for a six-month leave of absence in March 2023. He was supposed to resume studies in the fall semester of that year, but he did not return to the university and by December the university had still not been able to contact him.

The case has aroused a lot of attention, but a glimpse into media reports will find it's not the first

time a domestic university has dismissed an international student for nonattendance. As early as 2017, Wuhan University dismissed a number of foreign students, including undergraduates and graduates, because they did not register within the stipulated period. In April 2020, Shanghai Jiao Tong University also dismissed a number of foreign students for similar reasons.

All these cases make clear that university regulations apply to both domestic and foreign students. Some domestic universities used to

apply looser standards for international students considering their difficulties in studying in the Chinese language, but that practice has declined in recent years.

The principle of equal standards for all and strict enforcement of that principle will certainly benefit the nation's higher education sector. As an ancient Chinese saying goes, strict teaching makes excellent students. That still applies today, to both domestic and international students equally.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Sino-Brazilian partnership reflects shared values

Foreign Minister Wang Yi is scheduled to visit Brazil later this week after wrapping up his four-country tour in Africa that started on Saturday. Given the important role the Latin American giant plays in the world, the significance of this visit cannot be exaggerated.

The visit is expected to carry on the positive momentum of the development of the comprehensive China-Brazil strategic partnership that was effectively consolidated by Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's state visit to China in April last year.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the founding of their diplomatic relations. The past 50 years have not only seen China and Brazil become the largest developing countries in the Eastern and Western hemispheres respectively, but also witnessed them becoming major players on the world stage.

The complementarity of their economic structure means the two sides have great potential to deepen their current cooperation in such areas as minerals and technology, and to expand it into new sectors including environmental protection, climate change, the low-carbon economy and the digital economy.

The development of Sino-Brazilian pragmatic economic and trade cooperation aims to promote common development of the two countries and does not target at any third party. The two sides, upholding international equity and justice, stand ready to work with each other to strengthen strategic coordination in the G20, BRICS and other multilateral institutions, enhance coordination and cooperation in international finance, climate response and environmental protection, and contribute to develop-

ing countries' efforts to realize fairer and more balanced global development.

Given this, it is predictable that some in the United States will try to misinterpret Wang's visit as the latest attempt by Beijing to make trouble in Washington's "backyard". But the Latin American countries — especially such an important emerging market economy as Brazil — are nobody's "backyard".

Their shared and firm belief in true multilateralism and their upholding of the United Nations-centered international order and economic globalization put Brazil and China in the same trench fighting unilateralism, hegemony and protectionism. That does not mean they are trying to overturn the international system. It means they are trying to improve it.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Robin Xing

## China's policy support to boost 2024 recovery

The Chinese economy emerged from the shadows of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2023, with its GDP growth accelerating to 5.1 percent from 3 percent in 2022, led by household consumption. Yet the economy is likely to continue grappling with structural challenges of debt, demographics and low inflation, although we (at Morgan Stanley) believe that more decisive policy support is likely to boost the recovery path in 2024.

**Economic growth mix of the year**

Reflecting the recovery in labor-intensive services, disposable income growth likely outpaced GDP growth in 2023, a trend we believe will continue in 2024. Private consumption will thus remain a major contributor to GDP growth.

As household consumption appetite is on a path of normalization, with National Bureau of Statistics data showing households unleashed some excess savings in the third quarter of 2023, the first time since the pandemic, we expect private consumption growth to remain at a robust 5 percent year-on-year in 2024.

Fixed capital formation is likely to rise at a modest 3.2 percent year-on-year, similar to 2023, and infrastructure investment is expected to remain resilient amid a higher central government budget (specifically the increase in the budget by 1 trillion yuan — \$140.13 billion — in late 2023) and quota for local government special bonds, partly offsetting the tightening of net financing among local government financing vehicles (LGFVs).

This year could also see the further contraction of property investment, albeit at a slightly slower pace after two and a half years of sharp adjustment. The “three major projects” — rural vitalization, social housing construction, and building public infrastructure for normal and emergency use — are likely to provide a floor for the property market via quasi-fiscal support from the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank.

Finally, external demand is likely to rebound from the trough in 2023 thanks to a global tech up-cycle, competitiveness in the green supply chains, and global consumer demand amid resilient real income growth. We also expect China's trade-able sector to weather the headwind of supply chain “de-risking” by maintaining pragmatic economic relations with key trading partners, as well as resilient outward direct investment by China's emerging multinational manufacturers.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

**Reflation path likely to be gradual**

The shadow of low inflation still looms over the economy, though, with the GDP deflator remaining negative for three consecutive quarters up to the fourth quarter of 2023, the longest stretch since 1998-2000.

At its core, low inflation is a reflection of weaker aggregate demand relative to supply amid housing and LGFV deleveraging. Indeed, economic activity appears to have decelerated toward the end of last year, with the official manufacturing purchasing managers' index remaining below 50 for the

China's economy has reached a critical juncture. We see room for more decisive policy easing and faster economic rebalancing to support growth while tackling excesses from credit-fueled growth in the past.

third consecutive month, reaching a six-month low. The services PMI, too, dipped into contraction territory in November 2023 and remained flat in December for the first time since December 2022.

Experience shows reflation and smooth deleveraging often require more debt initially to support aggregate demand and anchor inflation expectations. Policymakers in turn ramped up fiscal support with the mid-year budget expansion, and we see further coordinated fiscal and monetary easing in 2024.

The augmented fiscal deficit may expand by 1.5 percentage points of GDP, cushioning tightening effects of housing and LGFV deleveraging (the two segments have combined debt-to-GDP of about 100 percent). Even though the initial fiscal package to be announced during the National People's Congress in a couple of months could be modest, additional easing could be prompted as growth is likely to fall below the official target in the first half of the year.

Also, the PBOC is likely to implement two 25 basis point reserve requirement ratio cuts and a cumulative 20 basis point policy rate cut this year to maintain sufficient liquidity and accommodate fiscal stimulus. That said, the reactive nature of policy response means that the reflation path is likely to be gradual.

We expect the GDP deflator to pick up mildly this year, to 0.5 percent from -0.9 percent last year, marking the first step toward a more optimal inflation environment. We believe a GDP deflator of 2-3 percent is not only implied by the long-standing official inflation target but also necessary to ensure more moderate levels of real interest rates, improve corporate profitability and revive private investment and wage growth.

Reaching the aforementioned optimal inflation in a sustained manner requires decisive fiscal easing and rebalancing. We believe a “5R” macro policy package — reflate, rebalance toward consumption,

restructure the troubled balance sheets, reform the public sector, and rekindle the private sector's animal spirit — will be needed to break the spiral of low inflation and rising leverage. The overall progress for implementing this “5R strategy” was about 25 percent in 2023. We expect it to reach 50 percent by year end, led by reflation and restructuring, in line with a gradual reflation outlook.

