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Wang Xiaohong, state councilor and director of the China National Narcotic Control Committee, greets Jen Daskal, deputy assistant to US President Joe Biden and deputy homeland security adviser, on Tuesday before their meeting at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing. Daskal led a US interagency delegation to Beijing for the launch of the China-US Counternarcotics Working Group. NG HAN GUAN / POOL VIA REUTERS

Sino-US counternarcotics working group launched

By YANG ZEKUN

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China and the United States officially launched the China-US Counternarcotics Working Group in Beijing on Tuesday, committing to practical cooperation in drug control, law enforcement and security.

Wang Xiaohong, state councilor and director of the China National Narcotic Control Committee, met with a US interagency delegation led by Jen Daskal, deputy assistant to US President Joe Biden and deputy homeland security adviser.

Wang expressed his hope that both sides would consider the important consensus reached at the meeting between their heads of state in San Francisco in November as the fundamental guideline. He emphasized that mutual respect is the way to coexistence and equality, and mutual benefit is a basic principle, urging pragmatic implementation of anti-drug cooperation.

He further said that both sides should address each other's concerns properly and deepen cooperation on law enforcement and

security, injecting more positive energy into the stable, healthy and sustainable development of China-US relations.

Chen Wenxin, executive director of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations' Institute of American Studies, said that the inauguration of the working group is a significant measure to fulfill the outcomes of the San Francisco summit, and it reflects China's proactive commitment to international cooperation in drug control.

During the meeting between President Xi Jinping and President Biden in November, the two leaders agreed to promote the establishment of a working group on counternarcotics cooperation.

Chen noted that the issue of drug control is of great concern to the US, especially in the context of persistent challenges posed by fentanyl. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated in May that more than 105,000 people died from drug overdoses in 2022.

Therefore, the US has strong expectations for cooperation with China in addressing this concern,

he said. Following the leaders' summit in November, the US removed the Institute of Forensic Science of China's Ministry of Public Security from its entity list and lifted sanctions imposed on it.

"From the perspective of bilateral relations and the common interests of humanity, China has consistently taken substantive actions, demonstrating a high level of responsibility in the global governance arena," Chen said.

Over the years, China has emphasized the need on various occasions to deepen fentanyl governance, enhance international anti-drug cooperation, promote anti-drug cooperation with key countries and regions, and jointly crack down on transnational drug crimes, and has taken a number of practical measures.

However, in May 2020, the US Department of Commerce added the Institute of Forensic Science, including the National Narcotics Laboratory of China, to its "Entity List", bringing anti-drug cooperation to a low point.

Furthermore, in August 2022, in

response to then US House speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan, which was made despite China's strong opposition and serious representations over the trip, China announced eight countermeasures, including suspending bilateral cooperation on counternarcotics with the US.

Despite these obstacles, China has actively participated in multilateral anti-drug cooperation mechanisms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Greater Mekong Sub-Region anti-drug cooperation mechanism, and has steadily promoted the multilateral drug control cooperation mechanism.

China has signed 50 intergovernmental and interdepartmental cooperation documents on drug control with more than 30 countries and international coalitions, establishing annual meeting mechanisms with 13 nations, as of the end of June last year, according to the China National Narcotic Control Committee.

See *Anti-drug*, page 3

US companies confident in HK rule of law

Executives say in survey that they expect city to retain its position as an arbitration center

By OSWALD CHAN in Hong Kong
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79 percent

More United States enterprises have expressed confidence in Hong Kong's rule of law and its role as an arbitration center, according to a survey released on Tuesday by the American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong.

The findings of the organization's 2024 Members Business Sentiment Survey, which was conducted online in November and December, were based on the views of 136 business decision-makers of AmCham member companies. Thirty-five percent of those polled have global revenues exceeding \$1 billion.

According to the survey, 79 percent of the respondents said they are confident about the rule of law in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, compared with 73 percent in 2023 and 25 percent in 2022. It also revealed that 78 percent of the companies do not plan to move their regional headquarters away from Hong Kong in the next three years.

A further 72 percent of the executives indicated that they expect the SAR would, to a great or moderate extent, retain its position as an arbitration center, especially for businesses with contractual relationships with their counterparts on the Chinese mainland.

Senior company executives cited Hong Kong's distinctive positioning in global banking, the city's judicial independence, the application of common law and legal practitioner professionalism, ease of enforcement and clean government, as the SAR's advantages as an arbitration center.

In the survey, 69 percent of the enterprises' senior representatives said their operations had not been negatively affected by the National

The proportion of respondents in a survey who said they are confident about the rule of law in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Security Law for Hong Kong. For those that have experienced negative effects, 65 percent said the impact has been indirect, such as staff morale, departure of Hong Kong employees, or diverting resources to seeking guidance and/or compliance.

Seventy-six percent of the respondents viewed Hong Kong as highly competitive or competitive as an international business hub due to its international connectivity, free flow of capital, a low and simple tax regime, legal and regulatory system, free flow of information and data, the city's status as the gateway to the Chinese mainland, as well as its efficient infrastructure and transportation links.

However, the cost of living, including housing, the cost of doing business and talent availability are hurting Hong Kong's competitiveness.

Thirty-four percent of the surveyed enterprises said they are optimistic about Hong Kong's business conditions in 2024, but regard US-China tensions, overseas public perceptions of the city and the sluggish mainland economy as the top three business challenges this year.

The respondents said they are also worried about Hong Kong's competitiveness in financial services due to the slowdown in the city's capital market activities and a limited regulatory governance framework on virtual assets.

Anti-China forces try to whip up fear

WORLD WATCH
By Tom Fowdy

An otherwise small incident occurred recently in London, when some Chinese tourists asked that they not be filmed while a British man was playing on a public piano and livestreaming on YouTube.

The scene devolved into a confrontation. The response of mainstream media, as well as that of anti-China activists and politicians online, was to claim that it was an example of "Chinese interference" in the United Kingdom, and that the personal preferences of the people involved had malign political purposes, as if they were being controlled by China.

That such an incident was exaggerated in this way is not unusual in the China discourse of some Western media. Every single event or development, no matter how large, is commonly blown out of proportion and never taken at face value or as something trivial, but depicted as a part of a deliberate geopolitical plot by China to impose its will on the world. In doing so, nothing that stems from China is depicted as having its own agency or decision-making, but rather is always under the

control of the State authorities. In other words, everything and everyone from China is taken as part of a grand conspiracy against the West in some way, even things as benign as a Chinese language class through a Confucius Institute.

However, a closer inspection of such discourse clearly suggests that it isn't true, that people are quick to stigmatize and accuse Chinese people, organizations and companies as acting on behalf of the government on often baseless or unconvincing evidence, and that it does not matter how unreasonable specific claims may be.

In doing so, the mainstream media and anti-China figures deliberately cultivate a culture of fear pertaining to all things China in order to advance their political objectives and also stifle opposition debate. This has irreversible consequences for ordinary Chinese people.

In pushing this fear, they have learned that they can use the ideological argument of "anti-Communism" as a facade to hide, justify and push other prejudices regarding China, or pretty much anything they dislike.

See *Discourse*, page 3

US UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS FACE SCRUTINY

Resignations thrust leadership of schools into national spotlight

By AI HEPING in New York
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The resignations of the presidents of Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania in January and December, respectively, were just the start, US education experts warned.

Scrutiny and resignation pressure might take their toll on other such presidents, they said.

It didn't take long to see who might be next — Martha Pollack, president of Cornell University in upstate New York.

In a letter to the Cornell Board of Trustees on Jan 23, Jon Lindseth, trustee emeritus and major benefactor of the school, said

In-depth

he was withdrawing his funding. Lindseth also called for the resignation of Pollack, accusing her of mishandling diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, initiatives and promoting "group-think" at the private school.

Nicolo, a freshman majoring in economics at Cornell, said the atmosphere among fellow students at the school, where about 26,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students are enrolled, is to "wait and see what the board of trustees will do".

See *Education*, page 2

Decision on US response



President Joe Biden speaks to members of the media on the South Lawn of the White House on Tuesday. He said that he had made a decision on how to respond to the drone strike in Jordan, which was the first fatal attack on US forces in the region since the outbreak of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in Gaza in October.

ANDREW HARNIK / AP See *story*, page 7

INSIDE Africa getting great help from China in ending hunger Global Views, page 13

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"We just don't know," said the student from New York City, who asked that his last name not be used and declined to comment on the accusations leveled at Pollack by Lindseth.

The call for Pollack's resignation comes as leadership of US higher educational institutions was thrust into the national spotlight following the resignations last month of Claudine Gay at Harvard and Liz Magill at the University of Pennsylvania in December.

With these resignations, the issues of plagiarism and antisemitism — along with the influence of wealthy donors — moved into the spotlight on college campuses and in the offices of those who lead them.

Gay, a political scientist, became Harvard's first black president and also president of the oldest US college with the shortest tenure — of just over six months.

The two resignations raised numerous questions, including what the increasingly polarizing political climate in the US might mean for higher education — especially amid the 2024 presidential election campaigns. There is also the issue of the right to free speech and whether the swirling controversy and problems entangling US higher education might reduce interest in becoming a university president.

Ted Mitchell, president of the American Council on Education, or ACE, and a former president of Occidental College in Los Angeles, told *The Washington Post*, "There's no question that people are thinking twice now about whether they want to be college presidents."

"It has always been a 24/7 job. There have always been multiple constituencies, but what seems to have happened over the last few years is that the volume dial for all of those constituencies has turned up."

Jonathan Fansmith, senior vice-president of government relations at ACE, which represents colleges and universities, said he had anticipated a heightened attack on higher education.

"Everyone expects in 2024, especially given the election cycle, you're going to hear a lot of pretty heated rhetoric and you're going to see a lot of people who, for whatever electoral reasons, want to hold up colleges and universities for attack," he told GBH media.

Cancel culture

Fansmith's comments were echoed by Greg Lukianoff, president of the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, an organization whose advocacy focuses on college campuses and has challenged the suppression of free speech by people of varying political beliefs.

"I wouldn't exactly envy university presidents in the current environment," he said. Lukianoff anticipates a particularly tumultuous time for leaders who have espoused progressive ideals. "We are likely going to see an uptick in cancel culture coming from the right," he told USA Today.

The resignations of Gay and Magill come as higher education institutions face numerous challenges, including the high cost of attending schools, the value of higher education, the shrinking number of students, and the growing politicization of higher education.

Doug Shapiro, executive director of the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, said that compared with a decade ago, there are now 2.5 million fewer students enrolled in college in the US.

There always has been a divide between Republicans and Democrats — and higher education, but education experts say it has now deepened, and recent polling illustrates this.

In 2015, polling by Gallup found 56 percent of Republicans had "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in higher education. By 2023,

Education: Political divide deepens



From left: Former University of Pennsylvania president Liz Magill, who resigned on Dec 9; former Harvard University president Claudine Gay, who quit on Jan 2. PHOTOS BY MARK SCHIEFFELBEIN / AP. Massachusetts Institute of Technology President Sally Kornbluth appears at a House Education and the Workforce Committee hearing in Washington on Dec 5. HAIYUN JIANG / BLOOMBERG VIA GETTY IMAGES



Cornell University students enjoy fresh air on the campus in Ithaca, New York, in November. The university canceled classes after one of its students was accused of making violent antisemitic threats. MATT BURKHARTT / GETTY IMAGES

the proportion had fallen to 19 percent. Confidence fell among Democrats, too, but far less dramatically, from 68 percent to 59 percent.

Reports of antisemitism and tension on college campuses related to the Israel-Hamas conflict have been a topic of heated discussion and threats, including some violent clashes amid demonstrations. Students on both sides have raised concerns about their safety as tensions remain high.

Antisemitism has increased on several campuses, including Cornell. Israel's offensive in Gaza also triggered a wave of pro-Palestinian protests on campuses and elsewhere in the US.

College administrators are grappling with how to keep campuses secure and denounce the violence in the Middle East without wading too deeply into the supercharged political and historical dispute.

But many of them have been widely criticized for their responses to Jewish students' complaints of antisemitic incidents and hostility toward them on campuses.

Questions asked

Fallout from a Congressional hearing on Dec 5 that led to the resignations of Gay and Magill continues to reverberate.

Republican New York Representa-

“Everyone expects in 2024, especially given the election cycle, you're going to hear a lot of pretty heated rhetoric and ... see a lot of people who ... want to hold up colleges and universities for attack.”

Jonathan Fansmith, senior vice-president of government relations at the American Council on Education

ive Elise Stefanik questioned Gay, Magill and Massachusetts Institute of Technology President Sally Kornbluth during the hearing about incidents of antisemitic harassment on their campuses.

Stefanik asked each of them whether anti-Israel students calling for the genocide of Jews in the wake of Hamas' attack on Oct 7 violated their universities' codes of conduct related to bullying and harassment.

Gay and the others declined to give a yes-or-no answer, emphasizing that this would depend on "context" and only warrant action if such actions rose to the level of bullying, harassment and intimidation.

Their answers infuriated Stefanik, who is a Harvard graduate, and also brought strong criticism from political leaders in both parties, a White House spokesman, as well as Jewish community advocates, alumni and donors.

Doug Emhoff, the husband of US Vice-President Kamala Harris, denounced the university leaders.

"Seeing the presidents of some of our most elite universities literally unable to denounce calling for the genocide of Jews as antisemitic — that lack of moral clarity is simply unacceptable," said Emhoff, who is Jewish.

High-profile critics of the three university presidents include hedge fund billionaire and Harvard alumnus Bill Ackman, who has donated more than \$25 million to the university and called repeatedly for the three to resign.

Gay resigned on Jan 2 after the

backlash from her congressional testimony, allegations of plagiarism emerged, and doubts arose about her academic integrity. Her tenure of just six months and two days is the shortest in Harvard's history.

Magill stepped down the month before. Kornbluth has received strong endorsement from MIT's governing board and remains in office.

Following the hearing and resignations of the two presidents, Stefanik issued a warning on what lies ahead. "This is just the beginning of exposing the rot in our most prestigious higher education institutions," she said.

House Republicans are continuing a broader investigation into what Stefanik called "a fundamentally broken and corrupt higher education system," including antisemitism on campus and DEI initiatives.

As for the flap at Cornell, scrutiny of DEI initiatives isn't new. Conservative lawmakers have for years claimed DEI efforts are a form of indoctrination.

Last year, more than a dozen state legislatures introduced or passed bills reining in DEI programs at colleges and universities, claiming the offices overseeing them eat up valuable financial resources, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* reported.

Many DEI initiatives have been credited as beneficial, as they are seen as a way to combat inequality by encouraging multiculturalism and providing resources for

people of different backgrounds. ACE surveys college presidents about their jobs. Each of its previous three such studies has shown a decline in length of service.

In its survey released this year, more than 1,000 presidents and chancellors from a broad range of institutions told ACE they had worked in their positions for an average of 5.9 years. Previous surveys found an average of 6.5 years in 2016, seven years in 2011 and 8.5 years in 2006.

Some education experts are worried about what this turnover means for institutional stability.

"I think institutions, whether they're journalism institutions, business institutions or higher education institutions, benefit from stability and continuity that comes from long-term relationships with leadership. And if there's excessive turnover, I think the institution suffers," said Robert Dickeson, a higher education consultant and former president of the University of Northern Colorado.

Dickeson, who served as president for a decade, told *Inside Higher Ed*, a print and digital media outlet owned by Times Higher Education in the US, that presidents have to "hit the ground running," which he believes makes it difficult to do the job.

"Leaders often need at least a year or two to get their bearings and figure out the institution's inner workings. At the same time, if they stay too long, it can mean that the university stagnates due to a lack of fresh ideas from the top," he wrote.

He believes the ideal tenure for a university presidency is between seven and 10 years.

Dickeson, who recently wrote a guide on the presidential search, screening and selection process for the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, said boards have to take responsibility for failed presidencies, given their role in finding and hiring college leaders.

"If I was on the board, I would say, 'OK, what went wrong? How did we screw up?' Because the fact that the person has left is as much our fault as theirs, if there is fault to be assigned," he said.

Holden Thorp, a former chancellor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, wrote in an article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education* last month that today's college presidents need to be prepared right from the start "to go toe-to-toe with seasoned politicians in high-stakes public hearings. When world events strain the campus, they (college presidents) also need the experience and judgment to not send out statements except in cases where they're supposed to send one out."

Zachary Smith, executive partner in the education practice of WittKieffer, an executive search company, said candidates are opting out of some presidential searches because of the political environment.

"People are taking a little bit longer look at whether they want to jump into the furnace and operate in environments that are not necessarily conducive for their success or their institution's success," Smith told *The Washington Post*.

Roderick McDavis, the first black president of Ohio University, who is now a managing principal and chief executive of AGB Search, said that while there are still plenty of people who want the jobs, he thinks tenures are shorter because the role is so much more stressful.

He told the news website *Axios* that when he was president of Ohio University from 2004 to 2017, it was a rewarding job, but it became increasingly all-consuming. "There's literally never any downtime," he said.

David Gearhart, chancellor emeritus of the University of Arkansas, who has written books on higher education leadership, told *Inside Higher Ed* that a college presidency has become an increasingly hard job due to challenges that only seem to be increasing.

"There are so many groups out there that a college president has to try to appease, and it's almost impossible to do that with all of the political machinations that are happening these days, not to mention the huge decline that we will be seeing over the next several years in enrollment, which has already started," Gearhart said.

Steven Mintz, a professor of history at the University of Texas at Austin, said political attacks on US higher education are not new.

But the biggest threat, Mintz wrote in *Inside Higher Ed*, "comes from mounting anxieties about colleges' return on investment: that the cost of attendance is too high, completion rates are too low, and learning and employment outcomes too uncertain, and that society needs to embrace faster, cheaper and less rigorous and well-rounded paths into the workforce."

He fears that "the true political threat to universities comes less from ideologues than from a diminishing faith among broad segments of the public in the power of higher education to transform lives, open doors and open minds."

"It's that loss of faith that gives traction to the recent political attacks," he added.



Visitors photograph a statue of John Harvard on the campus of Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. STEVEN SENNE / AP



Visitors stroll through the grounds of Harvard University on Jan 2. STEVEN SENNE / AP

TOP NEWS

US advised to reduce trade curbs on China

National security 'de-risking' not a real change from 'decoupling', economist says

By YIFAN XU in Washington
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An economist in the United States has expressed concern that the country will restrict trade with China in goods unrelated to national security, such as electric vehicles and batteries.

"The US government should dramatically reduce the scope of Section 301 tariffs and carefully explain the rationale for any new national security trade or investment restrictions," said Gary Hufbauer, a senior fellow at Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, DC.

"Moreover, the US government should welcome Chinese students who want to study in US universities, and Chinese professors who are offered US faculty positions of teaching or research," he said.

While such steps should be taken, Hufbauer said that, because of politics, "it probably will not happen."

Inside "Maybe a few products will be taken off the 301 list and exempted, but not a lot of products the way I recommend," he added.

Section 301 of the US Trade Act of 1974 authorizes the president to take action, including tariff- and nontariff-related, "to obtain the removal of any act, policy or practice of a foreign government that violates an international trade agreement ... and that burdens or restricts US commerce."