**Property sector needs to improve liquidity situation**

The property sector remains at the center of China's economic challenges. Granted, the direct drag from housing activities may become more moderate as investment in housing as a percentage of GDP has fallen sharply from 9 percent in 2021 to about 6 percent, and housing sales have declined by one-third compared with the peak level. However, the spillover effects, such as difficulties for suppliers and contractors, investment losses in wealth management products, and negative wealth effect due to lower housing prices, could become more pervasive.

For the government, the ongoing social housing construction and rural vitalization plans are indirect ways of supporting the property sector by digesting inventory and improving realty developers' liquidity situation so they can complete the construction of unfinished homes. This would in turn appeal to homebuyers' sentiment, which would be conducive to restoring the positive circulation in the property market.

But if the aforementioned non-linear transmission channels emerge and widen, it would dampen the policy multiplier and deepen the downward feedback loop between macroeconomic conditions and the property market, requiring a larger stimulus to keep the economy on a recovery path. Moreover, more explicit support to property developers might be necessitated to prevent another round of confidence deficit in their ability to deliver presold homes.

China's economy has reached a critical juncture. We see room for more decisive policy easing and faster economic rebalancing to support growth while tackling excesses from credit-fueled growth in the past. With a proper policy mix, we see a two- to three-year reflation journey, lifting the country to the level of a high-income economy by 2027.

The author is chief China economist at Morgan Stanley. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Lau Siu-kai

## Washington uses Taiwan only to fulfill its own self interests

Lai Ching-te of the Democratic Progressive Party was elected the next leader of Taiwan in the local leadership election held on the Chinese island on Saturday. Compared with the 2016 and 2020 leadership elections on the island, the approach of the United States to the 2024 election has been relatively “low-key”, which reflects how Washington defines its interests given the present state of Sino-US relations.

Over the years, the US has been making efforts to win over allies and partners, especially those in Asia, to build a front against China. It has been attacking China, and taking measures to contain it as well as isolate it from the international community.

**Taiwan a pawn on US' strategic chessboard**

The US is committed to strengthening its military and “official” ties with Taiwan, not only to bolster the island's “defense capabilities” but also to strengthen Taiwan's role as a “chess piece” which can be used to encircle the Chinese mainland. At the same time, “Taiwan independence” forces on the island have become increasingly arrogant and overbearing, not only rejecting the 1992 Consensus, the ballast of cross-Strait peace, but also challenging the one-China principle bottom line, leading to tense cross-Strait relations in recent years.

Many US officials, politicians and experts have identified Taiwan as a “flash point” between Beijing and Washington which could trigger a war between them.

Given these facts, US political circles and Western media, somewhat “unexpectedly”, paid limited attention, at least outwardly, to the local leadership election in Taiwan and refrained from publicly favoring any candidate. Of course, we have no way of knowing the measures the US took behind the scenes — and therefore some secret maneuvers cannot be ruled out. Still, multiple signs indicate that no matter who becomes the island's leader, the US believes it can keep him or her on a tight leash, without

In this year's New Year message, the top leader declared that the reunification of the motherland is a historical necessity, and compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait must join hands to share the great glory of national rejuvenation.

allowing him/her to influence the US' policy toward the mainland or interfering with that policy, especially when the US' attention is almost wholly diverted somewhere else today.

The US is so confident because, given the fact that the power difference between the two sides of the Taiwan Strait is now a chasm and Taiwan has been increasingly isolated in the world, the island has become irrevocably dependent on Washington for security. No leader on the island can defy the will of the US, because tragically, Taiwan has no autonomy or dignity left.

In the past, former US president George W. Bush reprimanded then Taiwan leader Chen Shui-bian for his excessive provocations against the mainland, and asked him to stop doing so. This lesson is still fresh in the minds of the “Taiwan independence” forces, though the US may consider a reunified China harmful to its strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond.

The view that “Taiwan's status is undecided” has gained currency even among today's many US politicians. The US further insists that the reunification of the Chinese nation must be contingent on the consent of Taiwan residents and that it has no “obligation” to promote or facilitate peaceful cross-Strait reunification. The US has for long used different means to prevent the two sides of the Taiwan Strait from moving

toward peaceful reunification.

But, at the same time, Washington does not want to provoke Beijing into realizing national reunification through non-peaceful means by blatantly intervening in the Taiwan island's leadership election or siding with the “Taiwan independence” forces, because that would destroy the fragile rapport between the two powers brought about by the San Francisco summit between the top leaders of China and the US in November 2023, and trigger a conflict between them.

**US mired in political instability, internal strife**

At present and in the foreseeable future, the United States is particularly averse to militarily engaging the Chinese mainland over Taiwan, because it cannot handle such a conflict due to the lack of overwhelming military power and grave domestic and foreign troubles.

Tensions between Beijing and Washington have somewhat eased, but that does not mean Washington has substantially changed its policy toward Beijing and Taipei, even though it has perfunctorily reiterated its opposition to “Taiwan independence”. It has not given any indication, though, that it does not want the Taiwan question to exacerbate tensions with Beijing.

Although some Americans still believe Washington has the military capability to defeat Beijing, many US strategists are not confident that it could do so. To be sure, China's military strength, especially its naval strength, has grown over the past couple of decades. Consequently, in the short run, reducing cross-Strait tensions and preventing the Chinese island of Taiwan from issuing provocative statements targeted at Beijing are in the US' best interests.

The US' strategy to help Ukraine in order to prolong the Moscow-Kyiv conflict and weaken Russia has been failing. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has consumed a lot of US and Western military power and brought

severe economic hardships to many European countries. The war-weariness of the Western public has become increasingly evident. The US cannot continue this proxy war indefinitely, but it has no “face-saving” exit option. Failure in this proxy war will severely damage the international credibility and status of the US, deepen the rift between it and major European countries, and divide the Western camp. And the repercussions will hurt the US in multiple ways for a long time to come.

In the Palestine-Israel conflict, too, the US has been supporting Israel's attack on Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip. As a result, it faces the threat of being politically isolated from the international community and globally condemned, which has significantly weakened its “soft power”.

If the Palestine-Israel conflict were to eventually expand into a large-scale war in the Middle East, the US would be embroiled in a protracted war wherein it would be a loser in all aspects, no matter the outcome.

As the US presidential election approaches, the political struggles and divisions within the US will intensify and become intractable. Unsurprisingly, some US politicians will turn to the old trick of playing the “China-bashing” card to garner votes.

But the fact is that the US is mired in political instability and severe internal strife, lacks absolute military superiority, is overburdened with debt and does not have the ability or the will power to fight for Taiwan, and US citizens are not prepared to sacrifice their lives and resources for the safety of a distant “friend”.

Incontrovertibly, cross-Strait relations ultimately depend on the vicissitudes of Sino-US relations. In the foreseeable future, the US, which is afflicted by intractable internal and external troubles, including the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts, would not want to open a new military front against China, which is now a major global military power.

Even though Washington's intention to

use Taiwan to contain Beijing remains unchanged, it should prevent Taiwan from triggering a Sino-US military conflict in the foreseeable future. Although the election of Lai Ching-te as the island leader will heighten the tensions and undermine cross-Strait economic ties, especially if Lai doesn't refrain from spewing toxic separatist rhetoric. Nevertheless, at this stage, the US, acting to safeguard its interests, will likely exert pressure on Lai to not take measures that would damage Sino-US ties beyond repair.

Irrespective of what the US strategic calculations are, over the past few years, the Communist Party of China has introduced a vigorous national reunification policy. National reunification is now an irreversible process. No matter which political party is in power in Taiwan and how hard the US and its allies and partners strive to forestall it, they cannot stop China from achieving complete national reunification.

At the San Francisco summit, the top Chinese leader told his US counterpart that “the United States should back up its stance of not supporting ‘Taiwan independence’ with concrete actions, stop arming Taiwan, and support China's peaceful reunification. China will eventually be reunified, and it will be reunified”. In this year's New Year message, the top leader declared that the reunification of the motherland is a historical necessity, and compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Strait must join hands to share the great glory of national rejuvenation.

Beijing can thus be expected to double down on efforts to use economic, political, diplomatic, and military means to realize national reunification within an appropriate period and at the least cost.

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## GLOBAL VIEWS

HUANG JIKUN

## Acquired taste

Chinese people are shifting from subsistence eating to eating well which necessitates a greater food approach

Over the past four decades, governmental policies and technological innovation have allowed the Chinese people to have enough to eat, addressing the food shortage problem lasting for several thousand years and greatly improving the diets of urban and rural residents. The Chinese people are shifting from having enough to eat to eating well and seeking more nutritious and healthier diets.

In the past, however, the supply of major agricultural products such as grains was often ensured at the expense of land and water resources as well as the ecological environment in agricultural areas. As a result, the current agricultural production system is facing mounting challenges. It is imperative to develop fundamental solutions to maintain and improve the productivity of arable land. In the meantime, as Chinese people's income grows, their demands for diverse, safe, nutritious and healthy food will continue to improve, which has important implications for China's agri-food supply system.

The transformation of food systems to provide people with adequate, nutritious and healthy food while promoting the harmonious coexistence between people and nature is a core issue of global concern. People in China and other parts of the world are shifting from subsistence eating to eating well, seeking more nutritious and healthier diets and eating in a more environmentally friendly manner. But there are still many people in developing countries struggling to overcome the problems of famine and poverty for whom food security is still a distant dream.

In the medium- to high-income countries, the dual goals of transformation are easy to achieve if they have rich agricultural resources such as cultivated land and water. Countries with small per capita arable land, dense populations and small territory, such as Singapore, have to count on international trade to achieve the dual goals. Japan and the Republic of Korea also largely rely on international trade in this regard. While large and populous countries with a small amount of per capita arable land, such as China and India, will find it hard to achieve the goals of transforming food systems through cultivated land production system

and can't highly depend on international markets.

While China is a large population country with relatively little cultivated land, it has a vast territory and diverse food customs. But as an innovative country, it is capable of achieving the dual goals of food system transformation with a greater food approach.

Apart from the cultivated land in agricultural regions, China also has larger grasslands, forestlands, rivers, lakes and seas that can also produce various foods across the country. Due to diverse food customs in China, food not from cultivated land can help meet people's demands for a diverse, nutritious and healthy diet. China has ensured absolute security of food and grain (rice and wheat) and stabilized its food supply chains, with supplies mainly from domestic output supplemented by international trade. China's measures have had positive impacts on global food security and global green development. While providing its people with more adequate, nutritious and healthy food, it has firmly promoted and actively implemented the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

To shift from merely ensuring food security to food sustainability, supporting policies are needed. However, it remains a challenge for China, with its current policy systems centering on farmland in agricultural areas. Launching the greater food approach is an effective way to achieve transformation of the food system in China. It aims at building a diverse food supply system that incorporates all five major food production systems — agricultural areas, grasslands, forestlands, rivers, lakes and oceans — as well as microorganisms and artificial food. Studies show that rural economic restructuring, including the transformation of the food system, must be accompanied by corresponding reform and innovation of systems, policies and investment in each phase. However, the country's agricultural policies have been formulated primarily for farmland in agricultural regions, and they are inadequate to support the development of food production systems in the other production systems under the greater food approach, and are unsuitable for the transformation and development of food production systems such as grasslands, forestlands,

rivers, lakes and oceans, microorganisms and artificial food. In the transformation of China's food system into a new stage with the greater food approach, China has to introduce innovative institutions, policies and investment systems in line with each of the diverse food supply systems.

The transformation of the food systems will take time, and the transformation based on the greater food approach must be advanced in a steady manner, for which a sound development road map needs to be formulated. While providing more adequate, nutritious and healthy food for its people, China should keep promoting sustainable development, and balance development and environmental protection.

Since the five major food production systems are differentiated from each other, China also needs to develop a road map and identify strategic priorities in line with the development of each system. Agricultural areas should grow grains and cash crops, raise livestock, and seek to develop facility agriculture in line with local conditions. Pastoral areas should seek to improve grasslands, strike to balance the outputs of grass and livestock production, support the integration of livestock production between agricultural areas and pastoral areas, and promote artificial grass planting. Forestlands should develop non-timber forest-based food economy in a sustainable way. Rivers and lakes suitable for fishing should develop sustainable fisheries, and offshore areas should promote aquatic farming and develop offshore fisheries in a sustainable manner. Diverse microorganisms and artificial food also remain to be developed.

Innovation in biological, digital, equipment and green ecological technologies will determine the transformation of the food systems by the greater food approach, for which innovative institutions, policies and investment should be introduced to drive progress.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

WANG HENG AND ZHOU XINGCAN

## Fertile ground

Green cooperation has become an essential and growing part of China-Africa relations

Africa is facing challenges such as climate change, threats to biodiversity, intensifying desertification, and increasing frequency of extreme weather events. The global energy supply-demand landscape has been affected by the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has created significant challenges and brought increased uncertainties to global climate governance and exacerbated poverty and economic vulnerability in Africa.