On Jan 18, agents of the US Department of Homeland Security searched Harco Manufacturing Group in Moraine, Ohio, which was acquired in 2015 by the Chinese company Qingdao Sunsong. The department said the search was "part of an ongoing federal investigation."

In September, members of a US House of Representatives committee sent a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, accusing Qingdao Sunsong of moving some of its production to Thailand to avoid US tariffs.

The lawmakers described the action as "a serious violation of US law and undermining American economic and national security."

"What they assert is that because this Chinese company has a subsidiary over in Thailand, and the Thai company is selling to the United States, it must be some kind of evasion," Hufbauer said. "I don't agree with that at all."

"They're just trying to create a big storm where there isn't a storm," he said.

In an email to the US website Axios, a spokesperson for the Chinese embassy expressed firm opposition to "some in the US (who) are attempting to politicize and weaponize trade issues between China and the US".

Hufbauer cited a summary written by Mary Lovely, a professor emerita of economics at Syracuse University and a senior fellow at the Peterson Institute, on a recent meeting centered on the auto industry and hosted by the Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland in Ohio.

He said the United Auto Workers union and the auto parts industry were seeking protection against electric vehicles and batteries from China, which "has nothing to do with national security".

US officials such as Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo are pushing back on the concept of "decoupling" advocated by what Hufbauer described as congressional "China hawks" and instead emphasizing "de-risking". Hufbauer said the latter term is merely a more polite one.

In future meetings with their Chinese counterparts, if Yellen and Raimondo are specific about what national security "de-risking" covers and what it does not, that will influence how the Chinese government views the sincerity of the policy, Hufbauer said.

"China will be very skeptical that 'de-risking' is any different from 'decoupling' — just a different word, but not a real change," he said.

"If the officials from the US agree with the officials from China that automobiles and batteries are not national security items, that will be very persuasive," he said. "But if they hedge on that and say, 'Well, maybe it's national security' ... I think the Chinese authorities will rightly say, 'Oh, this is just a word game.'"

Regarding the prospects of China-US trade, Hufbauer said he expects relatively peaceful relations during the rest of the year.

"For the year 2024, I do not see much danger of further decoupling. This is the positive outcome of high-level meetings," he said. "The year 2025 will depend on the US presidential election in November 2024."



Fiery collision

Investigators examine the charred remains of a passenger bus on Tuesday after it collided with a freight truck on a highway in Sinaloa, northern Mexico. The accident left at least 19 people dead and several others injured, local authorities said. There were 37 people aboard the bus. Photos of the scene showed both vehicles had been reduced to burned metal frames. AFP

Provinces crack down on animal exploitation

By YAN DONGJIE
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Authorities are taking stringent measures to stop the exploitation of protected animals amid booming winter tourism in northeastern China, following reports of red-crowned cranes and tiger cubs being used to entertain visitors in Heilongjiang and Jilin provinces.

The forestry and grassland administrations in the two provinces have strictly forbidden inappropriate display of animals under State protection, and have warned of imposing legal and regulatory penalties on offenders.

According to a recent report, a red-crowned crane, which is an endangered avian species under first-class State protection, was

sent from Heilongjiang's Hegang to Harbin, the provincial capital, to engage with tourists.

Earlier reports had indicated a similar inappropriate display of the rare birds, which were sent from Qiqihar, another city in Heilongjiang, to Harbin.

The surge in visits to Harbin this winter has been substantial, with the local culture and tourism bureau reporting record numbers.

During the three-day New Year holiday, Harbin Airport transported 205,000 passengers, marking a 27 percent rise compared with 2019. Meanwhile, the city registered over 3 million tourist visits, generating a record revenue of 5.9 billion yuan (\$820 million).

Animal protection volunteers also voiced concerns over Changchun

Zoo in Jilin sending Siberian tiger cubs to a hotel where tourists had gathered, allowing the cubs to interact closely with the out-of-town visitors.

The volunteers emphasized that both Siberian tigers and red-crowned cranes are under State protection, requiring official authorization for any interactive or display activities.

The Heilongjiang Forestry and Grassland Administration said that a red-crowned crane from Hegang was displayed at Harbin's Central Street on Jan 6 without administrative permission, but stressed that immediate steps were taken to suspend the entertainment activities.

Authorities in Jilin instructed Changchun Zoo to immediately bring the tiger cubs home. The zoo

said that future animal display and performance activities will adhere strictly to legal requirements.

Sun Yingdi, an animal protection volunteer, emphasized the importance of obtaining approval from competent authorities for interactions involving protected animals, citing the risks of possible injury during transportation and aggressive behavior.

She urged improving public awareness of animal protection laws and encouraging people to actively participate in the oversight of wildlife conservation efforts.

In light of these incidents, Sun suggested strengthening the dissemination of information about laws and regulations related to animal protection, and promoting ecological knowledge at the same time.

Experts upbeat on recovery prospects

By OUYANG SHIJIA
and ZHOU LANXU

China will likely see a faster economic recovery this year amid robust government measures to tackle challenges including insufficient domestic demand and the troubled real estate sector, with a run of indicators suggesting the stabilization of the world's second-largest economy, according to experts.

In January, the country's factory activity improved marginally while nonmanufacturing activities expanded at a faster pace, according to data released on Wednesday by the National Bureau of Statistics.

China's official purchasing managers index for the manufacturing sector rose to 49.2 in January with a recovery in both demand and supply, compared with 49 in December, according to the NBS. Figures below 50 indicate a contraction in activity.

The subindex for production rose to 51.3 in January from 50.2 in December, while the gauge for new orders improved to 49 from 48.7 a month earlier, the NBS said.

NBS statistician Zhao Qinghe said that manufacturers' optimism and confidence are stabilizing, with the

gauge for manufacturers' expectations for their production and operations standing at 54 in January.

China's nonmanufacturing PMI came in at 50.7 in January, up from 50.4 a month earlier. Also, the country's official composite PMI, which includes both manufacturing and nonmanufacturing activities, came in at 50.9 in January compared with 50.3 in December, according to the NBS.

Zhou Maohua, a macroeconomic researcher at China Everbright Bank, said, "The improvement in PMI readings reflects a faster pace of economic expansion, with the momentum in domestic demand strengthening."

Zhou said that manufacturing PMI contracted for a fourth consecutive month in January as the month marks the off-season for some manufacturing sectors, pointing to the still-weak domestic demand. "Supportive macroeconomic policies are needed to bolster activity and promote the recovery in effective demand."

The country has introduced a series of supportive policies since last year to bolster the economy, in terms of stimulating consumption, enhancing industrial capacities, and reducing market entry barriers and

strengthening financial services.

Lloyd Peng, president of CPA Australia's North China Committee, emphasized the importance of policy support in driving economic growth, saying that these measures have "played a very positive and constructive role in alleviating the burden on businesses, boosting confidence, and stabilizing growth expectations."

Data from the State Taxation Administration showed that the country's newly implemented tax refunds, as well as tax and fee cuts and deferrals, exceeded 2.2 trillion yuan (\$306.6 billion) in 2023, benefiting various sectors including manufacturing, small and medium-sized enterprises and private companies.

By the end of 2023, outstanding inclusive loans granted to small and micro businesses totaled 29.06 trillion yuan, up 23.27 percent year-on-year, according to the National Financial Regulatory Administration.

Peng said the Chinese economy experienced a steady recovery over the past year thanks to policy support and structural reform, and a new survey by CPA Australia indicates that this growth momentum is expected to continue this year.

"Despite global economic uncer-

tainties, our survey reveals that 45 percent of professionals anticipate their company's profits will increase this year," he said.

Peng said it is crucial that existing policies are implemented in a predictable and consistent way, which will ensure that such policies benefit more businesses.

On Tuesday, the International Monetary Fund released its latest World Economic Outlook report, revising its 2024 global growth forecast to 3.1 percent, 0.2 percentage point higher than that in its projection in October. The report reflected upgrades for China, the United States and large emerging markets and developing economies.

The report said that China's growth in 2024 is forecast to reach 4.6 percent, 0.4 percentage point higher than the IMF's previous projection in October.

"Additional property sector-related reforms, including faster restructuring of insolvent property developers while protecting homebuyers' interests, and larger-than-expected fiscal support, could boost consumer confidence, bolster private demand, and generate positive cross-border growth spillovers," the IMF said.

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Tax protest



Supporters of Sri Lanka's main opposition party interact with riot police on Tuesday in Colombo during a protest against the high taxes imposed by President Ranil Wickremesinghe's administration.

THUSITHA KRISHNADASA / GETTY IMAGES

Anti-drug: Principle of equality seen as crucial guideline

From page 1

In addition, China maintains regular communication with dozens of nations and has set up border drug control liaison offices with 13 neighboring countries that, among other things, share anti-drug intelligence resources.

The meeting on Tuesday focused on bilateral anti-drug cooperation, including the control of precursor chemicals for drug production and law enforcement safety collabora-

tion, representing significant progress in law enforcement cooperation between the two sides, said Chen, the executive director of the Institute of American Studies.

"The principle of equality and mutual benefit is a crucial guideline in handling Sino-US relations. China's anti-drug cooperation is driven by its national interests, and China will not engage in cooperation merely for the sake of it. It will also not accept unreasonable demands or accusations

from the other side," Chen said.

According to the CNNCC, China has listed 456 narcotic and psychotropic substances, the entire class of fentanyl and synthetic cannabinoids, and 38 precursor chemicals under control, making it one of the countries with the most and strictest drug control.

Last year, public security authorities resolved more than 42,000 drug-related crime cases, apprehended more than 65,000 criminal suspects, and confiscated a total of 25.9 metric

tons of various types of narcotics, according to a release on Wednesday from the Ministry of Public Security.

While effectively combating the infiltration of foreign drugs, domestic drug production and the cross-regional trafficking of narcotics, law enforcement agencies have also focused on addressing the rising issue of new psychoactive substances, the ministry said. Efforts have also been intensified to monitor the abuse of pharmaceuticals, the ministry said.

Discourse: Fear, suspicion invoked by media depictions

From page 1

The biggest contemporary example of this was the COVID-19 pandemic, whereby China was viciously scapegoated as being responsible for a global pandemic.

In other words, linking and associating people and things

with the Communist Party of China is a vehicle for discrediting and attacking them by portraying their words, actions and deeds in strictly conspiracy terms, thus invoking fear and suspicion. It does not matter how irrational it may be in logical terms; hence, British media will even say that a

Chinese coffee machine can spy on you.

Rarely mentioned is how the CPC has managed to lead the Chinese in getting rid of absolute poverty, lifting millions to a good and prosperous life.

Therefore, a confrontation in London is exaggerated by the

media into being the culpability of China and its government as a whole. Chinese people are depicted as not having their own opinions, lives or preferences, but instead are determined to force their ideology on other countries in a top-down scheme from the country's leadership.

Therefore, as populist movements have swept the West, such as those involving Brexit and former US president Donald Trump, it has become a popular tactic for political opponents to blame these outcomes not on voter discontent or social fractures, but on foreign interference, which has the negative impact of closing down domestic debate and making some opinions unacceptable. The same thing is happening

about China, whereby the mainstream media are all too quick to push hysteria over small incidents and thus whip up anti-China fear, which they claim is targeted at only the government, but for all practical purposes has an impact on everyone.

The author is a British political and international relations analyst. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Cooperative finds success with slate rice

Variety grown in rare fields invigorates village in Heilongjiang province

By LI HONGYANG

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In 2016, Chen Yujia left her position as a high school physical education teacher in Ning'an city, Heilongjiang province, and returned to her hometown to be a rice farmer.

The 35-year-old was born and raised in Shangguandi village in the city's Bohai town. Nourished by volcanic soil, the area is known for its production of slate rice.

Chen said slate rice fields are as rare as giant pandas, and she came to realize the need to protect and make good use of them.

She now heads a rice cooperative that has gained popularity in the area. To safeguard villagers' interests, she signed agreements with farmers, ensuring annual purchases at prices higher than market value and personally bearing the risks of overstocking.

Though Chen's parents raised her in the countryside, they hoped she would pursue higher education rather than do labor-intensive farmwork like them, she said. She went on to become a high school physical education teacher.

During school holidays, she would accompany her mother to agricultural exhibitions, where they saw high-priced rice in exquisite packaging from southern provinces being sold.

At the time, her mother was participating in a rice cooperative she helped establish in 2008. She and her colleagues were relying on traditional sales methods, waiting for middlemen to buy rice in bulk from them. This proved unsuccessful, and villagers struggled to make ends meet.

Seeing the high-priced rice at the exhibitions gave Chen and her mother an idea. By taking advantage of the uniqueness and relative scarcity of slate rice and making the packaging more attractive, Chen believed they could better promote their rice and sell it at a higher price.

Despite the stability of her job at the high school, she resigned and returned to her hometown to work at the cooperative, ignoring



Chen Yujia harvests slate rice in Shangguandi village in Ning'an city, Heilongjiang province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Sales are not easy. I thought conducting research, reading books and making videos would help sell the products easily, but reality poured cold water on my expectations."

Chen Yujia, head of a rice cooperative in Ning'an city, Heilongjiang province

her friends' objections and emboldened by her mother's support.

"I returned because for the cultivation and sale of rice, hands-on experience is necessary," Chen said.

Facing unforeseen challenges in rice cultivation and skepticism from the community, her determination to sell the rice at a better price grew.

Chen said at the beginning, she thought farming wouldn't be difficult for her, an agile physical education teacher. However, she soon learned that walking on a rice field is more difficult than run-

ning on a racetrack.

"The mud is so sticky that it's hard to walk smoothly," she said. "Moving through the field doesn't give you the exhilaration of jogging on a track."

She began conducting market research in supermarkets, going to shops to study various rice varieties, pricing and packaging.

"I needed to consider the market demand, what amount of rice do people generally buy, which rice is preferred by certain demographics, and so on," she said.

To promote slate rice, Chen offered to cook it at exhibitions so customers could try it.

"Only if people taste it will they pay for the rice. Also, my mother and I tailor-made a set of red and green cotton jackets to attract attention," she said. "Normally, I wear only black and white. Wearing such eye-catching clothes was a struggle for me."

Chen also quickly learned that selling the rice was not as simple as she thought it would be. Besides redesigning the packaging, she also opened an online store and began livestreaming to promote her products.

"Ideas are great, but putting them into practice can be quite difficult. Sales are not easy. I

thought conducting research, reading books and making videos would help sell the products easily, but reality poured cold water on my expectations," she said.

"Villagers had doubts about my abilities. On days when I had no orders, I wondered whether I had made a mistake. However, there was no turning back."

Despite her misgivings, she persisted through the challenging times, gradually gaining trust and securing orders.

Chen's cooperative gained renown, attracting more than 150 families from Shangguandi and neighboring villages.

The slate rice cultivation area expanded from 3 hectares to 120. The annual revenue generated from each hectare has increased from around 75,000 yuan (\$10,444) to about 150,000 yuan, providing incomes for over 500 villagers.

Meanwhile, projects such as land adoptions by citizens have boosted tourism, instilling more confidence in villagers.

"I want to create value. Now that villagers have seen positive changes, talking to them feels different. Their enthusiasm has given me great confidence," Chen said.

Project helps bring produce to rural area in Xizang

LHASA — In the remote pastoral areas of Shanza county in Southwest China's Xizang autonomous region, fresh fruits and vegetables have become a common sight for Wu Wa — a stark contrast from Wu's childhood, when apples were once a rare treat and green vegetables were hardly ever seen on the dining table.

Spanning over 25,000 square kilometers, the county is nestled in the heart of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and stands at an average altitude of about 4,700 meters.

Nearly 90 percent of Shanza's 23,000 people are engaged in animal husbandry.

The harsh combination of a cold climate, barren land and high altitude posed significant challenges for the cultivation of fruits and vegetables in the area, so the locals had to rely on meat and dairy products as the main components of their diet.

In 2019, the regional department of commerce launched a pilot project for fruit and vegetable distribution in Shanza. With an investment of nearly 3 million yuan (\$422,000), a fresh produce storage facility was built, 16 produce stands were set up across the county and refrigeration equipment and transport vehicles were purchased.

As part of the initiative, fresh produce and essential items were packaged and transported to the county from the regional capital Lhasa, nearly 600 kilometers away, and sometimes even from Xining, the capital of neighboring Qinghai



From top: Tibetan villagers purchase fresh vegetables at a grocery store in a remote village in Shanza county, Xizang autonomous region, on Jan 6. TENZIN NIMACHOQU / XINHUA Trucks deliver fresh fruits and vegetables from Xining, Qinghai province, to Shanza on Jan 3. CAO BIN / XINHUA

province. The goods were then distributed to vendors in towns and villages.

"We can now enjoy fresh items such as dragon fruit, kiwi fruit and cherries, and we can always have vegetables with our meals," Wu said.

The project has been well-received among residents, and there are now 44 produce stands in the county.

Every year, the county government allocates 70,000 yuan to subsidize the daily operations and fuel costs for vendors in a bid to keep

produce prices consistent, according to Ma Yulong, deputy director of the county's economy and information technology bureau.

It used to take two days for produce to be delivered from Lhasa to Shanza. Now, a truck laden with 20 metric tons of fresh produce such as peppers, potatoes, cabbage, tangerines, grapes and apples usually sets off from Lhasa at 7 or 8 pm, reaching Shanza in about 12 hours.

The enhanced transportation system has ensured the freshness of the produce, said Tonzhub, an official with the county's supply and

marketing cooperatives, which is responsible for carrying out the project.

Shere Gyatso, who operates a produce stand, said he receives shipments two to three times a week, each weighing about 50 kilograms.

"I notify the villagers in our WeChat group as soon as the fresh produce arrives. The demand from villagers has increased, and occasionally I have to restock the supplies," he said, adding that apples and cabbage are the most sought-after items.

Last year, Shere Gyatso took part in a training program organized by the county's supply and marketing cooperatives to learn about fruit and vegetable preservation techniques. "These skills have helped me overcome previous problems I faced in preservation. I can replenish my stock with more varieties and offer more options for the villagers," he said.

A total of 218 tons of fresh fruits and vegetables were distributed to households in the county last year as a result of the pilot project, accounting for 30 percent of the county's fruit and vegetable consumption.

XINHUA

Quake-rattled villagers rebuilding their lives

CHENGDU — Xu Yongqiong, a villager in Luding county in the southwestern province of Sichuan, is busy decorating her new home while electricians are installing pendant lights in a room.

On Sept 5, 2022, a 6.8 magnitude earthquake jolted the county, resulting in many casualties, and collapsed houses in the affected areas.

After the earthquake, the jolted mountains nearby posed a serious geological hazard, forcing Xu's family to relocate. Assisted by the government, her new home was finally built.

And with the help of interest-free loans from a bank, money borrowed from relatives and government subsidies, she was able to invest nearly 700,000 yuan (\$98,488) in a new business opportunity — the construction of a two-story building with eight bedrooms.

"I'm preparing for the future to develop this property into a homestay for tourism," said Xu, who is now running a restaurant with family members.