According to a study by the International Monetary Fund, rising global temperatures could lead to a reduction in the GDP of African countries by 2.25 percent to 12.12 percent, depending on the extent of climate change. Another study found that nearly half of the countries in Africa are susceptible to the impacts of extreme weather on their GDP. The World Bank states that African countries hit by extreme weather conditions could see their poverty rates jumping from 64 percent to 79 percent, and their actual GDP growth rate could drop from the estimated 4.7 percent to 2.4 percent.

Additionally, Africa is grappling with issues such as soil erosion, salinization and declining soil fertility, with around 20 percent of its land area, or 6.6 million square kilometers, undergoing degradation. Glacier melting has also become a challenge, with famous high-altitude ice caps in Zambia and Zimbabwe shrinking. Environmental degradation not only directly harms Africa's natural resources and biodiversity but also leads to reduced food production, increased regional conflicts, the spread of infectious diseases and terrorism. The impoverished population has also been on the rise. Some African countries are also facing electricity shortages, with the International Energy Agency saying in a report released in June 2022 that there has been a rise of 25 million people without access to electricity in Africa since 2021. This can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the various crises it has caused. According to research by the African Development Bank, the GDP of South Africa was down by 2 percent to 4 percent each year due to power shortages.

Given the urgent need for green development in Africa, green cooperation has become a crucial part of China-Africa relations. Under the framework of the Global Development Initiative, China and African countries have engaged in extensive cooperation to enhance Africa's resilience and capacity for green development.

In addressing climate change, China and African countries have strengthened cooperation in areas such as meteorological monitoring, disaster prevention and reduction, water resource utilization, desertification control, land degradation, and drought prevention. Beijing has also supported African nations in protecting the ecology, environment and biodiversity, constructing a "Green Great Wall" in Africa, and assisting African

countries in enhancing their climate adaptation capabilities. China has already initiated joint projects with several African countries to address climate change, including the construction of low-carbon demonstration zones and climate adaptation demonstration zones in countries such as Seychelles, and a total of 38 climate mitigation and adaptation projects in countries such as Ethiopia.

In terms of energy structure adjustments, there is a diverse level of development and energy needs among African countries. China is offering its assistance to the nations in developing clean energy sources such as solar, wind, biogas, and geothermal, supporting them in enhancing their self-development capabilities and the stable supply of power to remote areas. According to data from the International Energy Agency, China undertook power generation projects in 24 sub-Saharan African countries in 2019, with 49 projects expected to be completed by 2024, mostly renewable energy projects. The projects will constitute 20 percent of the region's installed capacity during that period.

In terms of economic and trade cooperation, the list of outcomes released during the Global Development High-Level Dialogue, hosted by China in June 2022, included 32 items for China-Africa green cooperation. China-Africa cooperation is now expanding in the field of green finance, effectively guiding market resources toward energy conservation and environmental protection. On Feb 9, 2022, the Johannesburg branch of the Bank of China successfully completed a \$300 million green bond issuance, the first green bond issued by a Chinese financial institution in Africa, marking the significant enriching of China's green financial product system and promoting sustainable development.

There is still ample room for the development of China-Africa green cooperation, in spite of the outcomes already achieved.

First, both sides can refine their green concepts and jointly pursue sustainable global development. Both China and Africa need to effectively manage their differences and the interference from external geopolitical factors and objectively evaluate and recognize the achievements and positive contributions made by both sides in addressing climate change. It is essential to promote the construction of mechanisms and platforms and formulate a road map for cooperation and development. When providing aid to Africa, China can appropriately add green conditions to promote the application of green technologies and the transition to a green economy in recipient countries, creating more opportunities and space for China-Africa green cooperation.

Second, the two sides should develop green technology and actively integrate themselves into the global innovation network. China and Africa

should concentrate their efforts on conducting cooperation in a more precise manner in alignment with the needs of African nations and China's technology strengths, on the basis of expanding financial investments. Leveraging digital technology advantages, both sides can explore new models of cooperation. It is important to build an information-sharing platform, develop a catalog for demand and supply in the cooperation process and digitize green technology cooperation projects to ensure that supply can match demand. Improving the intellectual property governance system and formulating stable and secure cooperation rules are crucial. China and Africa can pilot the establishment of unified intellectual property standards and create intellectual property rules through non-market mechanisms, such as establishing a green patent assistance or patent-sharing platform, to attain the governance on the intellectual property of green technology cooperation.

Third, it is important to spur the development of green economies to optimize the international market. China and Africa should stimulate the vitality of green finance and accelerate the allocation of global resources in their green cooperation. Beijing can initiate a carbon management system through platforms such as the International Platform on Sustainable Finance and the Sustainable Banking Network in a bid to promote the establishment of unified green financial standards and enhance the efficiency for aligning with green capital. The nation can also collaborate with African partner countries to jointly formulate unified standards for defining green financial products. In doing so, the two sides can enhance their mutual understanding of green policies and make it easier for the two sides to match in the green financial sector. Both parties can fully leverage the effects from demonstration zones, constructing and expanding typical cooperative projects such as green industrial parks. The goal is to promote the reform of the China-Africa green infrastructure, address challenges facing African countries in the sustainable development of their infrastructure, and effectively enable African countries to adopt green standards in their construction sector.

Looking to the future, China and Africa should draw on their experiences and wisdom, jointly address the challenges of green development, jointly implement the Global Development Initiative, and promote the building of a global community with a shared future.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

## LIFE

When Beijing native Jin Yu arrived for a special screening of *Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour* — the highest-grossing concert film of all time — she was surprised to see many audience members were dressed up, waving glow sticks, swaying and loudly singing along with the performer.

"It felt like I was attending a solo concert by Swift for almost three hours, but it only cost 100 yuan (\$14). In addition, you could take out your smartphone to take photos or videos. That's usually forbidden when watching a movie in a theater," she says.

Under the helm of Emmy award-winning director Sam Wrench, the movie follows the 34-year-old pop icon and her dancers onstage, as Swift performs 40 songs from 10 albums during her 2023-24 *The Eras Tour*.

The film has grossed over \$261 million at box offices worldwide, including more than 78 million yuan on the Chinese mainland, according to statistics from trackers Box Office Mojo and Beacon. The 169-minute-long movie has also become the highest-grossing imported documentary of all time on the Chinese mainland.

With *The Eras Tour* breaking the Guinness World Record for the highest-grossing music tour in history, Alibaba Pictures — which is known for importing such acclaimed foreign movies as *Green Book*, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Capernaum* and *Departures* — recognized the film's prospects, facilitated its entry into the Chinese market, and helped to promote.