"We should stay busy, as I believe that through hard work, we will find hope."

Shaba village, where Xu now

XINHUA



An aerial photo shows a newly built village for earthquake-affected families in Beitou village in Luding county, Sichuan province, on Jan 25. YANG JIN / XINHUA

Editor's Note: As protection of the planet's flora, fauna and resources becomes increasingly important, China Daily is publishing a series of stories to illustrate the country's commitment to safeguarding the natural world.

As December arrived, Huang Qibang and his wife Wang Juxiang looked forward to a bustling time in their village in the southwestern part of Yunnan province.

They prepared to welcome a stream of photography enthusiasts to Yangguang village, Mangshi, with the seasonal influx expected to continue until the end of April and provide a significant source of income for the couple.

"They come to capture images of the monkeys," Wang said. "Baby monkeys are usually born in December. They look golden and adorable and are a major draw for visiting photographers."

The monkey is the Phayre's leaf monkey (*Trachypithecus phayrei*), also known as Phayre's langur.

They are predominantly found in the tropical, deciduous and evergreen forests of northeastern India, eastern Bangladesh and Myanmar. In China, they are found only in the southern and southwestern parts of Yunnan.

Within the confines of Mangshi, a city close to the border with Myanmar, a patch of forest spanning approximately 1,600 hectares serves as a sanctuary for over 500 Phayre's leaf monkeys, making it the most accessible location in the country to observe the endangered species, which is on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species. Hunting and loss of habitat are two major factors threatening the species.

Outsiders need the assistance of locals such as Huang and Wang to locate the langurs in their natural habitat.

"We are among the few monkey guides in the village," Huang said. "For most people hoping to observe them in the wild, our services are essential."

Road to conservation

Huang, 43, has been familiar with the Phayre's leaf monkey since he was a child.

With its grayish-blue fur, light-colored areas around the eyes and mouth, and a tail nearly twice the length of its body, the langur has long been a hidden gem in the mountainous forests surrounding Mangshi in Dehong Dai and Jingpo autonomous prefecture.

As a plot of collective forest allocated to Huang's family is part of the langur's natural habitat, he often saw the monkeys while herding cattle or collecting wood on the mountain when he was young. "We didn't know their scientific name then, and neither did we know they were rare and endangered," he said. "We called them 'gray monkeys'."

In 2016, one of Huang's friends, Yang Kaisuo, returned to the village after working elsewhere for many years, and tried to see the langurs on the nearby mountain but failed. He later discovered that due to deforestation and habitat destruction, the monkeys were being squeezed out of their natural habitats and forced to constantly relocate to the remaining forested areas.

Yang was inspired to bring back the gray monkeys that had lived in the area for generations. Understanding that protecting the monkeys required safeguarding their habitats, Yang asked Huang and another friend to initiate voluntary forest patrols.

Their early efforts to persuade villagers to protect the leaf monkeys and refrain from forest destruction yielded limited results. It was during a conversation with a local wildlife photographer that Yang conceived a more effective approach. He began helping the photographer track the langurs and capture awe-inspiring moments in 2016. The photos finally put the enigmatic creature in the limelight.

More photographers came, which in turn brought more media attention to the langurs.

In 2018, researchers from the Chi-



Two adult Phayre's leaf monkeys, also known as Phayre's langur, a species under first-level State protection, and an infant on a branch in Mangshi, Yunnan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Yunnan villagers make the most of monkey business

Guiding photographers into forest to snap shots of endangered langurs can be lucrative. **Chen Liang** reports.



Left: Wang Juxiang (left) and a photographer wait in the woods to take photos of Phayre's leaf monkeys in Xuangang township in Mangshi. CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY Right: A Phayre's leaf monkey holds its newborn infant. The infants are covered with yellow and white fur during their first three months of life. WANG JIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Left: A Phayre's leaf monkey feeds in Yunnan. LI XINFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY Right: Patrolman Huang Qibang (front) offers assistance to photographers in Yangguang. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



nese Academy of Sciences' Kunming Institute of Zoology visited the area and launched a comprehensive survey of the leaf monkeys.

Huang and Wang were hired by a graduate student at the institute to help him track the monkeys during his survey. He also lived in their house during his field survey.

"Every month he would come and work with us for 18 days," Wang said.

The local volunteers learned from the researchers that monkeys were a species under first-level State protection. They also discovered the forest, comprising part of the State-owned Mangxing Forest Farm and part of the collective forest belonging to villagers living in Xuangang township in Mangshi, was home to China's largest known population of the species.

"We were told that about 320 leaf

monkeys in five families were living in our forest," Huang said.

In 2016, the prefecture's forest and grassland bureau hired Huang as a patrolman to protect the collective forest. The target of his protection has since become the langurs.

It can be challenging work. From December to mid-June, he needs to patrol the forest almost every day, tracking the monkeys' movements

and eliminating any forest fire hazards. An average patrol route is 6 kilometers, and a longer one of more than 10 km will put him on a mountain path for the whole day.

"June 15 marks the beginning of the rainy season," Huang said. "In the following months, I can relax a little bit and decrease the frequency of my patrols."

While the work offered an allowance of 1,800 yuan (\$250) a month, that is not the reason for his persistence, especially as the local government's budget woes meant it failed to pay him for the past two years.

However, his work has brought guests — photography enthusiasts — to the family.

"People come for our help to find the monkeys," Huang said. "Because of my work, more than 80 percent of them prefer our service to the others."

Monkey guides' routine

Every morning in December, Huang leaves his four-story house in Yangguang village at around 7 am to try to locate the langur troops as early as possible. It's not an easy job, or one that he can do alone.

Yang and several fellow villagers established a conservation monitoring team with the support of a local conservation NGO, and the focus of their conservation efforts gradually expanded to include other protected species in the area such as the bearcat, macaque, serow, clouded leopard and giant flying squirrel.

The team's diligent work has received recognition and support from local government departments and research institutions. In November 2021, they established the Mangxing River Natural Ecology Conservation Association, with Yang elected its leader.

Yang and members of his team have often joined Huang's patrols to monitor the langurs in the forest.

"We work together to keep a close watch on the monkeys," Huang said. "As a result, we split the earnings generated from visiting photographers."

They charge 200 yuan per person per day, with locating the monkeys a precondition for payment.

After receiving a message from her husband detailing the langurs' location, Wang, 39, accompanies the customers to meet with Huang and his friends. Once they find the langur troop and the customers start taking photos of the monkeys or observing them, she heads back to the family's small plantation of dendrobium orchids, treasured herbs in traditional Chinese medicine.

The 3,300-square-meter farm is located on the mountain near the leaf monkeys' habitat. While there, Wang cooks lunch for her customers, charging them 30 yuan for a lunch box.

Huang's responsibilities extend until his customers are satisfied with their photos and conclude their day. Typically, that occurs around 4 pm.

Sometimes, Wang will leave early to pick up more customers at Mangshi airport, about 15 km from the village, in the family's four-wheel-drive vehicle, which was purchased in 2020.

"We charge 300 yuan per person for a round trip to the airport," she said, adding that she usually makes arrangements for their customers to stay in a hotel near the village.

She said the family can earn 30,000 to 40,000 yuan a year from the guiding service, although there were few customers between 2020 and 2022 because of COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Without the income from visitors, the family had to rely on growing orchids and beekeeping.

She maintains 20 bee colonies, which yield between 30 to 80 kilograms of honey.

"Due to excessive rainfall last year, our honey harvest was limited to 30 kg," she said. "The current market price for 1 kg of honey is about 100 yuan."

Their 21-year-old daughter and 18-year-old son have no regular work and live at home after graduating from high school. The son is learning to operate an excavator.

The couple is now planning to build a bird blind to draw more bird-watchers to the village.

"An Asian emerald cuckoo has recently been hanging around in the valley where we plan to build the blind," Huang said. "Hopefully, more rare birds will show up and help draw more visitors to our village."

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Patrols help boost primate population

By CHEN LIANG

Patrols in collective forests owned by several villages in Xuangang township in Mangshi, Yunnan province, have led to a steady improvement in living conditions for the Phayre's leaf monkey.

A scientific survey conducted in 2018 by the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Kunming Institute of Zoology found about 320 of the monkeys in five groups in the 1,600-hectare natural subtropical forest in Mangshi.

Yang Kaisuo, a resident of Yangguang village in Mangshi, said about

500 now live in the forest, with the largest troop having more than 200 members.

"In the beginning, many villagers didn't care about our call to protect the monkeys," he told China Green Times. "When photographers came and they felt that visitors might bring some income to the villages, their attitude to conservation started to change."

The Yunnan Green Environment Development Foundation then supported Yang and five fellow villagers to establish a langur monitoring team.

In January 2020, the Mangshi Forestry and Grassland Bureau, the Yunnan Green Environment Development Foundation, and The Nature Conservancy, an international conservation organization, collaborated to establish the Mangshi Phayre's Leaf Monkey Habitat Protection Management Plan (2019-2023), outlining protective measures for the species in the area.

In September 2020, the Mangxing River Reserve project was launched online on the Ant Forest public welfare platform.

Within a week, 1,600 hectares of

forest were pledged for protection by netizens nationwide through donations. Over the next five years, the reserve would receive nearly 2 million yuan (\$280,800) in support from Ant Forest, primarily for patrol monitoring, ranger capacity building and other preservation efforts.

With the financial support, Yang and the other five members of his patrol team set up 20 infrared cameras in the forest, said Li Mingxian, the only female member of the team.

The cameras operate 24 hours a day, allowing continuous monitoring of specific locations, she said. The results obtained from each infrared camera act as pieces of a

puzzle within the vast ecosystem, and when enough data is collected, the patrol members and researchers can analyze the information to understand the basic behaviors of Phayre's leaf monkeys living in the area. As a result, it is essential for the patrol members to regularly inspect the infrared cameras.

"At the end of each month, we trek up the mountains to check, replace camera batteries and retrieve data," Li told a local newspaper. "Every time I see photos captured by our infrared cameras, I feel our work is meaningful."

To further stimulate local enthusiasm for conservation, with the support of the local government, the city's Zhonghe and Qincitang villa-

ges jointly established the Mangxing River Natural Ecology Conservation Association in January 2021.

Yang, who was elected to lead the grassroots organization, said its membership exceeded 130 within three months of its establishment, with the majority being local residents and forest patrolmen.

Thanks to these conservation efforts, the population of the langur has increased steadily.

Zhou Chengwei, an official with the city's forestry and grassland bureau, said a single troop of langurs living around Xuangang township added approximately 85 young monkeys from 2019 to 2021, with its population growing from around 98 in 2018 to about 183.

WORLD

Xi sends greetings to Malaysia's new king

President expresses readiness to bring more benefits to people from both sides

By CAO DESHENG in Beijing and PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong

President Xi Jinping has sent a congratulatory message to Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar, who was sworn in as Malaysia's 17th king in a ceremony at the national palace in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday.

In his message to Malaysia's new king on Wednesday, Xi said that China and Malaysia are friendly neighbors across the sea and enjoy a time-honored friendship.

Since they established diplomatic ties in 1974, the two countries have been adhering to mutual respect, equality, mutual benefit and win-win cooperation, Xi said. Bilateral ties have maintained a sound momentum of development with significant achievements through their cooperation in various fields, he added.

Xi recalled that in 2023, he and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim reached an important consensus on jointly building a China-Malaysia community with a shared future, which, he said, drew a new blueprint for the development of bilateral relations in the new era.

Noting this year marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties and the China-Malaysia Year of Friendly Exchanges, and Malaysia will take over as the country coordinator of China-ASEAN relations, Xi said the development of China-Malaysia ties will see new opportunities.

Xi expressed his readiness to conduct friendly exchanges with Sultan

Ibrahim and push the building of the China-Malaysia community with a shared future for new progress in order to bring more benefits to the people from both countries and make greater contributions to regional prosperity and stability.

Wearing royal blue ceremonial attire, the 65-year-old on Wednesday took the oath of office in a traditional ceremony.

"With this oath, I solemnly and truly profess to be faithful, to rule fairly for Malaysia in accordance with the laws and the constitution," Sultan Ibrahim said during a nationally televised event.

Sultan Ibrahim's reign comes at a time when the Southeast Asian nation is pushing for economic reforms. He will serve as the country's head of state for the next five years under a unique rotating monarchy system.

The king traditionally plays a ceremonial role in Malaysia but has in recent years featured prominently in the country's political landscape.

In addition to overseeing major political appointments, the king serves as the official head of Islam in the Muslim-majority country and commander-in-chief of its armed forces.

Analysts said the newly-crowned king is expected to continue to play the role of stabilizing the country's politics.

Awang Azman Awang Pawi, associate professor at the Academy of Malay Studies at the University of



Sultan Ibrahim Sultan Iskandar, 17th King of Malaysia, salutes the guard of honor at the national palace in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Wednesday, as Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim looks on. HASNOOR HUSSAIN / REUTERS

Malaya, said Sultan Ibrahim may have a "more prominent" role in the country's governance, noting the king aims to prioritize political stability and discourage any attempts to overthrow the government.

In a November 2023 interview with Singapore daily The Straits Times, Sultan Ibrahim vowed to stamp out corruption, emphasizing that a stable government should have consistent and sustainable policies.

"The new king is also seen as uncompromising toward those who try to create disharmony, particularly those playing on ethnic and reli-

gious issues for political support," Awang Azman told China Daily.

Serina Abdul Rahman, lecturer on Southeast Asian studies at the National University of Singapore, said the "consistent threats from the opposition" may "push the king to step in".

Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy. The nine state monarchs rotate five-year terms as the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (the paramount ruler). These state monarchs make up the Conference of Rulers and in October 2023 they elected Sultan Ibrahim as the next king.

Sultan Ibrahim hails from a state which was in the news lately after Singapore and Malaysia signed an agreement that aims to develop Johor as a special economic zone.

Tan Wee Tiam, a Johor-based property consultant, expects Sultan Ibrahim to remain a "powerful enabler" who will ensure close cooperation between the two neighbors.

Agencies contributed to this story.

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Lithium deal with Bolivia set to bring dividends

By SERGIO HELD and GERMAN SANCHEZ in Bogota, Colombia
For China Daily

A new deal signed by the Bolivian government with the Chinese consortium CBC is expected to upgrade joint extraction and development of the South American nation's lithium reserves.

The latest pact, valued at around \$90 million, adds to a previous agreement signed last year. It will see the Chinese group invest further in Bolivia's lithium sector.

"An acceleration of lithium extraction is expected, which could clearly benefit Bolivia's economy today as it seeks to diversify beyond hydrocarbon exports — a main income source that has been declining in recent years," Juan Subirana, an energy analyst and business consultant in the Bolivian city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, said.

"Bolivia is betting lithium can replace that lost revenue and foreign currency."

Bolivia has one of the largest lithium reserves in the world. Lithium is a key mineral used in lithium-ion batteries, which power electric vehicles and electronic devices. Production under the new deal is slated to begin in 2025.

With the price of lithium rising to almost \$85,000 a metric ton, a more than tenfold jump since 2020, the Bolivian government has been eager to exploit its mineral wealth.

The CBC consortium is led by Contemporary Amperex Technology, or CATL, which is based in Fujian province. As of last year, CATL holds around 37 percent share of the global lithium battery manufacturing market.

Pilot projects

The deal will facilitate pilot projects and studies for a proposed lithium carbonate industrial complex to be run by Bolivia's state-owned Yacimientos de Lito Bolivianos, or YLB, in partnership with CBC.

The newly announced deal brings together multiple agreements. Last January, CBC agreed to invest over \$1 billion to build two industrial direct lithium extraction plants that would facilitate lithium processing in Bolivia.

The deal was completed after years of negotiations between Bolivia and China. The Chinese consortium will oversee lithium mining in Bolivia.

"If things are smooth sailing, the lithium industry could generate state revenues through taxes, of \$4-5 billion, annually, and — more important than anything else — employment opportunities for the Bolivian population," Juan Pablo Suarez, an analyst and socio-economic consultant, said.

Bolivian President Luis Arce agreed that deals like the agreement are critical steps for the country. "All the companies wanting to come to our country must focus on industrialization," he said.

"Both China and Bolivia are committed to improving global governance, combating climate change and taking good care of Mother Earth on which humanity depends ... to leave clean waters and green mountains for generations to come," China's Ambassador to Bolivia Wang Liang wrote in an op-ed in Bolivian newspaper Ahora El Pueblo.

The writers are freelance journalists for China Daily.



A demonstrator sells water on the sidelines of a protest outside Congress, where police stand guard, during a national strike against the government's economic and labor reforms in Buenos Aires on Jan 24. NATACHA PISARENKO / AP

IMF sees deeper economic contraction in Argentina

Buenos Aires — Argentina's economy is set to contract by 2.8 percent this year, the International Monetary Fund predicted on Tuesday as President Javier Milei's massive economic reform package remained bogged down in Congress.

Milei took office in December vowing to slash spending and end decades of economic crisis in South America's third-largest economy, where annual inflation stands at over 200 percent.

However, the libertarian and self-described "anarcho-capitalist" has been forced to water down a massive package of more than 600 economic and political reforms to win support in Congress.

Milei's political party has only 38 of 257 seats in Congress, and opposition pressure has already forced him to ditch almost half of the articles in his bill, including key fiscal reforms.

The official debate on the law has been delayed as he tries to shore up support, and was expected on Wednesday.

The delays have only heightened economic anxiety in the country where poverty levels stand at 40 percent.

The IMF said it had scaled back Argentina's growth prospects "in the context of a significant policy adjustment to restore macroeconomic stability."

The IMF prediction marks a 5.6 percentage point cut from its last economic forecast in October, when it predicted a growth of 2.8 percent in 2024.

Argentina's economy is estimated to have contracted 1.1 percent in 2023, said the IMF.

The 53-year-old Milei won a resounding election victory on a

wave of fury over the country's decades of economic crises marked by debt, rampant money printing, inflation and fiscal deficit.

He began his mandate by devaluing the peso by more than 50 percent, cutting state subsidies for fuel and transport, and reducing the number of ministries by half.

His reform package aims to notably scrap hundreds of economic regulations in a country accustomed to heavy government intervention in the market.

Milei has warned that economic "shock" treatment is the only solution to the country's troubles, and that the situation will get worse before it improves.

Argentina's economic woes are reflected across the updated forecasts to the IMF's World Economic Outlook.

The fund's 2024 growth forecast for Latin America and the Caribbean was revised down 0.4 percentage points to 1.9 percent, reflecting "negative growth in Argentina in the context of a significant policy adjustment to restore macroeconomic stability", it announced in the WEO update on Tuesday.

The IMF also noted that Argentina's inflationary surge was the main driver pushing up the 2024 inflation outlook for emerging markets and developing economies to 8.1 percent.

"The realignment of relative prices and elimination of legacy price controls, past currency depreciation, and the related pass-through into prices is expected to increase inflation in the near term," it added.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Kenya's UN office marks Chinese New Year

By WANG XIAODONG in Nairobi, Kenya
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A gala was staged at the United Nations compound in the Kenyan capital Nairobi on Wednesday to mark the Lunar New Year, showcasing traditional Chinese culture to participants from different countries.