Since its release in domestic theaters on New Year's Eve, the movie has received an impressive score of 9.3 points out of 10 on Douban, one of China's most popular review sites, due to its spectacular visual effects and Swift's superstardom.

Song Zhe, a 29-year-old short-video director from Henan province, is one of the Chinese fans who was so captivated by the documentary's fresh and innovative format that he purchased two tickets for consecutive screenings.

"I have rarely experienced such an exciting and immersive movie-watching experience before," says Song, who works in Beijing.

"When it came to some of the hottest Swift songs, the audience sponta-



## Swift's fans swap the stage for the silver screen

The overwhelming success of the premiere of the documentary about her concert reveals an innovative format for cinemas, **Xu Fan** reports.



The audience spontaneously stood in the empty space below the big screen, and started jumping and singing along. You couldn't even hear Swift's voice."

Song Zhe, an audience member

neously stood in the empty space below the big screen, and started jumping and singing along. You couldn't even hear Swift's voice — only the cheers and shouts of the fans," he recalls.

The documentary was filmed during Swift's performance at the SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles, a venue that has hosted many headline-grabbing events, not least of which was the 2022 Super Bowl. Its visual effects are also impressive, allowing theatergoers to see close-ups of Swift on the big screen.

Zhi Feina, a professor at the Chinese National Academy of Arts and an industry observer, says that the overwhelming success of the movie has helped many young people to socialize.

Although this format is new to Chinese theatergoers, Zhi says that similar films that document popular events have already become a regular genre overseas. For example, Japan has introduced ODS (Other Digital Stuff) screenings since 2005, which release recorded versions of stage plays, such as Kabuki, musicals and dramas, as well as concert recordings and sports broadcasts.

"China has more than 80,000 screens in over 12,000 cinemas, but most of the seats remain unsold during the comparatively slow box office season. Swift's movie could serve as a good example for domestic theater operators to learn how to attract a larger audience," says Zhi.

Sha Dan, a curator at the China Film Archive and a veteran critic, views the movie's popularity as a signal to the Chinese film market to seek a breakthrough in attracting the generation born between the late 1990s and 2000s.

He also mentions that one of the top concerns among insiders in recent years has been the growing trend for young audiences to shift to short-video platforms instead of going to cinema.

"If Chinese distributors could import more movies like this, the local market would become more culturally diversified, and cinemas could revive their functions as places for socializing and entertainment," he says.

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Top and above: *Taylor Swift: The Eras Tour* held a premiere screening in Shanghai on New Year's Eve, leading fans to sing along with their idol on the silver screen. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Animated series draws from tradition and plays on game origins

By XING WEN  
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The mobile game *Honor of Kings*, celebrated for its intuitive gameplay, diverse hero roster and immersive multiplayer experience, has achieved widespread acclaim domestically and internationally.

Recently, a new 3D animated series based on the game's heroic characters and underlying narratives has been released. This four-episode animation centers around the game's hero, Li Bai, who has become immensely popular among young gaming enthusiasts.

Set against the backdrop of a fictional world, the storyline revolves around Li's quest for family and homecoming, through the adventurous journey of the youth in the city of Chang'an.

In the story, the young protagonist, who is brimming with poetic talent and martial skills, leaves his hometown of Suixue city to venture to the bustling metropolis of Chang'an.

There, he hopes to witness the most beautiful things in the world but becomes ensnared by the opulence and extravagance of the city.

A letter from home prompts Li to return, only for him to discover that his hometown has mysteriously vanished.

In the process of unraveling this enigma, he gradually realizes the importance of his roots and that the

most beautiful thing could also be familial bonds.

Li undergoes a spiritual transformation, ultimately growing into a true hero.

The series started to air on Tencent's video-sharing platform on Saturday.

It seeks to portray heroes embodying traditional Chinese culture and values, emphasizing the principles of truth, kindness and beauty inherent in Chinese traditions.

The four episodes use family as a starting point to portray the preciousness of one's hometown, aiming to shed light on reality, according to Lu Keyan, one of the animation's producers.

"In the present context, where many young individuals leave their hometowns for urban areas, the series seeks to resonate with the homesickness experienced by contemporary youth who are working in places away from their roots," he adds.

While set in a fictional world, the animation's artistic design draws inspiration from recognizable elements of traditional Chinese culture in such aspects as architecture and costume.

For instance, the opening scene of the animation incorporates the poetic and picturesque essence of *qushui liushang* (winding waters and flowing goblets), a custom in which literati would sit and enjoy an

elegant and leisurely drink while seated along the banks of a winding stream.

"The architecture in this scene is influenced by the traditional style of the southern region along the lower reaches of the Yangtze River," says Lu.

The clothing designs for the characters in the animation are influenced by styles from the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) and include attire from ethnic groups like the Miao and Yi.

"The animated film also includes traditional Chinese musical instruments, such as the *guqin* (a seven-stringed Chinese zither) and flute, with the intention of offering young

audiences a more immersive experience of traditional music," adds Lu.

On Jan 6, the animation art committee of the Chinese Television Artists Association organized an expert symposium in Beijing.

During the event, experts delved into discussions on the innovative development of Chinese animation and its role in promoting traditional Chinese culture, using the first animated version of the mobile game as a case study.

Mao Yong, secretary-general of the animation art committee, says that *Honor of Kings* has a vast global user base and the decision to adapt it into an animation will help extend its status as intellectual property.

"This animated series could fur-

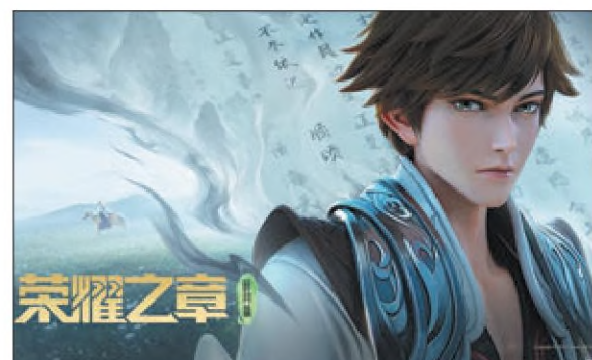
ther develop the characters in the game and enrich the storylines. It represents a promising direction for the creation of online animation," Mao says.

Huang Xinyuan, Party secretary of the School of Animation and Digital Arts of the Communication University of China, believes that the animated series can easily connect with today's young generations.

"Many young people nowadays are, in a way, like Li, drifting away from their hometowns. Initially, when young individuals venture out, they may perceive the outside world as appealing. However, after several years pass, changes occur in their hometowns — parents age, and suddenly strong emotional attachments to their hometowns emerge. Such experiences make it easy for the audience to relate," he says.

Zhang Li, director of the new media department at the National Academy of Chinese Theatre Arts, emphasized that this animation unquestionably showcases Chinese aesthetics.

"There are many intriguing elements in Chinese historical myths, folk stories and traditional opera narratives. Their artistic style and visual representation display Chinese aesthetics, which provides animation creators with rich material for in-depth exploration and study," Zhang says.



Left: A scene from the first 3D animated series of *Honor of Kings*. Right: Li Bai, the protagonist of the four-episode animated series, which started to air on Tencent's video-sharing platform on Saturday. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

LIFE

# Comics redrawing reading habits

Youth in particular are exploring the medium, drawn by the entertainment they add to educational topics, **Yang Yang** reports.

In recent years, the domestic market has seen comic books that popularize knowledge — especially about traditional Chinese culture — or that provide emotional support have become popular, largely due to competition that's increasingly fierce in today's fast-paced society. However, comics, which are particularly demanding for both authors and editors in general, still need further development, insiders say.

According to the latest report on the domestic book market in 2023 by the publishing industry consulting company Beijing Openbook, comics have become an important medium for presenting different themes.

On both the general list of best-sellers and the list of best-selling new books in 2023, comic books that cover subjects such as science, psychology, history, life and traditional culture, targeting both adults and children, performed well.

For example, the top best-selling children's book in 2023 is *Manhua Xiaoxuesheng Xinli* (Psychological Comics for Primary School Students), according to Beijing Openbook.

In 2022, *Xiaoxuesheng Chaoyi'aide Manhua Kezue* (Comic Books About Science Loved by Primary School Students) sold more than 1 million copies.

Actually, comics present many topics in a more vivid and interesting way, and aim to teach children a range of things, such as self-defense, developing strength, making friends and studying efficiently; the life of Confucius and the development of his thoughts; Chinese classics like *Journey to the West*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*; great inventions, politics, philosophy, arts and military strategy in ancient China.

This trend was started by a book initially published in 2017, *Banxiaoshi Manhua Zhongguoshishi* (A Comic Book About Chinese History That Can Be Finished in Half an Hour).

Its author Chen Lei, whose pen name is Erhunzi, says he did not become interested in history until he was 20, after playing a computer game about World War II while studying mechanical science at university.

"At that time I knew nothing about the people, places and historical background in the game, so I started reading books about WWII and found that I had to first read about WWI to understand WWII," he said at a book event last year.

He said that gradually, his previously sparse historical knowledge developed into clear narrative lines, and he found that the essence of history is stories.

While working as an automotive designer in Shanghai, Chen began



creating comic strips full of jokes and vivid metaphors based on historical facts.

For example, when talking about the seven powers during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), he compared them to seven students in a class. One student named Qin was so outstanding that he looked down upon all the others, so the other six united to fight him. The strategy was known historically as *hezong*, but Qin managed to sow discord among the allies and break up the union.

In 2014, Chen started posting his comics on his WeChat account, and by 2018 he had 5 million followers.

"We (the publishing team) spent 80 percent of our time processing historical knowledge so as to represent it in a straightforward and clear way that long-form text can't achieve, so that readers can quickly understand people's relationships and other information," he said.

Choosing only core events from critical historical periods, Chen tried to create an interesting narrative form for readers to easily understand and remember events in Chinese history.

After finishing his part, Chen would invite experts to review his work to make sure there were no mistakes pertaining to historical facts.

In April 2017, when the book was published by Dookbook, it set a record of selling out within seven hours on online shopping platforms.

To date, the Half-An-Hour Comics series includes 47 books. The latest is about Chinese geography, says Shen Jun, who is in charge of the

series at Dookbook. Selling more than 20 million copies to date, the series mainly consists of four themes — history, literature, Chinese ancient civilization and science.

"Actually, at first, Erhunzi created the comic strips for adult readers, but later we found his work is most popular among primary school students because kids need to study Chinese history, but what teachers teach at school is not so easy or interesting enough for them to understand," Shen says.

"In comparison, readers need only a little time to read our comics but can gain a lot of knowledge, which is how we positioned the books in planning."

"Just like the educational idea of 'learning through play', through the metaphors, jokes and images in the comic books, readers can easily master otherwise boring knowledge."

Another type of domestic comic book that has become popular in the Chinese market in recent years addresses young people's need for emotional support.

In a time when people prefer photos and videos to text when they take a break from the heavy pressures of life, light comic books naturally win out in popularity.

They are not complicated, long stories but rather warm, funny, short stories about fragments of daily life, Shen says.

One representative work is *Daike de Muli Shi Daren de Xinzang* (Oysters With Shells Are Grown-ups' Hearts) by Wang Manni.

First published in September 2022, the comic book, which uses candy colors to depict 17 short sto-



The book covers of Chinese comic titles that are sweeping the market, gaining popularity for introducing knowledge of traditional culture and for offering emotional support to readers.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ries about love and dreams, healing, destiny, hope and courage, has sold more than 600,000 copies in a year, according to Jimu News.

Ruan Junting, associate professor at the China Academy of Art, said in a previous interview that a comic book, like a cocktail, mixes the bitterness of the adult world with candy-colored innocence to offer strength to readers to continue their lives with smiles.

"Now, too many readers need healing stories, and that's why it is successful," says Liu Ping, deputy editor-in-chief of the publishing company, CN Time Books.

The third trend is tied to traditional Chinese culture.

In recent years, as traditional Chinese culture has become popular among young people, a lot of comic books have successfully attracted more readers to this wave.

On the top 10 list of best-selling comic books of all time, released by Xiron, a Beijing-based publishing company, seven are domestic. Among the top 10 best-selling comic titles for 2022 and 2023, respectively, seven and five are domestic comic books, and their competitors on the lists are well-known books from Japan, including *Cells at Work* and *My Neighbour Totoro*.

Hua Juan, supervisor of comic books at Xiron, says that the domestic comic books on the lists are popular not only for their stories but also for their themes of traditional Chinese culture.

For example, the best-selling comic book, *Those Happenings of the Ming Dynasty* (1368-1644), is adapted from an extremely successful book of the same title that discusses

events in this historical period in an entertaining way.

Two other best-sellers on the list, *Fei Ren Zai* (Non-Human), and *You Shou Yan* (Fabulous Beasts), are about the daily lives of the immortals and mythical creatures from ancient times living in modern times.

"They are very imaginative and interesting, and because they are rooted in traditional Chinese culture, Chinese readers can easily resonate with them. Only domestic comics can provide such a reading experience," Hua says.

The Bu Baichi series by Xiron also focuses on traditional Chinese culture and has also been popular among readers.

"They present complicated information in an approachable manner and are popular among young people, especially students, who are most interested in learning, but also care about personalized reading," says Zhang Zheng, a manager in charge of the Bu Baichi series at Xiron.