Students and teachers from the Confucius Institute at the University of Nairobi put up a traditional Chinese cultural show, performing lion and dragon dances, playing traditional Chinese musical instruments and Peking Opera. Participants also had the opportunity to try out calligraphy, traditional Chinese painting and paper-cutting.

More than 200 people attended the event, including UN staff members and diplomats from countries such as China, Russia, Malaysia, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Iran.

Zainab Hawa Bangura, under-secretary general and director-general of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, conveyed her wishes for

the festive occasion while delivering her remarks at the ceremony.

"This year is the first time in the history of the UN that the Lunar New Year is formally recognized as a floating holiday," she said.

"My message on behalf of the United Nations family in Kenya is to say that, may this Lunar Year of the Dragon bring peace, joy and prosperity to all," she said.

This year's Lunar New Year, also called Spring Festival in China, falls on Feb 10. It is the most celebrated traditional festival in China, when families gather for reunions and set off firecrackers. The Lunar New Year is also celebrated in many other countries.

In December, the 78th General Assembly adopted a resolution by consensus to list the Lunar New Year as a UN floating holiday, which means the Lunar New Year will be celebrated at the UN too.

"The Spring Festival symbolizes joy, harmony, unity and prosperity, and embodies the core values of harmony, love and peace in the Chinese culture as well as Chinese people's bond and responsibility to their fam-

ily and the country," Zhou Pingjian, Chinese ambassador to Kenya, said.

The Lunar New Year is a public holiday in almost 20 countries and celebrated in various ways by about one-fifth of humanity, he said, adding that the festival has become a global cultural event, bringing joy to people around the world.

"Now it's officially listed as a UN floating holiday, demonstrating values of inclusiveness and diversity which have always been advocated by the UN," he said.

Pujades Alexandre, a consultant at UN-Habitat in Nairobi, said although he has seen the Lunar New Year being celebrated by the Chinese community in Spain, this was the first time he participated in such a celebration.

Alexandre said he learned to write the Chinese character *fu*, meaning luck, with this being his first time trying out calligraphy.

Gichimu Loise, a Kenyan staff member from UNEP, said she hopes to see the Lunar New Year celebrated in Kenya every year, so that people can become familiar with traditional Chinese culture.

Off track

At least two people were hospitalized after an Amtrak train derailed when it hit a truck carrying milk in northeastern Colorado. The crash happened at around 10 pm on Monday near Keenesburg, a town roughly 56 kilometers northeast of Denver. KMGH VIA AP



Doctors launch strike action across Germany

By JONATHAN POWELL in London
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Doctors at 23 university hospitals across Germany staged strike action on Tuesday due to a collective bargaining dispute over wages and working hours, after negotiations between hospital managers and union leaders failed.

In the northern German city of Hanover, several thousand doctors were expected to rally, advocating for wage increases and restrictions on rotating shifts, reported Deutsche Welle News.

More than 20,000 doctors at university hospitals funded by Germany's 16 federal states are demanding

a 12.5 percent pay increase and a rise in bonuses for regular night, weekend, and holiday shifts.

Andreas Botzlar, leader of the Marburger Bund trade union, said federal states "do not want to face the fact that university hospitals are falling further and further behind — in terms of doctors' salaries as well as working conditions".

He told the dpa news agency the challenging factors of lower pay and longer working hours at university hospitals compared to other medical institutions are posing difficulties in recruiting workers.

"The states think they can make a few small cosmetic alterations and everything will be rosy again," he

said. "But they're sorely mistaken; without substantial improvements, the doctors' resentment will grow."

According to the union, the strike will not disrupt urgent patient care because hospital managers are obligated to ensure emergency staffing, though there may be disruptions in clinic services.

Bargaining talks

Despite multiple rounds of collective bargaining talks, hospital leaders and the trade union have been unable to reach a deal so far.

Monika Heinold, lead negotiator for the states and finance minister for the state of Schleswig-Holstein, conveyed regret that the last round of

talks did not result in an agreement.

"It remains the case that our appreciation for the work of our doctors at university hospitals ought to be reflected financially," she said.

A more positive conclusion is hoped for the next round of talks, due at the end of February, she added.

Meanwhile, just hours after train drivers in Germany concluded their nationwide strike on Monday morning, the Verdi trade union announced a new near-nationwide local transport strike, after pay negotiations failed in all federal states.

Verdi Deputy Chairwoman Christine Behle announced that industrial action will go ahead in all federal states except Bavaria on Friday.

"We have a dramatic shortage of labor in public transport and incredible pressure on employees," she said.

WORLDUS

Biden 'decides' reply to deadly attack in Jordan

Increasing dissatisfaction seen against Washington as tensions soar in Mideast

By CHEN YINGQUN
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The United States said on Tuesday it is likely to take multiple actions in retaliation to the drone strike that killed three of its soldiers in Jordan, and a day later Iran warned of decisive response to any type of attack.

US President Joe Biden said on Tuesday that he had decided how to respond to the drone strike in Jordan, which is the first fatal attack on US forces in the region since the outbreak of the new round of Palestine-Israel conflict in October.

Biden said he held Iran responsible "in the sense that they're supplying the weapons to the people who did it," but he insisted that he didn't want a wider war in the Middle East, as he headed for campaign fundraisers in Florida. He was facing growing pressure to punish Iran in a US election year.

National Security Council spokesman John Kirby added on Tuesday: "It's very possible that what you'll see is a tiered approach here, not just a single action but potentially multiple actions."

The White House announced that the president is scheduled to be present at the solemn repatriation ceremony for the remains of the three US soldiers at a Delaware air base on Friday.

One day after Biden's remarks, Iran's envoy to the United Nations Amir Saeid Iravani said on Wednesday that Tehran would react firmly

to any assaults on its land, its interests, or on Iranians abroad, as reported by state media on Wednesday.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani on Monday rejected the country's involvement in the drone attack, saying the accusation is "baseless and provocative." He also said Iran did not welcome the expansion of the conflict in the region.

Klaus W. Larres, a Richard M. Krasno Distinguished Professor at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said there is immense domestic pressure on Biden to go after Iran. If the US can ascertain that Iran was behind the drone attack in Jordan, it will take some direct action against Iran, which may well escalate tension overall in the region. Otherwise, the US response will not be directed at Iran but at other targets, which will be less escalating.

"But this is a dangerous situation," he said.

Frequent strikes

Tensions in the Middle East region have soared since the outbreak of the Palestine-Israel conflict, with US forces in Iraq and Syria having been attacked more than 160 times.

The United States and the United Kingdom have also initiated a series of airstrikes targeting Yemen's Houthis group, which has carried out repeated attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, claiming its support for Palestine.

Israel's military action in Gaza

started in October has now left swaths of Gaza in ruins and killed more than 26,900 people, according to figures from Gaza.

Li Haidong, a professor at the Institute of International Relations at China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing, said the situation in the Middle East is escalating as Middle Eastern countries are increasingly showing dissatisfaction and even hostility toward the US for its support to Israel amid the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"After the drone attack in Jordan, it is foreseeable that the US government will temporarily take some retaliatory actions on targets it deems responsible for the attack, as a way to address domestic criticism that it has been too lenient in its approach to Middle Eastern affairs," he said.

Li said the overall situation in the Middle East is becoming increasingly complex, and the US hopes for a de-escalation rather than an escalation of tensions in the region. However, the complexity of reality means that, due to concerns about domestic public opinion and doubts from allies about its reliability, the US finds itself compelled to take certain technical military actions that are actually contributing to the escalation of regional conflicts.

However, the US government is well aware that becoming involved in a larger-scale armed conflict in the region would be more detrimental than beneficial for the US. Nevertheless, the idea of a regional conflict remains unthinkable, he said.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Netanyahu rejects 2 key demands for truce

GAZA/JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected two key demands Hamas has made during indirect cease-fire talks, saying Israel will not withdraw from the Gaza Strip or release thousands of jailed militants.

During an event on Tuesday, Netanyahu again vowed that the war would not end without Israel's "absolute victory" over Hamas.

Netanyahu rejected the Hamas militant group's two main demands — that Israel withdraw its forces from Gaza and release thousands of Palestinian prisoners — indicating that the gap between the two sides remains wide, reported The Associated Press.

After a meeting in Paris between US, Israeli, Egyptian and Qatari officials yielded a proposed framework for a truce, Hamas confirmed on Tuesday it had received the proposal and was "in the process of examining it and delivering its response."

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, whose government helped broker a previous truce in November, voiced hope an initial deal might lead to a permanent cease-fire.

Meanwhile, Israeli forces working undercover killed three Palestinian militants in a raid on a hospital in



Supporters hold posters on Tuesday in Beirut, Lebanon, showing Israeli bombardments as they demand that staff fired over Oct 7 Hamas attack allegations be returned to their jobs and countries resume funding for the UN agency. BILAL HUSSEIN / ASSOCIATED PRESS

the West Bank, where violence has surged since the Gaza conflict.

The Israeli military said forces entered the Ibn Sina hospital in the northern city of Jenin early Tuesday and shot the three men, whom Hamas claimed as members. The military said the men were using the hospital as a hideout and that at least one was planning an attack.

The Palestinian Health Ministry said the Israeli forces opened fire inside the hospital's wards and called on the international community to stop Israeli operations in hospitals.

Call for funding restoration

At least 26,900 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli strikes on Gaza since Oct 7, the health ministry in Gaza said on Wednesday.

The Hamas' Oct 7 attack in Israel killed 1,200 people, and about 250 people were taken hostage, Israeli authorities said.

The conflict has displaced a vast

majority of Gaza's population, according to the UN, which warned the humanitarian crisis in the besieged territory would only get worse if major donors didn't restore funding to the UNRWA, its main aid agency for Palestinians.

The UN's coordinator for Gaza aid, Sigrid Kaag, said on Tuesday that no other agency could "replace or substitute" UNRWA, which has thousands of employees.

The heads of several UN agencies, including the WHO, the UN rights office, UNICEF and the World Food Programme, later issued a statement warning that defunding UNRWA would "have catastrophic consequences for the people of Gaza."

Withholding the funds, they said, was "perilous and would result in the collapse of the humanitarian system in Gaza, with far-reaching humanitarian and human rights consequences."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Guanxiang Cheng, head of the newly formed youth division of volunteers at the WWII Pacific War Memorial Hall in San Francisco, introduces the reading room dedicated to Iris Chang, the late Chinese American historian and author of *The Rape of Nanking: The Forgotten Holocaust of World War II*. LIA ZHU / CHINA DAILY

Young voices keep forgotten chapter of World War II alive

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
lizhu@chinadailyusa.com

On a bustling street in San Francisco's Chinatown, the WWII Pacific War Memorial Hall stands as testament to a history often overlooked.

Inside, a group of young docents were ready to guide visitors through the lesser-known history of China's wartime struggles and its alliance with the United States against fascism.

These aren't typical museum guides; they are high schoolers from the San Francisco Bay Area, driven by a desire to fill the gap in history curriculum and public awareness.

"Schools don't teach this," Guanxiang Cheng, head of the newly formed youth division of volunteers told China Daily. "We want to bridge that gap, share this history, and remind people of the friendship between China and America forged during the war."

The WWII Pacific War Memorial Hall, established in 2015, is the sole museum outside China dedicated to the often-overlooked chapter of Chinese resistance and US-China collaboration during World War II.

The 5,000 square-foot museum houses more than 100 artifacts of historic interest and hundreds of historical photos covering important aspects of China's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-1945).

World War II claimed 6 million Jewish lives in Europe, with the Holocaust memorialized in more than 100 museums worldwide.

The 35 million Chinese lives lost

to the Japanese invasion, however, remain largely unheard of in the US.

The disparity struck these high school students, sparking the creation of the museum's "youth division" earlier this year.

The students' outreach efforts include "free open days" offering guided tours, and hands-on activities like drawing Flying Tiger planes and crafting peace badges.

"We are working to invite more teachers and students to visit the museum for the next free open days," Cheng said on Saturday.

Tina Sheng, an international education consultant who organized the Bay Area Chinese Teacher Group, was among the first teachers invited by the students.

"It's crucial for our students to see this history firsthand. The Nanjing Massacre, the Flying Tigers, the shared struggle against fascism — these are pieces missing from the history books in the US," Sheng told China Daily.

A former social studies teacher, Sheng said it is sad that there is only a small section in the textbook — just a few lines — explaining the entire Pacific theater of the war. "For example, Flying Tigers is very well known in China, but I'm surprised that not many Americans know about it," she added.

She was also frustrated that outside of classrooms, this part of history wasn't exhibited in any American museums.

"We do not know that China and America used to work together and fought along each other against their

enemies," Sheng said. "Nowadays, with all the tensions, I hope knowing this part of history is going to help with that, after our students know that the two countries used to fight side by side for many significant battles."

The museum's mission extends beyond mere remembrance. It seeks to bridge the understanding between American and Chinese narratives of the war.

Exhibits showcase the Flying Tigers, the American pilots who soared over the treacherous "Hump" of the Himalayas to deliver vital supplies to their Chinese comrades. The battered parachute of a pilot, signed by his Chinese rescuers, speaks volumes of a forged brotherhood in the face of unimaginable adversity.

"In a world where tensions often overshadow shared histories, young voices have the power to rewrite the narrative and remind people that amidst the darkness of war, human connection illuminated the path to a hard-won peace," said Betty Yuan, a council member of the WWII Pacific War Memorial Hall and mentor of the student docents.

Annabelle Ning, a docent and a student from the French American International School in San Francisco, echoed that sentiment.

"In my school, there are few students of Chinese background, and most of them know nothing about this history," she said. "I think they will be surprised when they come and see these exhibits in person. It makes us realize how much is lost when we forget this shared past."

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US museums close Native American exhibits

By MINLU ZHANG in New York
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Leading museums in the United States are covering up or closing displays featuring Native American cultural objects amid new federal rules.

The new regulations require museums to "obtain free, prior and informed consent" from tribal leaders before displaying ancestral heritage items.

The American Museum of Natural History in New York City, the largest natural history museum in the world, announced on Jan 26 that it would close two halls spanning 10,000 square feet with Native American exhibits, as the exhibits

are "severely outdated."

"The halls we are closing are artifacts of an era when museums such as ours did not respect the values, perspectives and indeed shared humanity of Indigenous peoples," museum President Sean Decatur said in a letter to the staff, The New York Times reported.

"The number of cultural objects on display in these halls is significant, and because these exhibits are also severely outdated, we have decided that rather than just covering or removing specific items, we will close the halls," Decatur said.

The move comes because of the implementation in early January of updated regulations under the Native

American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA).

Over the next five years, museums, universities, art institutions and similar venues are required to undertake essential updates to prepare all human remains and related funerary objects for repatriation, empowering tribes with increased authority throughout the process.

"The ultimate goal of the law is not to cover up exhibitions. It's not to prevent appropriate education about diverse native cultures. It's about repairing and repatriating items that have been stolen over the last couple of centuries and returning them to the rightful people," Shannon O'Loughlin, the CEO of

the Association on American Indian Affairs, told China Daily.

Chicago's Field Museum earlier this month also closed several displays featuring Native American cultural items.

The Field Museum has one of the biggest collections of Native remains in the country and opened a new permanent exhibition in spring 2022 that displaced the museum's long-standing Native American exhibition since the 1950s.

"What was told in the old hall was facts of a kind," Alaka Wali, the museum's curator emeritus of North American anthropology, told radio station WBEZ in 2022. "[It did not reflect] how Native peoples themselves

understand their own story."

"Pending consultation with the represented communities, we have covered all cases that we believe contain cultural items that could be subject to these regulations," the Field Museum said in a statement in January announcing its decision.

Harvard University, which has more than 5,000 Native American human remains, has said it would remove all Native American funerary items from its exhibits.

"Exhibitions have always been discussed during tribal consultations and cultural items have been removed from display at tribal request. With the new NAGPRA regulations the museum is in the process of removing all funerary belongings and likely funerary belongings off display in anticipation of consultation," Harvard University's Peabody Museum of

Archaeology and Ethnology, said in a statement to China Daily.

The Cleveland Museum of Art also has taken similar steps to cover up its Native American exhibits.

The new regulations made by the Interior Department in December are an update to the NAGPRA, which was signed into law in the 1990s.

"Most Western museums use our tribal, religious and sacred and cultural patrimony and even burial items. They simply put them on the wall behind glass with a label that does nothing to educate the public about who contemporary Native peoples are and what our diverse cultures are about," O'Loughlin said.

"I think requiring free prior and informed consent is the base level of what anyone can do if they want to work on Native issues," O'Loughlin said.

BUSINESS

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Antimonopoly law produces good results

SAMR: No new cases of concentration of operators by platform enterprises

By CHENG YU and ZHENG YIRAN

China has found no new cases of concentration of business operators by platform companies since the implementation of the new Antimonopoly Law in August last year, said an official with the country's top antitrust authority on Wednesday.

Concentration of operators is a practice where one business operator obtains control over another, which may lead to a monopoly or quasi-monopoly. Antitrust authorities in many countries require operators to declare mergers and acquisitions in advance to prevent such potential monopolies.

Industry experts said that the effectiveness of the new law is proof of the country's improved normalized antimonopoly efforts, under which the platform economy has developed in a healthier and more standardized way.

Xu Lefu, an antitrust official of the State Administration for Market Regulation, the country's top market regulator, said at a State Council news conference on Wednesday that Chinese platform companies, especially large ones, have significantly increased their compliance awareness and generally established internal antitrust compliance systems and corresponding human resources.

"The SAMR is stepping up (the work of) formulating standards of administrative penalties for illegal implementation of the concentration of business operators, as well as working rules for operations that do not meet current declaration standards but have potential anti-competition behavior," he said.

To offer platform companies a clearer and more stable supervision expectation, China has strived to shorten the review time of the concentration of business operators to 25.7 days on average, which gives it a lead in major antitrust jurisdictions worldwide, he said.

The latest data showed that as of the end of 2023, antitrust authorities have concluded 5,787 cases of concentration of business operators.

Xu said: "Competition policy is development policy in China. The purpose of antitrust regulation is to maintain the healthy and sustainable development of the indus-

try, and provide consumers with more high-quality and cost-effective products and services.

"More efforts will be made to drive development while maintaining normalized antitrust supervision, and uphold an inclusive and prudent regulatory attitude, and serve the healthy and standardized development of the platform economy."

The term "platform economy" refers to tech-driven online marketplaces and other similar operations or businesses.

Ma Chaojiang, head of informatization industry development at the State Information Center, said: "The country has been promoting the sustainable, healthy and rapid development of the platform economy. Special and targeted rectification work of the platform economy has been completed in recent years, and has now entered a new stage of healthy development of normalized supervision."

Last week, China revised rules on declaration standards for the concentration of business operators. The global combined turnover benchmark for all operators participating in the concentration process the previous fiscal year has been raised from more than 10 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion) to more than 12 billion yuan. The benchmark for all operators participating in the concentration process in China the previous fiscal year has been raised from more than 2 billion yuan currently to more than 4 billion yuan.