In 2021, Xiron started a campaign to attract young Chinese to traditional culture through books.

"Now, the popularity of domestic comics has demonstrated this trend," Hua says.

However, she says that even though comic books can easily attract attention and go viral online, they don't actually perform so well in terms of sales.

"Some top comic books can sell more than 1 million copies each, but most comic book editors still do the job out of love, since the books they work on are more complex and costly than common books but sell at lower prices," she says.

She points to the comic books from Xiron as examples. Comics account for less than 10 percent of the total number of book titles, and account for less than 5 percent of sales.

According to Beijing Openbook, between January and November 2023, sales of comic books for adults accounted for 0.53 percent of the market, and kids comics for 0.34 percent.

However, she says there's still huge potential for both domestic market proportion and sales.

"Over the past decade, we can see that the development of comics in China can be attributed to the persistence and efforts of excellent authors, such as Xia Da and Xiao Xinyu. Both of their reader bases have been continuously expanding," she says.

"What we need to do is to better serve these creators, presenting and promoting their great content in a market-oriented way, and providing them with better space for creation."

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UTRECHT, the Netherlands — A Chinese pavilion opened to the public at the 2024 Dutch Holiday Fair (Vakantiebeurs 2024) in Utrecht on Thursday.

Adorned with Chinese elements such as a begonia gate, screens depicting an ancient painting and a vermilion colonnade, the pavilion is also decorated with the "Nihao (hello) China" national tourism brand.

Covering an area of 100 square meters, the pavilion houses exhibitors touching on tourism, aviation and visa services.

Tan Jian, Chinese ambassador to the Netherlands, said at the opening ceremony of the Chinese pavilion on Wednesday that China has recently introduced a visa-free policy for Dutch citizens.

"Now travel is easy. Every week there are 36 flights between the Netherlands and China," he said.

China boasts not only delicious food, but also high-speed rail and rich culture, Tan underlined.

"Over the past decade, China has built 44,000 kilometers of dedicated high-speed railway. The speed is 350 km per hour," he said.

Jeroen van Hooff, CEO of the

## China opens pavilion at Dutch holiday fair



Left: A Chinese pavilion opens to visitors to the 2024 Dutch Holiday Fair on Thursday. Right: Chinese ambassador to the Netherlands Tan Jian introduces a visa-free policy for Dutch travelers to China. PHOTOS BY XINHUA



Dutch trade show and exhibition company Royal Jaarbeurs, says that he was happy to be at the Chinese pavilion because it is the first time in many years that China is attending the Dutch Holiday Fair.

"We have a strong relationship

with China," he says, noting that his company is also attending trade fairs in China.

Meanwhile, former Dutch ambassador to China Ron Keller says that he felt honored to be present at the opening of the pavilion, "welcoming

Dutch people and basically all Europeans who are willing to come to China."

He also notes China's new visa-free policy. "I see so many Dutch people traveling to China, and China is certainly worth a visit"

Gabriella Esselbrugge, entrepreneur and Dutch tourism promoter, says she is going to China soon, where she will visit the cities of Nanjing and Yancheng in the eastern province of Jiangsu. Showing a tourism promotion poster for the Suz-

hou gardens, she says she was looking forward to going.

Wang Zheng, director of the China Cultural Center in Den Haag, the Hague, which designed and built the Chinese pavilion, says the Dutch Holiday Fair is a good opportunity to promote Chinese culture and tourism.

"I hope that through this exhibition, exhibitors from other countries and regions will learn more about the huge potential of the Chinese tourism market, and promote exchanges between Chinese and foreign tourism industry players," Wang says.

This year marks the 53rd edition of the Dutch Holiday Fair, which was first held in 1970, and has since become the largest holiday-themed travel trade show for industry players in the Netherlands.

According to the organizers, more than 1,000 exhibitors from over 100 countries and regions are expected to participate in the fair, which will last from Wednesday to Sunday. Over 110,000 people are set to attend.

XINHUA

## LIFE



Unless you have tried it, it is probably hard to imagine the taste of furry tofu pizza or a smelly mandarin fish pizza.

However, Adrien Brill, a 33-year-old American, has managed to successfully merge the distinctive tastes of East China's Anhui province with the Italian classic, making his small restaurant nestled in Nanxi'an — a tranquil and picturesque village near the famous Huangshan Mountain — a popular eatery with both locals and tourists.

His unlikely culinary adventure is told in the second season of *Crazy Rich Fanatic*, a documentary series produced by Beijing-based Boss Zhipin Pictures. Both the first and second seasons are now available on the Tencent Video streaming site.

Brill, a native of Arizona, recalls that he and his brother were taken care of by a Chinese babysitter who had accompanied her husband, while he studied for his doctoral degree at the University of Arizona.

"She spoke to me in Chinese every day. At such a young age, I had more exposure to Chinese than any other foreign language. I have no memory of her because I was too young. When I was growing up, my parents often told me this story. They always joked that my first language was Chinese," he says.

At the age of 15, while Brill was a sophomore in high school, he got an opportunity to accompany his mother, a language teacher, on a project that invited American teachers to universities in Jiangsu province, sparking his interest in Chinese culture.

After returning to his hometown and pursuing a major in East Asian Studies at the University of Arizona, Brill decided to return to China and further his language skills at Sichuan University in Chengdu.

But what enticed him to leave Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan province, was his encounter with his future wife, Qiu Tong, a native of Anhui province, during the Strawberry Music Festival in 2014.

Brill, who previously worked as an English teacher at Huangshan University in Anhui, discovered his passion for cooking in 2021, and

# Topping the Brill

American pizza maker in Anhui province finds fortune favors the brave, **Xu Fan** reports.



**Top:** Adrien Brill, a 33-year-old from Arizona, has been operating a small restaurant in Nanxi'an village near Huangshan Mountain in Anhui province. **Above:** He makes pizzas with Chinese-flavored toppings and has immersed himself into local countryside life. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“

At such a young age, I had more exposure to Chinese than any other foreign language. ... When I was growing up, my parents ... always joked that my first language was Chinese.”

Adrien Brill, American featured in the documentary series *Crazy Rich Fanatic*

launched an account on Douyin, a popular video-sharing platform, to post short videos of his culinary explorations.

His popularity soared, amassing over 130,000 fans and earning around 686,000 likes. As a result, he was invited by local authorities to open Adrien's Little Canteen in Nanxi'an village, a restaurant that combines the distinctive traits of Anhui's renowned dishes with Western cuisine. The initiative was part of a project to vitalize the countryside.