Xu said the move will greatly reduce M&A transaction costs for companies. The number of applications for small and medium-sized M&As will be reduced by more than 200 on average each year, accounting for more than 30 percent of all M&A applications, he said.

Li Chao, chief analyst at Zhesang Securities, said that for years, it has been a global trend for antimonopoly authorities to strive to strike a balance between supervision and development.

"Global practices showed that such efforts relating to the platform economy didn't crack down on any specific giant, but stimulated innovation and entrepreneurship, and furthermore drove market vitality over the long term," Li said.

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Livestreamers promote African goods during a trade expo in Changsha, Hunan province, in June. CHEN ZEGUO / XINHUA

Pioneering zone to be launched in Hunan to propel Sino-African trade

By ZHONG NAN zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

China's green light to build a pioneering zone for in-depth China-Africa economic and trade cooperation in the central Chinese province of Hunan will pave the way for exploring innovative avenues of bilateral collaboration in the next stage, said government officials on Wednesday.

Their comments followed the announcement by the State Council, the country's Cabinet, which approved a general plan to create such a zone in Hunan as outlined in a circular issued on Jan 12.

While implementing the plan, practical measures under the framework of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation will play a leading role in enhancing alignment between the two sides' respective development strategies, vigorously innovating the economic and trade cooperation mechanism and improving Sino-African modern industrial and supply chains, said Jiang Wei, director of the department of Western Asian and African Affairs at the Ministry of Commerce.

Jiang said that enhanced coordination is essential across trade, industries, finance and cultural exchanges to foster greater synergy in the coming years.

Guo Ning, deputy director of Hunan's provincial department of commerce, said that it is imperative to exert additional efforts aimed at propelling high-quality Belt and Road cooperation while

"We will seize the opportunities brought by Africa's accelerated industrialization and urbanization, as well as the development of the African Continental Free Trade Area ..."

Guo Ning, deputy director of Hunan's provincial department of commerce

constructing a high-level China-Africa partnership.

"We will seize the opportunities brought by Africa's accelerated industrialization and urbanization, as well as the development of the African Continental Free Trade Area, fostering close collaboration in Sino-African production and supply chains, and creating a broader market space," Guo said.

As the host venue for the China-Africa Economic and Trade Expo, Hunan's trade volume with Africa reached 55.67 billion yuan (\$7.76 billion) in 2023, ranking first in China's central and western regions, said Hunan's provincial government.

By harnessing their unique strengths and resources, China

and Africa can facilitate deeper integration across critical sectors, including manufacturing, agriculture, infrastructure and technology, said He Wenping, a researcher with the Institute of West Asian and African Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

Over 3,000 Chinese companies, such as China Railway Construction Corp Ltd, Huawei Technologies Co Ltd and Great Wall Motor Co Ltd, have invested in Africa and employ a large number of local people, said the Ministry of Commerce.

East China's Jiangsu province, another key export hub, saw a record high in its foreign trade with Africa in 2023, with two-way trade value growing 8.9 percent year-on-year to 157.32 billion yuan, said Nanjing Customs.

"Benefiting from tangible growth of the Belt and Road Initiative — and Chinese companies' efforts to enter more emerging markets — our automated teller machines, or ATMs, have gained a strong reputation among African customers, especially in countries like South Africa, Ghana, Benin, Mozambique and Kenya, with export volumes consistently increasing in recent years," said Zhuang Xuefen, a logistics manager at Inspur Financial Information Technology Co Ltd.

The Suzhou, Jiangsu province-based electronics equipment manufacturer witnessed an astonishing 180 percent year-on-year surge in export value to Africa in 2023, reaching 38.78 million yuan.

Jilin eyes stable foreign trade growth in 2024

By ZHONG NAN in Beijing and LIU MINGTAI in Changchun

Jilin province in Northeast China is expected to see stable growth in foreign trade this year, driven by deepening business ties between China and Russia, surging trade volume facilitated by cross-border e-commerce, and the nation's thriving automobile industry, said government officials and trade analysts on Wednesday.

The optimism has been fueled by Jilin's remarkable performance in foreign trade last year, with the province achieving a record 167.91 billion yuan (\$23.38 billion) in total exports and imports.

This marked a year-on-year growth of 7.7 percent, ranking it ninth in China in terms of growth rates, data from Changchun Customs showed.

Jilin's vehicle exports achieved a notable milestone in 2023 with a year-on-year surge of 158.3 percent.

Jilin's foreign trade with Russia will accelerate this year, pushed by fast-growing cross-border e-commerce business between China and Russia, Russia's soaring demand for Chinese industrial goods such as vehicles, manufacturing equipment, garments and textile products, as well as the two countries' complementary trade structure, said Ding Yibing, dean of the School of Economics at Jilin University in Changchun, the provincial capital.

Jilin had a trade volume of 29.73 billion yuan with Russia in 2023, a year-on-year growth of 71.5 percent and accounting for 17.7 percent of its total foreign trade, according to Changchun Customs.

Meanwhile, Jilin's exports of automobiles to Russia reached 57,000 units, a significant increase of 655.8 percent year-on-year. Its total sales value was 13.08 billion yuan, marking a growth of 475.4 percent on a yearly basis.

Eager to further enrich its trade ties with Russia, Hunchun, a border city in Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture in Jilin, has opened multiple cross-border transportation routes through seaports such as Vladivostok and Slavyanka in Russia, and launched new foreign trade formats such as used car exports and market procurement trade with Russia since last year.

In 2023, the cross-border e-commerce import and export trade value in Hunchun reached 5.1 billion yuan, a 44 percent growth year-on-year, securing its position as the top land border port in the country for trade with Russia.

Lyu Jiwei, deputy director of Jilin's provincial department of commerce, said the government will take new measures to expand vehicle exports and related components this year.

"Jilin will focus on promoting industrial agglomeration and accelerating the construction of a modern industrial system through the strategic layout of the auto industrial chain," he said.

By embracing a green development concept, the province aims to activate and expand new growth drivers, further advancing the high-quality development of its traditional industrial bases, he added.

Jilin boasts a well-developed processing and manufacturing sector, thanks to its favorable environment for revitalizing its old industrial base.

Li Dongchun, head of Xinglong Customs, a branch of Jilin Customs, said local Customs authorities will guide auto parts manufacturers and logistics companies in making the best use of the preferential policies in Customs special supervision areas and help exporters save on operational costs.

After seeing its sales grow by 8.8 percent year-on-year to 3.37 million vehicles in both the domestic and global markets last year, China FAW Group Corp Ltd, a Changchun-headquartered automaker, plans to export 158,000 vehicles in 2024, according to the group's website.

China FAW Group's high-end EV brand Hongqi has successfully entered countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Norway in recent years.

Contact the writers at zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

Briefly

Xinjiang tourism surges in 2023

In 2023, Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region received 265 million tourists, up 117 percent, with overall tourism revenue reaching 296.72 billion yuan (\$41.77 billion), up 227 percent. Passenger throughput of the region's airports exceeded 40 million for the first time last year, up 144 percent. The figures reflect the role of tourism in expanding employment, promoting consumption and enhancing people's well-being, the local government said.

Expansion of HSR lines on track

The expansion of high-speed railway lines in China is on a steady track. Construction of the Xi'an-Chongqing High-speed Railway reached a milestone when its Kangyu section completed the first cast-in-place beam for a railway bridge recently, said China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp. Work on the bridge, which is located in Chongqing's Beibei District and 1.36 kilometers long, presented challenges due to its mountainous terrain and dense vegetation.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

Xiong'an major draw among tech startups

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang zhangyu1@chinadaily.com.cn

As the Chinese Lunar New Year draws near, Zhang Junqi and his team gather for a party to celebrate their accomplishments in 2023 and look ahead to the coming year.

"Last year, we achieved a lot, including the development of three large language models and two AI products for our customers. Our goal for 2024 is to realize more breakthroughs," Zhang, 28, a graduate from the Department of Computer Science and Technology of Tsinghua University, said in a recent WeChat moments post.

One of the breakthroughs he is hoping for is his company's success in the Xiong'an New Area, Hebei province, in the new year.

Recently, he and two fellow Tsinghua graduates founded a high-tech startup in the new economic zone near Beijing, hoping to expand his business scope.

Xiong'an New Area AtomEcho Intelligent Technology Co just settled down in the area's Zhongguancun Science Park. It focuses on providing data intelligence governance services to clients through

artificial intelligence and big data.

"In other words, we will develop specialized trained models and other AI products for internal use of different enterprises," he said.

Zhang, who earned his bachelor's degree in 2017 and completed his doctoral studies in 2022, founded Beijing AtomEcho Intelligent Technology Co with his partners after getting their diplomas.

The decision to establish a branch in Xiong'an was initiated after he participated in a tour of the new area in October in a promotional campaign entitled "Thousands of Enterprises to Xiong'an". During the visit, he witnessed the rapid development of Xiong'an and its favorable entrepreneurial and innovative environment.

"I believe that technology-based enterprises like ours have great development prospects in the innovation hub. What's more, the supporting facilities, such as the apartments built for arriving talent, are very thoughtful and attractive to young people," Zhang said.

He said the furniture, appliances and daily necessities are fully equipped, making it convenient for employees to call the area home.



An aerial view of Zhongguancun Science Park in the Xiong'an New Area, Hebei province. ZHAI YUJIA / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

For Zhang, support services in the area's Zhongguancun Science Park are also attractive.

"We can enjoy policy benefits for the first three years, saving tens of thousands of yuan annually in rent alone," Zhang said. Their office space is approximately 400 square meters.

"The park also provides diverse services to help us recruit employees and expand our business, which is very attractive," he added.

Zhongguancun Science Park in Xiong'an was unveiled in August. Its first phase, located in the Huawangcheng complex of Rongdong area in Xiong'an, covers a total area of 21,000 sq m.

It was jointly set up by the area's reform and development bureau, China Xiong'an Group and Beijing-based Zhongguancun Development Group, aiming to become an innovation mecca for enterprises in Xiong'an.

Currently, businesspersons like angel investors and intellectual property consulting representatives, and providers of equity financing and tech services have settled in the park, according to Zhongguancun Science Park.

In addition, the area's public services bureau, banks and a service institution for industrial enterprises have also set up a presence there. With more services accumulating, 35 enterprises — most of which are tech firms from Beijing — have settled down in the park after four months.

And the first phase of the park has already achieved a 90 percent occupancy rate, with 18 companies completing their office decor and moving in.

It is expected that the settlement rate of the second phase of the park in the first half of 2024 will also perform well.

BUSINESS

Deutsche eyes Chinese biz in Middle East

Firms focused on digital tech, logistics, real estate, tourism sectors in region

By LIU ZIZHENG and LIU ZHIHUA

Deutsche Bank is poised to further tap business opportunities arising from growing two-way investment flows between China and the Middle East, two of its top executives said.

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have seen fast economic growth in recent years. As a result, an increasing number of Chinese companies are investing in the Middle East, with a focus on digital technology, logistics, real estate and tourism, said Kees Hoving, the bank's CEO for the Middle East and Africa.

Meanwhile, investors from the Middle East are positive about the growth potential of the Chinese economy over the medium to long term. Several sovereign wealth funds from the region, including Public Investment Fund and Mubadala Investment Company, are diversifying away from Western countries to China. Mubadala, one of UAE's largest state-owned investment funds, opened an office in Beijing last year, said Hoving.

According to data released by the Ministry of Commerce, China's outbound direct investment in Arab countries in 2022 was \$2.62 billion,

up 13.3 percent year-on-year, and ODI from Arab countries into China amounted to \$1.05 billion that year, with a year-on-year increase of nearly nine times.

In the first half, Deutsche Bank believes investors from the Middle East will continue to focus on China's electric vehicle, lithium battery, renewable energy and high-end manufacturing sectors, while in the second half, investment interest is expected to increase in consumer-related sectors.

"For instance, both Saudi Arabia and UAE attach great importance to food security. We've seen them actively invest in India's food industry in the past, with an aim to ensure the stable supply of healthy and safe food to the Middle East," said Hoving.

"Consumer electronics may also be an industry that draws Middle Eastern investors' attention in the second half of the year," he added.

Deutsche Bank believes more Chinese companies will expand their business into Middle Eastern markets this year, involving not



Kees Hoving



A Deutsche Bank branch in Wurzburg, Germany, in November. ZHANG XIAOJIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

only traditional industries like construction and engineering, but also emerging industries such as digital economy and new energy.

"China's investment in the Middle East has gone through various stages," said Yin Zhen, vice-president of Deutsche Bank China.

According to Yin, Chinese companies started investing in the Middle East with a focus on energy, mining and commodities, and later turned to the construction contractor market. Currently, the Middle East is China's second-largest market for overseas construction contracting.

Since the beginning of last year, with high-level visits between China and the Middle East gradually picking up, two-way investment has increased significantly as well.

Chinese investors now engage in a wider range of industries including financial technology

and tourism, and they need more local financial services to support the growing business, said Yin.

Against such a backdrop, Deutsche Bank offers almost every product that it has globally to the Middle East, including not only cash management, trade finance, export credits, securities and foreign exchange hedging, but also services for mergers and acquisitions, equity capital markets, debt capital markets and equity financing.

"Deutsche Bank is committed to providing Chinese companies with all the products (services) they need when entering Middle Eastern markets," said Hoving.

According to him, one of the bank's main roles is to help clients with risk management. It offers risk-hedging services to Chinese companies and supports them in doing business in the Middle East, including helping them get famil-

iar with the local regulatory environment.

Deutsche Bank also focuses on promoting sustainable finance and ESG (environmental, social and governance) investment in the Middle East. It has provided services for several renewable energy and green transition projects, Hoving added.

China and the Middle East have worked together to promote two-way investments. They complement each other in terms of resources and industries, and such investment can help them better diversify risks, said Yin.

Yin also said that, currently, many companies face currency mismatches and need foreign exchange risk management. Deutsche Bank has been actively seeking innovation in this area.

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Domestic gold sales glow bright in 2023

By LIU YUKUN
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China continues to lead global demand for gold jewelry and has secured the top spot in worldwide central bank gold purchases last year, making it an important force driving global consumption of the precious metal, said a report by the World Gold Council on Wednesday.

The global jewelry market proved to be resilient amid record-high prices last year as demand rose by 3 metric tons year-on-year to stand at 2,093 tons. China supported the robust global total, achieving a 10 percent increase in demand, which totaled 630 tons for gold jewelry in 2023, offsetting a 6 percent decrease in India, which ranked second worldwide, said the WGC.

The council attributed the growth in demand for gold jewelry in China to an overall economic recovery in the country.

As for gold bars and coins, China's 28 percent growth in demand, which was 280 tons in all for 2023 — combined with notable totals in India (185 tons), Türkiye (160 tons) and the US (113 tons) — offset plummeting demand from Europe, the council said.

Global central bank buying maintained a fast pace. Annual net purchases stood at 1,037 tons, almost matching the 2022 record, falling just 45 tons short, the WGC said, with central banks from China, Poland and Singapore leading the pack.

Such strong gold demand has supported elevated prices for the yellow metal. The benchmark LBMA (London Bullion Market Association) pm auction gold price ended 2023 at \$2,078.40 per ounce — a record-high year-end close. The average 2023 gold price was \$1,940.54 per ounce — also a record — which was 8 percent higher than 2022, the council said.

"We know that central banks often cite gold's performance in times of crisis as a reason to buy, which suggests demand from this sector will stay high this year and may help offset a slowdown in consumer demand (in other sectors) due to elevated gold prices and slowing economic growth (globally)," said Louise Street, a senior WGC analyst.

Looking to gold demand in China this year, Wang Lixin, CEO of WGC (China), said while the traditional peak sales season before Spring Festival could drive robust performance in first-quarter gold jewelry demand, persistently high gold prices may exert pressure on China's gold jewelry consumption afterward.

Wang said demand for gold bars and coins in China is expected to remain robust in 2024, although it might not reach the 2023 levels.

Yantian inspires as 10b yuan member

By QIU QUANLIN in Guangzhou
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Yantian in Dongguan, a manufacturing and trade mecca in Guangdong province, has become the first village in the city to surpass 10 billion yuan (\$1.4 billion) in economic output, according to a government work report.

By the end of 2023, total assets of Yantian and its lower-level units reached 10.26 billion yuan, with an average per capita dividend for local villagers exceeding 47,000 yuan, said the report, which was delivered on Wednesday by Lyu Chengxi, mayor of Dongguan, to the annual session of the local people's congress.

The village, located at the southeastern end of Dongguan and bordering Shenzhen, Guangdong, covers a total area of 24 square kilometers, with a permanent

population of about 150,000.

Industrial development, spurred by the introduction of key projects, has played an essential role in promoting Yantian's economy, said Deng Zerong, Party chief of the village.

"By leveraging the creation of a modern industry park as a catalyst, we have been promoting village-enterprise cooperation, facilitating the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries for sustained growth in the collective economy of village-level units," said Deng.

In recent years, Dongguan has actively nurtured strategic emerging industries, attracting leading enterprises to settle in the city. Major projects such as a smart-tech zone by e-commerce giant JD and a digital center have been introduced to Yantian, helping greatly accelerate the formation of new productive forces.

Yantian's performance in promoting industrial development represents the realization of a project targeting high-quality rural development of 10,000 villages from 1,000 townships in 100 counties, which was initiated by the Guangdong government in late 2022.

"By transforming collectively owned land into State-owned land, Yantian has attracted and aggregated high-quality industrial resources and innovative elements," said Deng.

The village has established an industrial platform with 3 million square meters for emerging industries, helping gather 4,572 enterprises, Deng added.

Currently, the village has developed various properties totaling 705,000 sq m, generating an annual rental income of approximately 160 million yuan. With 700 million yuan in trust and financial prod-

ucts, the village receives annual dividends of 90 million yuan, ensuring that local villagers benefit from rural industrial development.

"Yantian's output value of over 10 billion yuan further strengthened our confidence in doing business in the village. We have reached an agreement with the village committee to increase our investment and expand production," said Liu Ren, general manager of Dongguan Dailin Watch Group.

The watch company, which has been rooted in Yantian for 30 years, developed into a publicly listed enterprise primarily engaged in the manufacture and sale of high-quality timepieces.

Liu Yiqiang, a professor at the School of International Relations at Guangzhou-based Jinan University, said the core driving force behind the 10 billion-yuan villages lies in industrial development and upgrading.

"Villages aiming to join the 10 billion-yuan club should first identify their own leading industries and

key directions, breaking through to ascend toward higher industrial value chains," said Liu, who has been engaged in the study of rural vitalization across the country for years.

With nearly 600 villages and residential communities, Dongguan has gradually transformed from an agricultural base to a manufacturing and trade hub since the 1980s, when a growing number of processing industries were first introduced to the city.

The city, with collective rural assets accounting for about one-third of the total in Guangdong, currently has 45 villages with assets exceeding 100 million yuan for each.

"The robust industrial development in villages contributed significantly to Dongguan's overall economic development," said Liu.

According to local statistics authorities, Dongguan's GDP grew 2.6 percent year-on-year to 1.14 trillion yuan in 2023, with 313,000 new business entities springing up in the city.



Photo by Wang Jing

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BUSINESSFOCUS

Nation fetes 'Jinjiang Experience' for biz success

City in Fujian aims for nonpublic sector output of 1 trln yuan by 2025

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Jinjiang, a county-level city in East China's Fujian province, has been the birthplace of several top-ranked Chinese sportswear brands such as Anta, Xtep and 361 Degrees, thanks to its booming private economy, and local private enterprises have increasingly formed new industrial growth points and competitiveness.

The total output value of the private economy in Jinjiang now exceeds 800 billion yuan (\$111 billion), with more than 90,000 private enterprises and 51 listed private companies currently operating. By 2025, it aims to achieve an output value of 1 trillion yuan from its private economy, the local government said.

In the first three quarters of 2023, Jinjiang achieved a GDP of 236.38 billion yuan, up 6.2 percent year-on-year, with a growth rate higher than the province and the country's average.

"We have been focusing on developing the real economy, and encouraging and guiding private entrepreneurs to do small things well. These include manufacturing of a pair of shoes, a piece of clothing, a sheet of paper or a morsel of candy," said Zhang Wenxian, Party secretary of Jinjiang.

Back in 1978, the GDP of Jinjiang was 145 million yuan, and the per capita regional GDP was 154 yuan, lower than the national average, making it a typical impoverished county that heavily relied on agriculture, according to the local government.

With its spirit of daring and entrepreneurship, Jinjiang has transformed from a small county to a bright spot in China with a developed private economy, despite a large population and limited land resources, thus creating the "Jinjiang Experience".

The government said the "Jinjiang Experience" has been continuously improved and developed in practice and has played a vital role in developing China's private economy.

Over the years, under the guidance of the "Jinjiang Experience", it has grown its economy rapidly, mainly supported by the growth of the real economy.

The local government has helped with the integration of innovative resources in terms of branding and marketing advantages, attracted more talent and introduced a number of colleges and scientific institutions to conduct research in the city over the past few years.

"Jinjiang has undertaken 48 national-level pilot projects of reform, and built comprehensive industrial parks with space of more than 20 million square meters to support the development of private enterprises," Zhang said.



A worker operates on a footwear production line of Chinese sportswear brand Anta in Jinjiang, Fujian province, in February 2021. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“We have been focusing on developing the real economy, and encourage and guide private entrepreneurs to do small things well.”

Zhang Wenxian,
Party secretary of Jinjiang

Nationwide, China will roll out more pragmatic measures to support the growth of the private economy, such as accelerating legislation facilitating the promotion of private economy.

The government will improve multilevel communications and exchanges, and listen to the real voices of private enterprises, officials said at a conference held in Jinjiang in January.

The private sector has formed a growing proportion of the nation's GDP, and now accounts for more than 60 percent of the total, said the National Bureau of Statistics.

Fujian, one of the earliest birthplaces of the private economy in China, saw the nonpublic sector generate about 70 percent of the province's tax revenue and GDP.



Visitors check out rainboots during a footwear expo in Jinjiang in April. ZHANG BIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

More than 90 percent of enterprises in the province are private, and they have created over 80 percent of jobs for the urban labor force, said the local government.

In 2023, the total import and export value of private enterprises in Fujian exceeded 1 trillion yuan,

and more private companies have seized business growth opportunities emerging from the Belt and Road Initiative, the local government said.

The spirit and culture of the "Jinjiang Experience" have been blended into the ethos of the peo-

ple in Jinjiang and are deeply rooted in the DNA of local enterprises.

Jinjiang-based retail giant Anta Sports Products Ltd, whose sales revenue has ranked tops among Chinese sportswear product makers for 11 straight years, said it will con-

tinue to help drive high-quality development through technological innovation and promote the upgrading of the real economy.

Anta has invested over 10 billion yuan to promote innovation in China's sports industry, achieving a comprehensive breakthrough in independent research and development. It provided uniforms and footwear for China's national teams for the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, and changed the situation where foreign sports brands dominated.

"Traditional industries are not low-end industries, and industrial upgrading should be achieved through technological innovation. Major enterprises in various industries should play a leading role and take the initiative in the new round of technological revolution," said Ding Shizhong, founder and chairman of the board of directors of Anta.

Anta has increasingly utilized new materials and technologies and developed more innovative products. It has built smart factories and lowered production costs with digitalized technologies.

Currently, Anta directly operates more than 10,000 stores globally, and overseas sales account for 35 percent of the total sales of the company, it said.

"Anta has been the firsthand practitioner of 'Jinjiang Experience'. We have been promoting the transformation and upgrading of the real economy and changing the dominant position of foreign brands in China," Ding said.

"China's large consumption market supported by a population of 1.4 billion remains its biggest advantage. We hope the government introduces more favorable policies to help stimulate consumption growth," he added.

Meanwhile, driven by the rapid growth of e-commerce in China and digital technologies, a number of private enterprises in Jinjiang, including Chinese menswear brand Septwolves, have continued to refine the spirit of Jinjiang and promote the company's transformation through digitalization.

Septwolves said it has actively built a digital platform, and integrated research and development, design, supply chain, retail, logistics and services alongside a cutting-edge management platform.

Fueled by the booming growth of e-commerce transactions in China, the production and processing of a variety of goods have further shifted to smaller urban centers.

"E-commerce platforms play a positive role in helping enhance the resource allocation capacity of industrial chains, driving product circulation and profit growth, and providing new impetus for consumption growth," said Luo Zhen-dong, a professor at Nanjing University.

"With the development of information networks, transaction costs have continued to decline, leading to the division of labor and cooperation among various links in industrial chains on a larger regional scale," Luo said.

East China city, Zhejiang port hub both turn into private economy exemplars

By ZHU WENQIAN

Jinjiang of Fujian province has been taking the lead in economic growth among county-level cities in China with its thriving private economy, and some other urban areas plan to draw on the experiences of Jinjiang to further expand their respective nonpublic economies.

Over the years, under the guidance of the "Jinjiang Experience" — an important exemplar of private sector development — the city has blazed a path of county-level regional development supported by the real economy.

Wenzhou in East China's Zhejiang province was one of the birthplaces of the private economy in China. Over the past three years, the annual scale of private investment in the harbor city has exceeded 200 billion yuan (\$27.8 billion), accounting for nearly 60 percent of total social investment, according to the local government.

The city will continuously optimize its business environment and comprehensively expand invest-

ment channels for private enterprises, it said.

"We have created a globally competitive advanced manufacturing base in Wenzhou, built the city as the capital of China's fashion industry, and developed it as a new mecca for strategic emerging industries," said Li Wuwen, vice-mayor of Wenzhou.

"We will help protect the legitimate rights and interests of private enterprises, and strive to create a national demonstration zone for the innovative development of the private economy," Li said.

Over the past two years, total investment in new energy projects signed and implemented in Wenzhou has exceeded 460 billion yuan, creating a complete industrial chain of nuclear, solar, water and hydrogen power in the city, according to the local government.

In addition, Shenzhen of Guangdong province — one of the cities with the most vibrant private economy and concentrated nonpublic enterprises in China — said it has long taken innovation

as a driving force for growth.

Over the past four decades since reform and opening-up, Shenzhen has transformed itself from a small fishing village into a modern metropolis, and it is still pioneering China's development as a reform and opening-up model.

The local government of Shenzhen said the "Jinjiang Experience" has been a brilliant microcosm of the development of China's private economy, and Shenzhen has achieved resonance with the experience.

Meanwhile, Southwest China's Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province, said the "Jinjiang Experience" has strong practical guidance for the city to promote its high-quality development of the private economy.

As of the third quarter of 2023, the added value of the private economy in Chengdu accounted for 50.1 percent of the local GDP, and contributed 62.5 percent of total fiscal revenue, according to the local government.

"To develop a high-quality private

economy, it is necessary to respect the innovative spirit of private enterprises, and enhance the innovative vitality and motivation of entrepreneurs," said Liu Xiaoliu, executive vice-mayor of Chengdu.

The local government has encouraged private enterprises to actively get involved in business opportunities emerging from the Belt and Road Initiative. So far, Chengdu has more than 3,600 enterprises engaged in the import and export business related to BRI markets.

In addition, local private enterprises have been encouraged to participate in major national projects, such as the building of the Chengdu-Chongqing Economic Circle. The local government regularly promotes major engineering projects and key industrial projects to private enterprises, it added.

Thanks to a range of policies aimed at boosting domestic demand, fostering confidence and supporting the private economy, Chinese business entities have experienced a more robust growth momentum.



BYD vehicles are displayed at a company showroom in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in January. SHEN QILAI / BLOOMBERG

The National Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic regulator, established the Bureau of Private Economic Development in September 2023. It said the country's private economy has shown long-term growth pros-

pects with unlimited opportunities. China will strengthen analysis of the private economy's development and improve work mechanisms with a view to better serve the private economy's development, the NDRC said.

COMMENT

Editorials

Washington's disinformation fueled crackdown on Chinese companies continues unabated

The United States' Department of Homeland Security recently executed a search warrant at the Ohio-based US subsidiary of Qingdao Sunsong, a Chinese automobile parts manufacturer that a congressional committee has accused of trade fraud.

DHS agents searched the premises of Harco Manufacturing Group, which Sunsong acquired in 2015, on Jan 18, in what they said is an "ongoing investigation". The move came after two members of the House Select Committee on China wrote a letter in September to the DHS accusing the Chinese company of moving some of its production to Thailand in order to evade US tariffs. In the letter, Mike Gallagher and Darin LaHood called Sunsong's activities a "case of blatant trade fraud that is having a catastrophic impact on American manufacturers". It shows that the US continues to resort to disinformation to justify its crackdown on Chinese companies.

The two China hawks are by no means demonstrating the crime-busting abilities of fictional detective Sherlock Holmes. Rather, the two Republicans brought the charges against the Chinese company simply after reviewing its public disclosures. It must be quite extraordinary in the history of business crimes for a company to publicly state that it has used transshipment as a means of evading import tariffs of 25 percent, as they accuse Sunsong of doing.

As such an act seriously violates US law and

"undermines American economic and national security", as the two lawmakers said, it is hard to imagine why, if the allegation was founded on facts, more than three months have passed before the DHS has finally taken any action.

Sunsong has been targeted simply because it holds a leading position in the global auto aftermarket. The shaky ground on which the case has been built points to the difficult business environment Chinese enterprises are facing in the US as a result of some in the US seeking to politicize and weaponize trade issues between the two countries, which has disrupted normal bilateral economic and trade relations. Ford Motor, for example, recently announced that it had paused its partnership with battery company CATL, after the chairs of three House committees demanded it turn over documents related to its relationship with the Chinese company.

The spreading of disinformation and using it to suppress Chinese companies have become a common practice in the US, which has not only affected the normal operations of the Chinese enterprises, but also undermined the confidence of Chinese businesses in investing in the US.

Washington should stop harassing Chinese companies and provide them with a safe, transparent and fair business environment in compliance with international practice and in accordance with the commitments it has made to China.

Stoltenberg still hawking his outdated wares

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg is taking full advantage of his visit to Washington this week to assist efforts to push lawmakers in the United States and the European Union to approve respectively a \$6 billion additional assistance package and a €50 billion (\$54.5 billion) four-year budget to support Ukraine in its conflict with Russia.

The warm response the NATO chief has received from the Joe Biden administration on the issue was expected, because not only has the Ukraine crisis been orchestrated and continuously exploited by the Biden administration, but also Stoltenberg's extension of his fourth term as NATO chief from July last year to October this year was at Washington's insistence.

That he will become the second-longest serving head of the military alliance by then speaks volumes of how much Washington needs a puppet such as him at the head of the organization to help ensure it is always ready to do the US' bidding. With Europe having started to show the desire to stand on its own feet, the US has sought to tighten its grip on the security alliance.

As predicted, instead of providing US lawmakers with any insightful, latest observations from the European front or on how to end the conflict that has proved costly for the whole world, Stoltenberg only acted as a clumsy mouthpiece of the Biden administration.

Speaking at a news conference in Washington on Tuesday, Stoltenberg warned: "It will be a tragedy for Ukrainians if President Putin wins but it will also make the world more dangerous and all of us more insecure ... It will embolden other authoritar-

ian leaders — not only President Putin, but also North Korea, Iran and China to use force."

With many US lawmakers focused on opposing China, Stoltenberg went further in alleging: "Today it's Ukraine; tomorrow it could be Taiwan."

Although the world knows it clearly that the Taiwan question is fundamentally different from the Ukraine crisis, Stoltenberg has never ceased trying to link the two on the international stage. But even the Biden administration is learning to speak with prudence when it comes to China-related issues, not least the Taiwan question, after reaching mutual understanding with Beijing in November on the need to repair bilateral ties and responsibly manage risks.

Notably, Stoltenberg chose to avoid his usual preaching on human rights conditions in Ukraine this time. That largely stems from his awareness that US lawmakers are divided on the Biden administration's moves in the Middle East that have not only enabled the grave humanitarian crisis to unfold in Gaza but also cost US lives lately.

Not surprisingly, Republican lawmakers who are pushing the Biden administration for tougher immigration and border control policies in exchange for approving more money for Ukraine did not lend an ear to his words.

During Stoltenberg's decade-long tenure as its chief, NATO has expanded three times. Although he claimed each time that the expansion would boost Europe's security and make the world a safer place, the opposite has been true. It is to be hoped his successor bears that in mind.

To the Point

CIA chief shows US is truculently set in its ways

Foreign Affairs published an article by Central Intelligence Agency Director William Burns on Tuesday titled "Spycraft and Statecraft", in which the head of the US spy agency writes that today's challenges, and geopolitical and technological shifts have brought unprecedented tests for the CIA and the US intelligence community as a whole.

To meet these challenges, the CIA is adjusting the way it uses intelligence, he says. One of its initiatives is "strategic declassification", the intentional public disclosure of "certain secrets" to undercut rivals and rally allies, which has become a powerful tool in the hands of policymakers. This of course is more spook-speak, as it is presenting disinformation campaigns as hard-won intelligence.

A recent example of the "strategic declassification" approach being used against China was Burns and other top officials of the Joe Biden administration claiming that intelligence reports suggested that China was considering supplying weapons to Russia in its conflict with Ukraine, despite China repeatedly having made clear that was not the case, and the US providing no evidence of any description to the contrary.

The intent was clear: to inextricably link China and Russia in the public's mind, as Russia has long been viewed as public enemy number one in the West and China is to be tarred with the

same brush by association.

Burns' article, which carries on from the boastful admission of one of his predecessors that the agency lies, cheats and steals, is part of this strategic declassification approach.

In his article, Burns claims that China and Russia present serious geopolitical challenges to the United States, which no longer enjoys "uncontested primacy". As a result, he writes, the CIA is having to devote more resources to gathering, executing, and analyzing China-related intelligence around the world, and the percentage of the overall US budget devoted to China has more than doubled in the past two years alone.

The defining test for intelligence has always been to anticipate and help policymakers navigate profound shifts in the international landscape — "the plastic moments that come along only a few times each century", Burns writes.

But instead of helping the country's policymakers navigate the changes, the CIA, holding a hammer called "intelligence" in hand, is hitting the same old nails on the head.

Rather than seeking to help US policymakers chart a less adversarial course, the CIA is reinforcing the anxieties that have convulsed policymakers in Washington, in large part because of the US' own hubris and attendant follies.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

Ma Xuejing



Opinion Line

Virtuous circle can be formed via supply and demand synergies

Without demand, supply cannot be sustained, and without supply, demand cannot be met. As an organic entirety, any problem with either aspect of supply and demand will bring problems to the smooth circulation of an economy, not to mention its high-quality development. China must continue to make coordinated efforts to expand domestic demand and optimize supply.

At present, a new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial transformation led by artificial intelligence, quantum technology and bioscience is developing rapidly, nurturing and spawning new industries, new for-

ms of business, new models and new demands. In this context, China should continue to deepen supply-side structural reform, promote industrial innovation through scientific and technological innovation, increase the impetus for innovation, and build a resilient, advanced and reliable modern industrial system to boost productive forces. It should accelerate efforts to promote self-reliance in high-level science and technology, create a national system for achieving breakthroughs in key and core technologies, facilitate the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries.

It should be noted that at present, China's economy still faces difficulties such as insufficient effective demand, overcapacity in some industries, weak social expectations and many hidden risks, with some problems intertwined and superimposed. The country must intensify efforts to address the choke points in supply and demand, promoting not only reform of the production function on the supply side, but also promoting the continuous expansion and increment of the demand side, so as to build a strong force that props up its new economic paradigm.

— PEOPLES DAILY

Good, bad and ugly of BCIs need consideration

Brain-computer interfaces are in the news again, with Elon Musk's Neuralink company announcing it had implanted its first patient with its brain chip technology.

BCIs have generated significant interest due to their potential to create direct communication pathways between the brain and external devices. Neuralink is not the first company to implant a BCI in a patient. Cyberkinetics implanted a BCI in a paralyzed patient in 2006, and some of the researchers involved in that effort are now working at Neuralink.

Other companies are developing BCIs to improve the lives of individuals with disabilities by enabling them to control prosthetic limbs, wheelchairs, or other assistive devices directly with their thoughts. Others are working to use BCIs to restore lost sensory or motor functions in

individuals who have experienced paralysis, limb loss or the treatment of neurological conditions; and as a means of communication for individuals with conditions that limit their ability to speak or write.

Many of the BCI devices send signals into the brain through electrical stimulation. Other interfaces are placed into the brain to read the voltage put out by firing brain cells.

But Neuralink's announcement has created a stir as Musk has said in the past that his company's technology could allow humans to form "a sort of symbiosis" with artificial intelligence, which not everyone views as a positive development.

Some cautionary voices have raised concerns about the risks of people being controlled by AI through a BCI.

There are also concerns about the potential for BCIs to be misused by

humans to coerce or manipulate others, or to obtain information directly from a brain. There are also questions being asked about whether it will lead to societal divisions between those who have access to and can afford such technology and those who cannot.

Ongoing research and discussions are essential to address the ethical, social and practical considerations associated with the technology. Such concerns need clear answers if the BCI technology is to be popularized in the market. It's a great technology with promising potentials, but to win support from the public, those working for this technology need to realize these ethical risks early and do some preparatory work to ensure the risks are fully understood and addressed.

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

Long-term competitiveness of economy being shaped

The United States' economy is expected to have grown by 2.5 percent in 2023, with a nominal GDP growth of 6.3 percent, not adjusted for inflation. The US seems to have consolidated its lead in economic size to China and the European Union.

The main reasons have been the continuing depreciation of the euro, and the decline in labor force growth, the aging population, and high social welfare costs in the eurozone. But more importantly, it has been due to the excessive macro leverage ratio of the eurozone, which limits the room for further leverage. The US is relatively free to determine its debt levels and thus is able to maintain a strong dollar in a world of sluggish growth.