From kneading dough to building an oven and researching how to use the flavors and ingredients of local Chinese dishes as toppings on pizzas, Brill has gradually gained fame in this small village and has immersed himself in China's pastoral life.

Wang Xiaoyang, who directed the *Crazy Rich Fanatic* episode featuring Brill, says that, hopefully, his story and the other tales in the documentary series will inspire young viewers, showing them that even in the current challenging situation, they can discover new ways to launch a business in their own interesting ways.

The second season of *Crazy Rich Fanatic* consists of six stories, including that of a young woman who serves as a special guide, taking tourists on nighttime boat trips to admire the starry skies of Dali's West Lake in Yunnan province, and that of a veteran journalist who left the media industry to focus on growing different species of tomatoes.

Xin Ran, the producer of the documentary series, reveals that they conducted extensive research to select the six stories from over 400 candidates. During this process, they discovered that successful startup founders share a common trait — they have the ability to learn quickly and acquire the knowledge they need for their businesses primarily from the internet.

Currently, the second season of the documentary has a rating of 8.7 out of 10 on Tencent Video, suggesting that it resonates with many young aspirants yearning for career success.

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## Book leads advance of Chinese classics in Turkiye

ANKARA — Giray Fidan, a Turkish expert in Chinese language and history based at Ankara's Haci Bayram Veli University, is dedicated to introducing the Chinese culture of peace to an expanding Turkish audience eager to grasp the Chinese way of thinking.

Thanks to Fidan's expertise, the Chinese book on military strategy, *The Art of War*, written by Sun Tzu over 25 centuries ago, has become a best-seller in Turkiye. Since Fidan and his colleagues translated the famous book from classical Chinese in 2014, it has undergone 25 reprints. Previous publications were reliant on translations from English or French.

In Turkiye, where the sale of over 100,000 copies of a book is widely considered a remarkable success, *The Art of War* has sold over 400,000 copies in nine years.

Fidan attributes the success of the book in Turkiye to the enduring relevance of China's philosophy of peace, asserting that it remains a valid human ideal in both contemporary and ancient times.



The Chinese classics are precious and a shared heritage of humankind.”

Giray Fidan, Turkish Sinologist

"*The Art of War* reflects Chinese wisdom. It says conflict is unnecessary if it is not inevitable. The world is vast enough for everyone, and we can have a peaceful way," says Fidan.

"The name (of the book) is *The Art of War*, but the main argument is avoiding war. A successful strategist or general should avoid war when possible," he says.

"The Chinese classics are precious and a shared heritage of humankind," the Sinologist says, highlighting the significant interest among Turkish readers eager to understand Chinese philosophy and way of thinking.

Fidan says he has translated a wide range of Chinese works since *The Art of War*. The latest is *Zhen Guan Zheng Yao* (*The Essentials of Governance*), which was published in December 2023 and points to the growing interest in Chinese culture among Turks.

China's economic success in recent decades and its opening up have offered great opportunities to people across the globe, including from Turkiye, to learn the Chinese language and culture, says Fidan.

"Not only in Turkiye, but there is a large interest in China all over the world, from Europe to the United States," he says, indicating that many more people are learning Chinese to boost their general knowledge.

In his view, this is because they think it is an important investment for their future.

With the establishment of the China-Turkiye strategic cooperative relationship in 2010, economic and cultural cooperation between the two nations has flourished. The China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative has also become a medium of extensive multilateral cooperation between the two sides.

Fidan's university has responded to the growing interest of Turkish youth in Chinese culture by offering a Chinese language major for the first time this year.

The class is "100 percent full," says the Sinologist excitedly. "This shows how much interest there is in Turkiye toward learning Chinese, and discovering China's history and culture."

XINHUA

## Bookstores explore new ways to remain relevant in digital age

By WANG RU  
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For years, traditional physical bookstores have been actively seeking to change since they are facing difficulties due to the rise of the internet, and especially of online marketing, which has become the main channel through which Chinese people buy books.

Jiang Chuanyang, chairman of the Zhejiang Xinhua Bookstore Group, spoke about this issue at the 2024 China Bookstore Conference, which was held in Beijing on Jan 9, to discuss the role of innovation in the development of physical bookstores.

Under the theme of "innovation, reshaping the value of bookstores," the annual event was organized by the Books and Periodicals Distribution Association of China, the Anhui Xinhua Distribution Group Holding, and Bookdao, a publishing and book market intelligence information platform.

According to Ai Limin, chairman of the Books and Periodicals Distribution Association of China, bookstores have made some progress. For example, the number of bookstores in China has

remained relatively steady in recent years, with some cities seeing slight growth. Some innovative bookstores stand out and seem to have bright prospects.

Among them is the New City Bookstore, which opened in 2017. Despite the challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, it continues to grow, and now has four branches in Southwest China's Sichuan and Guizhou provinces.

Li Hui, a founder of the brand, analyzed the shortcomings of traditional bookstores. According to him, their value — like offering readers the chance to choose and buy books — can now be replaced by other channels, which has urged him to consider what bookstores can provide readers.

He has found that most of the customers who visit bookstores are women from 25 to 40, who often like reading, socializing, and who enjoy life. As a result, they have become the target customers for his chain.

Li's bookstores are built to satisfy their needs, and to allow them to enjoy a slow life. This means that they are no longer just places to buy books, but also cultural spaces.



The 2024 China Bookstore Conference was held in Beijing on Jan 9 to discuss the role of innovation in the development of physical bookstores. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Li pays attention to meeting the five sensory needs, namely visual, olfactory, acoustic, haptic and gustatory. As a result, his bookstores are carefully designed to be beautiful, smell pleasantly of flowers and coffee, with beautiful background music, wooden bookshelves which

feel good to touch, and restaurants and cafes providing tasty food and drinks.

"As a result, our bookstores are not limited to being a place for selling books, but also serve as a cafe, restaurant, bar and theater with performances such as talk shows

and cross talk shows (comedy stand-ups)," said Li.

Chen Lei, founder of the Hunzhi Bookstore, who is also a cartoonist, agreed with the idea of making his bookstore a cultural space.

He and his group of cartoonists have been making cartoons popularizing science and history, which have become well-received. Almost 40 million copies have been printed to date.

In 2020, Chen came up with the idea of opening a bookstore to communicate with readers. The store finally opened last year in Shanghai.

"We want to build an experience center where people can enjoy various forms of entertainment besides reading," said Chen.

Elements from his cartoons decorate the bookstore, and even its restaurant features dishes related to the cartoons.

As a creator, Chen also organizes interactive activities so that cartoonists in his group can communicate with readers, and teach them how to draw. "Some children have had fun in such activities, since they can see the cartoonists they like, and draw with them. And their parents can drink coffee in the coffee room," said Chen.