The total factor productivity of the eurozone began to decline in 2008, lagging 10 percent compared with that of the US now. Big US technology companies including Amazon, Alphabet, Microsoft, Apple, and Tesla have boomed in recent years. While the EU lacks emerging technology companies, and its traditional automobile, chemical, machinery and other industries have been weakening

due to the energy impact caused by the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The lack of emerging technology companies also makes it difficult to improve labor productivity in Japan and it too suffers from long-term challenges such as aging and labor shortages. Japan's GDP is almost certain to fall to the fourth place in the world last year overtaken by Germany. Japan's decline was mainly due to the depreciation of the yen's exchange rate.

Last year, the Japanese stock market boom was not supported by improving economic and corporate fundamentals, but by the Tokyo Stock Exchange forcing listed companies to use savings to buy back shares or increase dividends, and uncertainty about the Federal Reserve's interest rate policy led to large capital inflows into Japan, forming a stock market boom supported by temporary liquidity.

Meanwhile, the actual growth rate of China's GDP last year was 5.2 percent, which was much higher than that of the US. However, China's consumer price index rose only 0.2 percent year-on-year. In

addition, the renminbi depreciated significantly last year.

It should be seen that the US has mainly relied on debt to support its consumption boom. Last year, federal debt reached \$34 trillion, and corporate debt was equivalent to about 75 percent of GDP, which is even more serious than in 2008.

Although China's economy has suffered from its real estate downturn, the investment in high-tech manufacturing and emerging industries has grown rapidly, and the international competitiveness of some industrial clusters has improved. China has never ceased vigorously optimizing its economic structure and continuously improving production efficiency through technological innovation to give the economy greater future competitiveness.

Besides, Chinese policymakers need to further expand domestic demand, maintain reasonable growth in both the economy and prices through proactive fiscal and monetary policies, so as to better maintain confidence amid domestic adjustments and international competition.

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COMMENT



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Justine Coulson

All older people can benefit from 'silver economy'

The world's population is aging: by 2025, people aged 60 or above will represent 20 percent of the global population. The gains in socioeconomic development that are driving this demographic transition mean that many people are reaching old age healthier, wealthier and better educated than previous generations.

With significant aggregate purchasing power and specific needs, older people in developed and emerging economies are seen as the fastest growing consumer group in the world, offering opportunities for business growth for many major industries. The market for products and services aimed at people aged over 50 — known as the "silver economy" — is currently estimated to be worth \$15 trillion globally and is expected to rise exponentially as the number of older people continues to grow.

Importantly, the "silver economy" can contribute to a country's social development alongside the economic gains because when businesses set out to boost their profits by designing solutions to the challenges faced by older people, they can also create social value by improving the quality of life of people as they age.

China has the largest number of older people in the world with 216.8 million of its population aged 65 or above, and that number is set to increase to 400 million by 2050. As a result, China's "silver economy" is projected to triple in value, from \$750 billion in 2020 to \$2.1 trillion by 2030, and could reach a value of \$4.2 trillion, accounting for 10 percent of China's GDP by 2035.

The recently published "Opinions on Developing the Silver Economy and Improving the Well-being of Older Person" is China's first specific policy guideline for the development of China's "silver economy", and China's experience over the next decade can offer important insights for emerging economies into how best to meet the needs of an aging population while also maximizing the economic development opportunities from such a demographic shift.

As governments and companies begin to focus on the opportunities created by the "silver economy", it is important to not stereotype older people as simply a collection of

If these sectors only pitch their innovative products and services to the wealthiest older people, socioeconomic inequalities within the older population will increase.

problems that can be solved through their consumption of tailored products and services. The United Nations emphasizes the right of older people to be active participants in the development of their societies, and the responsibility of governments to ensure that an enabling, stigma-free environment is created where older people can continue to fully engage in community life.

Older people make significant social and economic contributions to society through paid work, as community volunteers, and in family care roles. At the same time, active participation in social, economic and volunteering activities and lifelong learning support the individual growth and well-being of older people.

As such, strategies to develop the "silver economy" should include policies that support the continued employment of older people who wish to keep working, and provide incentives for companies to encourage them to retain older workers, as well as ensuring that schemes to support start-ups and small businesses are extended to people above the national retirement age, recognizing that the flexibility of self-employment often appeals to older people and offers a way to supplement pension income while remaining physically and mentally active.

While discussions on the "silver economy" often focus on the role of the private sector, the public sector has an equally important role to play. As people enter old age, they carry with them the inequalities they have experienced throughout their life, and the differences in levels of education, wealth and health accrued over a lifetime result in poorer well-being for the most vulnerable older people.

Many sectors make up the "silver economy" including healthcare, transport, banking, the leisure industry and the construction industry. If these sectors only pitch their innovative products and services to the wealthiest older people, socioeconomic inequalities within the older population will increase. Providing inclusive social protection schemes and services for older people who need them and ensuring the most transformative innovations for the elderly can be mainstreamed across public sector services are critical to ensuring that all older people have an opportunity to benefit from the well-being gains of the silver economy.

In this regard, the needs of older women need special attention, and policies for the development of the "silver economy" need to purposely address gender inequalities, because globally, women enter old age with fewer financial resources than men.

More likely to be employed in the informal sector, to have missed years of paid work due to time spent providing unpaid care in the family and having had fewer opportunities for career advancement, older women face, higher levels of financial insecurity and therefore, are less likely to be able to benefit from the consumption of the products and services on offer through the "silver economy". Therefore, especially when it comes to healthcare, women have a greater need. While women live longer than men, they experience more years of poor health in their old age.

The "silver economy" offers multiple benefits — for the industries that design their products and services to meet the needs of older people, for the older people who are able to live more independent, engaged lives by availing of those products and services and for the policymakers who want to boost economic growth and social development. However, the benefits of the "silver economy" can be achieved for all older people only if policies and strategies are designed to purposely address enduring inequalities.

The author is the representative of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in China. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Sun Jiashan

Cultural exchanges will bring youths across Strait closer

Streaming platforms such as iQIYI and Tencent Video owe their rapid rise over the past decade to the confluence of factors such as urbanization, a booming cultural industry and mobile internet.

In terms of TV and film productions, genres such as historical dramas, suspense and urban romance have witnessed a significant shift both in production and distribution in the past six-seven years, with the Chinese mainland's productions overshadowing those from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and Taiwan. This marks a departure from the trend prevalent since the 1980s, where the mainland's dramas lagged behind those from Hong Kong and Taiwan. Outstanding series such as *Blossoms Shanghai*, *Story of Yanxi Palace*, *The Bad Kids* and *The Three-Body Problem* have not only dominated the domestic market but also gained overseas acclaim.

While recent years have seen highly successful Taiwan productions like *The World Between Us* and *Someday or One Day*, they can't conceal the decline of the Taiwan's popular culture industry. Well-produced mainland dramas such as *Story of Yanxi Palace* in 2018 attracted impressive viewership in Taiwan, and phrases from these series quickly spread among the island's youth. Despite claims that the mainland dramas are being used as a tool to facilitate national reunification and attempts by the island's ruling Democratic Progressive Party to stoke anti-mainland sentiments, surprising scenes unfolded with some pro-independence Taiwan influencers comparing themselves to characters from these dramas.

The influence of popular mainland cultural products on Taiwan is undeniable. The influence extends beyond TV dramas to variety shows, livestreaming, short videos and more. In the realm of livestreaming and short videos, platforms such as TikTok and Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book) have facilitated the exchange of common storylines, and promoted catchy tunes among the youth on both sides of the Taiwan Strait, thus narrowing the psychological gap between them.

Apart from the globally recognized TikTok, social media apps targeting niche viewers on the mainland, exemplified by Xiaohongshu, have influenced media to such an extent that mainstream outlets cannot match. For instance, since 2021, Xiaohongshu's popularity among Taiwan teenagers has dramatically increased, prompting media outlets to refer to Taiwan high school students who download and use Xiaohongshu on their phones as the "Xiaohongshu generation".

Both Xiaohongshu and Sina Weibo rank among the top 10 social apps favored by Taiwan junior and senior high school students as well as university students.

Their familiarity with simplified Chinese characters and the lifestyle of mainland youths has allowed the new generation of Taiwan youths to cast aside

the "sunflower generation" shadow to become part of the "Xiaohongshu generation".

In contrast to the rapidly evolving cultural market on the mainland, Taiwan's popular culture industry has lost its vitality. This shift has prompted more Taiwan youth in the entertainment industry to look westward at the mainland. Notably, actors such as Alyssa Chia, who acted in *The World Between Us* are products of the cultivation of the mainland market. And local Taiwan influencers are increasingly choosing to establish their presence on the mainland's streaming platforms to earn more fame and money.

Besides, the pop culture industry in Taiwan is not only shrinking but is also under tremendous pressure from global giants such as HBO and Netflix. This fact has increased the anxiety of the DPP authorities and made them eye mainland media platforms with suspicion.

The introduction of mainland "pop culture" in Taiwan has made the DPP's "de-Sinicization" and "cultural independence" policies increasingly farcical. Despite Taiwan implementing the "iQIYI clause" in September 2020, which banned all mainland streaming video services in Taiwan, young Taiwan residents continue to access and subscribe to them using servers in places such as Hong Kong, making a mockery of the ban. As a result, the younger generation in Taiwan is gradually becoming less susceptible to the DPP's manipulated public opinion.

With the continuous development of the economy and society, especially of the social media and integrated pop culture sectors such as dramas, games, livestreaming and short videos, the mainland has gained unprecedented leverage in telling Chinese stories, interpreting Chinese experiences, and enhancing the Chinese nation's cultural soft power. This resonates with people on both sides of the Strait and fosters a greater sense of value and identity.

For instance, in the latter half of 2023, the song *Taipei Girl* captured the dreams and aspirations of Taiwan youths. It went viral on the internet thanks to its heartwarming melody and relatable lyrics. The mainland's pop culture industry has not only been continuously evolving but also playing an unprecedented role in building common cultural experiences across the Strait.

Thanks to its technological advancements and rapid increase in national strength, the mainland's popular culture industry has transitioned from "Made in China" to providing "Chinese experience". This change in the pop culture map across the Strait is a reflection of Beijing's continuous rise on the global cultural stage.

The author is an associate researcher at the Central Academy of Culture and Tourism Administration. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL VIEWS



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

FELIX DAPARE DAKORA

Food security net

Sino-African cooperation is helping African countries to become self-sufficient in food and end hunger on the continent

Feeding the 1.4 billion people in Africa has been a challenge for the African Union and its 55 member states. Data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations have shown that 346.4 million Africans suffered from severe food insecurity in 2021 and another 452 million people from moderate food insecurity. Unfortunately, food insecurity is linked to poverty in Africa.

Africa, however, has an opportunity to learn from China, which suffered from severe food insecurity in the 1950s and 1960s and has bounced back to food sufficiency and food surplus with the use of modern technologies and high-yield crop varieties. China currently produces about 20 percent of the world's food, although it has just 9 percent of the world's arable land. While nearly 30 percent of Africa's food must be imported from other continents, it holds 65 percent of the world's uncultivated land. This limits financial resources for developing other sectors of the economy such as education, defense, transport infrastructure, health and scientific research.

The emergence of China from food insecurity in the 1950s and 1960s to food self-sufficiency today, shows that there are experiences Africa can learn from China through China-Africa agricultural cooperation. A lot has already been achieved under the auspices of China-Africa agricultural cooperation, and the success stories are rather inspiring, including the sharing of high-yield crop germplasm materials with Africa. For example, scientists from the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences have shared over 1,000 green super rice varieties with some African countries where their yields show increase of over 20 percent compared to local African varieties. Sesame breeding by Chinese scientists and their African collaborators has also led to over 50 percent increases in yields compared to the local varieties grown in Africa.

Research collaboration between Africa and the Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences has also contributed hugely to the success of the China-Africa agricultural cooperation. The academy has, for example, introduced over 30 new crop varieties (including South China No 5 cassava and Reyan No 5 Stylosanthes), more than 50 new technologies and more than

20 kinds of equipment to Africa. The average yield of the South China No 5 cassava in Africa is 37.5 metric tons per hectare, which is four times higher than the local varieties. The Chinese Academy of Tropical Agricultural Sciences has therefore been very instrumental in technology and germplasm transfer to Africa. The Guangxi Academy of Agricultural Sciences has also provided technical support for China Railway 5 Bureau Group to invest in the cassava industry in Cameroon, which has helped to reduce poverty and boost the income of local farmers.

And realizing that capacity building through training is key to achieving sustainable agricultural productivity, China has established joint laboratories in Africa for advanced research. These include the establishment of the Sino-Egyptian Joint Laboratory for Agricultural Green Development by the Institute of Agricultural Resources and Regional Planning of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences and Egypt's National Authority for Remote Sensing and Space Sciences for joint research in remote sensing-based monitoring and efficient utilization of water sources, and the Sino-African Joint Laboratory in Nairobi, Kenya, built by the Chinese Academy of Sciences to promote biodiversity studies.

As for Africa's capacity building in agriculture R&D, the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences has trained more than 1,530 agricultural technicians from African countries such as Rwanda, Tanzania, Mauritania and Angola. Specifically, 276 PhD candidates from 38 African countries were trained in July 2023. In addition, training courses for African agricultural technicians are provided every year to bridge the gap in crop breeding and cultivation, plant disease and pest control, animal disease monitoring and control, biomass energy and agricultural machinery.

The China-Africa Agricultural Science Technology and Innovation Alliance has also been established for stronger China-Africa agricultural cooperation in the promotion of science, technology and innovations for sectoral development through collaborative research, germplasm exchange, joint capacity building and exchanges of scientists and students.

Africa is huge in size with different agro-ecologies. For China-

Africa agricultural science technology and innovation and for the purposes of research and crop production, it may also prove useful to dividing the continent into major crop-producing and consuming areas. For example, cassava research in countries of West Africa, Central Africa, down to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique; common bean research in countries of Eastern and Southern Africa; rice and cowpea research in Mozambique and countries of West Africa; soybean, groundnut and maize in all countries of sub-Saharan Africa, etc. That way, scientists from countries of the AU regions that are best known for producing and consuming certain crops can actively participate in the joint research with Chinese scientists to develop technologies for increasing the yields of those crops. Food surpluses produced from the use of modern technologies can then be traded between and among countries of the AU regions under the auspices of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area, and/or exported to China as a win-win outcome of the China-Africa agricultural cooperation. That way, food security is guaranteed for both China and Africa.

The working tenets of the China-Africa Agricultural Science Technology and Innovation Alliance under the auspices of the China-Africa agricultural cooperation represents an excellent model for South-South Cooperation. Mapping out agro-ecologies with commonly grown and consumed crops across Africa, and developing new technologies and high-yield varieties of these crops for the different agro-ecologies are an important first step to ensuring food security in Africa and China under a changing climate.

In the future, China and Africa should deepen agricultural cooperation through various forms of South-South cooperation, and fully tap Africa's agricultural potential to achieve sustainable development.

The author is a fellow and former president of the African Academy of Sciences and the professor at Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa. The author contributed this article to China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

WANG JINYAN

Booster for the Global South

China and the League of Arab States are working together amid intensifying major-country competition

Since the founding of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, a dialogue initiative jointly set up by China and the League of Arab States in 2004, China-Arab relations have been scaling new heights.

As important players of the Global South, China and the Arab States have been strengthening their ties, consolidating cooperation and jointly fostering a closer China-Arab community with a shared future, amid the intensifying competition between the world's major countries.

Western powers led by the United States are sparing no efforts to contain and suppress the rise of emerging powers such as China in order to maintain the old international order dominated by them. Over the past few years, they have put forward measures against or set up barriers to the global public goods proposed by China, including the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative.

Against the backdrop of less interference from the US in the region in recent years, Arab countries are focusing on domestic development, and have put forward their respective development strategies and chosen cooperation partners according to their own needs and will, and there has been an increasingly noticeable trend of Arab countries "looking East".

China and the LAS continue to deepen and advance their friendly and cooperative relations.

Long dissatisfied with the old unfair and unreasonable international order, countries in the Global South have an increasingly strong demand for strategic autonomy and they are promoting the establishment of a new international order that's more equitable and reasonable. As important members of the Global South, Arab countries have been increasingly speaking with their own voice according to their own national interests in recent years.

For long, the US' rampant use of group politics and bloc confrontation has wreaked havoc on the global governance system, impeded the global economic growth, and hindered the development of countries of the Global South. Most Arab countries have been victims of this. Unwilling to be continually mired in confrontations and conflicts, they have started to focus on domestic development, wishing to pursue peace and promote stability through development.

China has constantly advocated that countries in the Global South focus on development and forge closer cooperation. Such concepts have been highly appreciated by

This year also marks the 10th anniversary of China's proposal to jointly build a China-Arab community with a shared future and invitation to the Arab world to participate in the Belt and Road Initiative. Friendly and cooperative relations between China and the LAS are both an important component of South-South cooperation and a critical boost for greater collective strength of the Global South.

Arab countries. China's high-speed development over the past years and dazzling achievements have made it a leader of the Global South. On bilateral and multilateral occasions, Arab countries have repeatedly expressed their wish to learn from China's development experience and strengthen cooperation with China.

In foreign policy, China has always observed such principles as mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-interference in internal affairs, and peaceful coexistence. In recent years, China has successfully promoted peace talks and brokered peace deals in the Middle East, which has been highly appreciated by regional countries.

Meanwhile, China has led or vigorously participated in international or regional organizations, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS, which are all aimed at strengthening unity and cooperation among the Global South and jointly enhancing the collective strength and voice of the Global South. These organizations have growing appeal to Arab countries. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt have become dialogue partners of the SCO; while Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates became members of BRICS on Jan 1. Many other Arab countries are also actively applying to join these organizations.

China has been attaching greater and greater importance to its relations with the LAS. Over the past 10 years, Chinese leaders and senior officials have visited the LAS headquarters and held consultations with the LAS secretary-general and people concerned on the Middle East situation and issues of common concern

to both sides. On Jan 14, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited the LAS headquarters, making the LAS the first regional organization visited by the Chinese foreign minister in 2024, which is solid evidence that China attaches great importance to China-LAS cooperation.

Driven by efforts from both sides, China-LAS friendly cooperation has been deepening. In December 2022, China and the LAS jointly held the First China-Arab States Summit, which has significantly elevated China's relations with LAS member states. Furthermore, some LAS member states that are Western allies have begun vigorously developing relations with China. Also in December 2022, the first China-Gulf Cooperation Council Summit was held. Both sides expressed their wish to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

The China-proposed BRI has covered all of the 22 member states of the LAS, which was also the first regional organization to sign a joint statement with China aimed at further implementing the Global Civilization Initiative. Alongside the enriched content of their cooperation and ever-expanding areas of cooperation, China and the LAS have achieved institutionalized exchanges and cooperation in many areas.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum, and over the past two decades, the forum has become a "prestige brand" for China-Arab collective cooperation. Foreign Minister Wang met with LAS Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit in January, with both sides pledging to strengthen communication and coordination to better prepare for and hold the 10th Ministerial Conference of the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum this year, so as to open up new prospects and inject new impetus into China-Arab relations.

This year also marks the 10th anniversary of China's proposal to jointly build a China-Arab community with a shared future and invitation to the Arab world to participate in the BRI. Friendly and cooperative relations between China and the LAS are both an important component of South-South cooperation and a critical boost for greater collective strength of the Global South.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

CULTURE

Charles Dickens opens *A Tale of Two Cities* with the luminary lines, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." This statement from the historical drama set against the backdrop of the French Revolution has remained so resonant that it's often been quoted in myriad contexts since its publication.

And its sentiment embodies the spirit of *Echoes From the Age of Steam*, an ongoing exhibition of Victorian-era British art at the galleries of the National Centre for the Performing Arts on Beijing's Chang'an Avenue that runs through March 25.

One part depicts the vibrant art scene and social life during the period when the Industrial Revolution propelled Britain's rise as a powerful empire and economy under Queen Victoria's rule.

In another section, artists from that time also reveal the other side of a prosperous state: the plight of the working class, money worship, growing disparity between the rich and the poor, pollution in cities and environmental deterioration.

On show are oil paintings, watercolors, drawings and sculptures that introduce British artists' development throughout the 19th century, as they created diverse works and initiated several larger art movements with lasting influence.

The works on display are from the several venues of the National Museums Liverpool, including the Walker Art Gallery, Lady Lever Art Gallery, Sudley House and World Museum, says Sandra Penketh, executive director of galleries and collections management at National Museums Liverpool.

Natural inspiration

The shift from agriculture to industrialization brought dramatic changes to every aspect of British society.

In terms of fine arts, a group of homegrown artists, art buyers and patrons emerged, and exhibitions were staged to bring more cultural experiences and better education to more people, says Li Mo, an exhibition curator at the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

Of the many artists who gained acclaim during this period, Joseph Mallord William Turner helped to elevate the landscape painting to an eminence that rivaled previously predominant motifs. That's why his painting, *The Wreck Buoy*, opens the exhibition.

An 1849 remake of a previous version exemplifies Turner's innovative use of color in a highly expressive manner and his noted mastery through turbulent marine scenes. Art critic John Ruskin once described this piece as, "the last oil he painted before his noble hand forgot its cunning".

Turner's name is closely associated with British landscape painting, and he is known as one of the most influential British artists of all time.

In February 2020, the Bank of England issued a 20-pound note featuring a self-portrait Turner created around 1799 that's housed in Tate galleries. The note also shows his quote: "Light is therefore colour".

Turner accentuated, with strong emotions, the sublimity of nature so much that the sometimes violent scenes in



Echoes From the Age of Steam, an exhibition of Victorian-era British art being held at the galleries of the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



From top: *Interior of Santa Sophia, Constantinople*, by John Frederick Lewis, is one of the exhibits. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Two 19th-century ceramic vases made in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province. LIN QI / CHINA DAILY
The Wreck Buoy by Joseph Mallord William Turner. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

An exhibition examines the best and worst of times of a bygone British era, **Lin Qi** reports.



Left: A 18th-century ceramic vase made in Jingdezhen. LIN QI / CHINA DAILY
From top: *An Italian Child (Tuscan Girl Plaiting Straw)*, by William Holman Hunt. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Yes or No?, a work by Charles West Cope; and *Flower Makers*, by Samuel Melton Fisher. PHOTOS BY LIN QI / CHINA DAILY

his work evoke a sense of fear. Other painters preferred to hail the greatness of nature in a simple and tender way, with an attention to detail.

"In this way, they addressed city dwellers' yearning for the peaceful countryside — a land of lush greenery, free of the problems generated by industrialization," says Li.

Examples shown at the exhibition include *Forest Glade With Deer: The King of the Forest*, a collaboration between Thomas Creswick and Richard Ansdell, and *Flying the Kite: A Windy Day*, a landscape piece by David Cox. It's said that a viewer of this work by Cox once told the artist of his propensity for depicting winds: "There is always a breeze in your pictures! I declare I shall take cold and must put on my shawl."

Such an enthusiasm for nature reflects the pursuit of truth through aesthetics.

Li, the curator, says this inspired several art movements that originated in Britain — the influence of which later expanded to the European continent and further around the world — such as the Arts and Crafts movement, the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood and aestheticism.

Demographic features

The growth of the middle- and working-class populations during this period meant they increasingly served as the subjects of art — beforehand, most works depicted religious figures, fairy-tale characters, royalty and aristocracy.

Paintings on show portray idealized lifestyles, and the underlying social rules and moral values, promoted by the middle class — a house in the suburbs; a quiet and virtuous wife; and adorable and well-behaved children.

Women in these affluent families are often portrayed as enjoying leisure, while leaving domestic chores and child care to servants. But they were legally and financially dependent on men.

A telling example of this on show is George Goodwin Kilburne's *Poor Relations*.

It shows a narrative scene in which a woman expresses resignation as she holds her face with one hand while her unhappy looking husband gives cash to her father following the death of her sister's husband.

The situation was, indeed, dire for the poor. The working class' struggles are depicted not only through paintings but also such arts and crafts as a necklace on display that's made using gold and human hair. Back then, women who lived in poverty often sold their hair.

Such jewelry was worn by wealthy elites, who decorated their living spaces with crafts from around the world, sometimes including Chinese porcelain. The exhibition shows patterned porcelain dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries from Jingdezhen in today's Jiangxi province — arguably the material's leading production center then.

"These works show not only the cultural diversity of 19th-century Britain but also many other aspects of society and the lives led by different classes that offer audiences a panoramic view of the Victorian age," Li says.

Contact the writer at linqi@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese arts troupe enchants Cape Town

CAPE TOWN — A captivating gala performance by a Chinese arts troupe wowed the audience on Saturday evening in Cape Town, the legislative capital of South Africa.

It was part of celebrations for the Chinese New Year, which is also known as Spring Festival.

The talented performers were from Henan province, and their varied show at the Westin Cape Town hotel featured martial arts, acrobatics, magic show, Yuju Opera, as well as traditional Chinese songs and dances.

Welcoming the guests to the event, China's consul general in Cape Town, You Wenze, said the

renowned troupe planned to give the beautiful city of Cape Town an enchanting performance showcasing the richness of Chinese culture.

"Tonight's spectacular performance will undoubtedly transport us to the heart of China, allowing us to experience the cultural treasures that have been passed down through generations," he says.

The consul general also expressed the hope that more pragmatic cooperation between the two nations would be achieved in the new year.

Speaking on the occasion, Sylvia Lucas, deputy chairperson of the National Council of Provinces

(upper house) of the Parliament of South Africa, said that the relationship between China and South Africa has long transcended the bilateral scope and become a shining model for relationships between China and Africa.

"In the past 25 years, the special and friendly relationship between China and South Africa has grown from strength to strength," she says. "It epitomizes cooperation between the rising markets of the Global South."

Lucas also expressed her wish that the friendship between the Chinese and South African people would continue to prosper in the new year.

Located to the south of the country's "Mother River", the Yellow River, Henan enjoys a significant position as the birthplace of the Chinese nation, and is known for its many historical sites, cultural heritage and tourism resources, says Li Yanqing, deputy director general of the culture and tourism department of Henan province.

Li extended an invitation to all South Africans to visit and explore Henan, and experience the ancient charm of China.

The Spring Festival falls on Feb 10 this year.

XINHUA



A Chinese artist displays a piece of paper-cut work and interacts with a member of the audience at a gala performance by a Chinese arts troupe in Cape Town, South Africa, on Saturday evening. XINHUA

LIFE



From left: A platter of Fujian traditional snacks. A display of various mountain and sea delicacies from Fujian. Fish liver and rice. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Having just finished a day's work at his newly opened Fujian restaurant in Beijing, head chef Hong Zhixiong hopped on a plane to Xiamen in Fujian province in search of the freshest ingredients.

Early the following morning, Hong returned to Beijing on a three-hour flight, bringing with him carefully selected ingredients.

At lunch, the table was awash with exquisite Fujian dishes made from the ingredients he had brought back. "They still carry the Fujian morning dew and the fragrance of the soil from Wuyi Mountain," Hong says.

"Fujian cuisine is known for its fresh flavors, but this freshness doesn't come from seasonings, it's the result of blending mountain and sea delicacies, to create a complex and delicate flavor," he explains.

With decades of experience in the culinary industry and a holder of the title of "Master of Fujian Cuisine" that is awarded by the Fujian Culinary Association, Hong has both the innate sensitivity Fujian natives have for food and his accumulated understanding of the characteristics of different Fujian ingredients. He is committed to serving authentic Fujian flavors to Beijing diners.

Despite being one of China's eight major culinary traditions, Fujian cuisine is not as widely known as Sichuan or Cantonese cuisine. In recent years, more chefs like Hong have ventured beyond the province, exploring the essence of their traditional cuisine while incorporating innovative elements, with the aim of introducing this historically rich, seafood-centric cuisine to a broader audience.

Imperial favorite

One of Fujian cuisine's most renowned dishes, Buddha Jumps Over the Wall, was once considered one of the culinary centerpieces of grand Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) imperial feasts. Known for its complex flavors, it features a variety of ingredients expertly simmered to perfection. Hong takes pride in displaying all the elements of the dish on a dedicated wall in his restaurant. He has also given the traditional recipe a modern twist, with a lighter, clearer broth that appeals to the health-conscious palates of today's diners.

To preserve its authentic flavor, he goes the extra mile, and uses water specially sourced from the province.

Another Fujian food expert, chef Wu Rong at Shanghai's Meet the Bund restaurant, has also added his own unique touch to the famous dish. He substitutes the usual soup base with ingredients such as fish glue, sea cucumber and abalone, steering away from its normally overly thick consistency.

Wu emphasizes the importance of preserving tradition while embracing change. He believes that innovation doesn't have to mean a departure from the past, but can mean making traditional dishes even better. This approach has earned Meet the Bund a Michelin star, and recognition as a two-diamond restaurant in food app Dianping's

Fujian's fragrant feast

As the popularity of regional cuisines heats up, a once-unappreciated tradition discovers fresh confidence, **Li Yingxue** reports.



From left: Wu Rong, chef at Shanghai's Meet the Bund, a Michelin-starred restaurant. Wu Jie, who is also known as "Shangqing Jiege" runs the Shangqing Bengang seafood restaurant in Xiamen. Zheng Hui, founder and president of the Xiamen Culinary Association.

Black Pearl Restaurant Guide.

The 45-year-old's culinary journey began in hotel restaurants in 1998, where he honed his skills. In 2011, he decided to become an entrepreneur, and opened a fusion cuisine restaurant in Fujian, which quickly gained popularity with patrons.

In 2016, Wu decided to return to his roots and embrace tradition. He opened Mr Rong's Fujian Cuisine restaurant, which focuses on more traditional dishes.

Two years later, he expanded his culinary footprint to Shanghai's iconic Bund area, opening a high-end Fujian cuisine restaurant named Meet the Bund.

"At that time, Michelin was starting to evaluate restaurants in China. I thought that if our food could win an award, it would help more people discover Fujian cuisine. My main goal is to share our food with a broader audience," Wu says.

Over the last 10 years, he has noticed the increasing popularity of regional cuisine, which he sees as a great opportunity for his own province's food. Awards like the Michelin and the Black Pearl have also recognized this growth in regional cuisines, contributing to the better promotion of Fujian cuisine.

Wu says that when he first opened his restaurant in Shanghai, many Fujian restaurants did not mention their geographic origin, but in recent years, more have begun

to proudly include it in their name. "In the past two years, I feel that Fujian chefs have become more confident," Wu says.

While managing Meet the Bund, Wu continued to run the Mr Rong's Fujian Cuisine restaurant and earlier this year, he opened a branch in Beijing.

"At this small restaurant, the average cost per person is around 80 yuan (\$11), and guests can enjoy a variety of authentic Fujian snacks, such as oyster omelet and Quanzhou vinegar pork," he explains.

"I believe in promoting all of Fujian cuisine, it's not just about the high-end. Our cuisine includes both high-end dishes with rare ingredients, and street snacks and small seafood dishes. I want diners to develop a comprehensive understanding of Fujian cuisine."

Fusion in cuisine

According to Zheng Hui, founder and president of the Xiamen Culinary Association, the evolution of Fujian cuisine is tied to the blending of cultural influences. As the starting point of the Maritime Silk Road, Quanzhou has played a significant role in shaping the culinary culture of Fujian cuisine.

"Fujian cuisine embraces flavors from both the north and south, as well as Southeast Asia. Its proximity to Guangdong has introduced influences from Cantonese cuisine, and it has also adopted some cooking methods from the

cuisine of nearby Zhejiang province," explains Zheng.

"Fujian is blessed with abundant ingredients, thanks to its mountains and seas. This means we have access to both mountain specialties and fresh seafood. The long coastline contributes to the availability of delicious seafood, and many rivers with fresh ingredients, too."

Fujian cuisine is often associated with soups, and Zheng believes that soup-based dishes are not only delicious but also healthy, as the dishes emphasize a balanced nutritional approach. "Fujian cuisine places a strong emphasis on nutrition by using less oil, salt and sugar while ensuring great taste," he adds.

In recent years, the province's aquaculture industry has flourished, with ingredients such as abalone, sea cucumber, and large yellow croaker from Ningde gaining popularity nationwide. This trend has also accelerated the recognition of Fujian cuisine across the country.

"For example, take the case of large yellow croaker. Previously, overfishing led to a decline in numbers, but with better practices, artificially bred large yellow croakers are gradually increasing in numbers. We also release many into the wild to restore their population," Zheng says. "Production has recovered in recent years, and meets

demand across the country. In Fujian and Zhejiang, a feast without large yellow croaker is considered incomplete."

According to Zheng, the development of Fujian cuisine has not only had an impact on the province's culinary scene, but has also stimulated the entire ecosystem of the province, contributing to the local GDP.

He has observed that, in recent years, many chefs are not only venturing beyond the province, but also innovating to introduce a wider range of Fujian cuisine to diners elsewhere. At the same time, chefs in the province are showcasing the brilliance of their cuisine to visitors in their own unique ways.

Wu Jie, who is also known as "Shangqing Jiege" runs the Shangqing Bengang seafood restaurant in Xiamen. Every day, he serves the freshest catches from the boats and shares intriguing videos on social platform Douyin, where he has gained over 9 million followers.

Although Wu Jie is a Xiamen native, he wasn't a seafood fan as a child, because he didn't like the way it looked. However, as his parents started using more seafood in home-cooked meals, he gradually developed a taste for its freshness and sweetness.

He says that Fujian cuisine stands out for its emphasis on freshness, which is why he has his own boat to buy fresh catches from other fishermen, and also ensures the shortest time and distance between the sea and the dining table by purchasing directly from boats.

He serves over 300 varieties of seafood every day, creating a unique experience for diners. As the daily catch varies, so does the menu, and prices fluctuate accordingly.

"I can't design a system to take orders and it may take half an hour to find a particular item of seafood, so the menu is handwritten. And the seafood I serve varies each day," Wu Jie explains. "Out-of-town customers usually order common seafood, while locals prefer rarer varieties, like a shellfish that resembles abalone called the 'abalone shell,' which can be poached with ginger, steamed, marinated raw, or stewed into soup."

For Wu Jie, understanding the sea — knowing what is available in each season and how to harvest it — is as simple as opening his wardrobe and knowing where each item is stored.

He also makes videos to showcase the province's diversity of seafood. Initially educational, they gradually began to feature different ways of preparing seafood as his audience grew.

In contrast to Wu Rong, who is expanding Fujian cuisine restaurants nationwide, Wu Jie acknowledges that different Fujian restaurants have different business models.

His dishes are only available for local consumption, so only visitors can sample it. "I prefer to stay in one city for the long term," he says, adding he has no plans to expand.

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Localized adaptation of *Carmen* dazzles with debut on Shenzhen stage

SHENZHEN — When a classic Western opera and traditional Chinese culture merged in the southern city of Shenzhen this past weekend, a captivating fusion unfolded on the Guangdong province stage.

The version of *Carmen*, performed on Saturday and Sunday evening at the Shenzhen Poly Theater, was a collaboration between Chinese and German creators that demonstrated the talent of leading actors and exceptional artists of

diverse global backgrounds.

Revered as one of the world's most performed and beloved operas, the story of *Carmen* has been etched into the hearts of countless spectators.

Coproduced by the Shenzhen Opera and Dance Theatre and the German National Hamburg State Opera (Staatsoper Hamburg), the adaptation retained the essence of the original while boldly innovating with the use of local elements in terms of character portrayal, storyline development, stage

design and costumes.

"Through the medium of opera, we aim to build a bridge of cultural and artistic exchange between Shenzhen and Hamburg," says Georges Delnon, artistic director of the adaptation.

Shenzhen is embarking on a quest to produce a series of high-quality operas on its own soil. They will no longer be imported productions, but rather unique, Shenzhen-inspired adaptations that incorporate local cultural elements, he says.

An international, innovative city brimming with charm, dynamism and vitality, Shenzhen presents an unmatched stage for the creation and performance of top-tier international opera.

This rendition of *Carmen* marks not only the city's debut in coproducing and participating in a full-length opera production with a leading international opera house, but also its first-ever deep collaboration with a renowned institution steeped in history, the theater stat-

ed in a news release.

The international partnership, a joint effort to continue the legend of *Carmen*, aligned with the global context of advanced cultural development and provided a favorable opportunity for cultural exchange and artistic enrichment between the two nations, it added.

The adaptation is slated for performance in Beijing and other cities in the future.

XINHUA

LIFE

The winter chill that grips Beijing in December doesn't slow things down at all for Cheng Yongmao.

He reaches his office in Huairou district in the capital's northeastern suburbs at 6:30 am and gets right down to business. "It's a force of habit," says Cheng, who's in his 60s and has been repairing and maintaining the Great Wall's Jiankou section in Huairou for nearly two decades.

Jiankou is widely considered one of the most dangerous parts of the Great Wall in Beijing and is known by hikers as the "wild Wall". The only way up to the bulwark is a rocky path along cliffs.

The Great Wall has been subject to natural disasters and human impact after standing for more than 450 years, and now direly needs maintenance and reinforcement.

"Construction work is generally conducted from April to October, and now it's time to prepare documents for future work," Cheng says.

Previous work has to be reviewed, and historical items unearthed during the cleaning and repairs need to be properly put in files, while construction charts for future endeavors have to be readied, he explains.

Cheng's office is filled with traces of his dealings with the Great Wall. A dozen walking sticks he made out of branches stand in the corner behind the door, next to a pile of tools he uses for tiling.

Detailed overall plans of the Jiankou section and the restored parts in Huairou district spread across the office walls. They clearly show towers, checkpoints and various scenic spots Cheng has mapped using a computer program.

He has remained involved in providing technical guidance for the Great Wall's restoration with the Huairou cultural management department since he retired several years ago.

"Our main goal is to effectively eliminate safety hazards and reflect the ancient appearance of the Great Wall," Cheng says.

"Loose and naturally deteriorating parts have to be removed in time to avoid collapses and rainwater erosion, while (repair) materials should be applied as little as possible to follow the principle of minimum intervention," he adds.

Since 2004, Cheng and his team have overcome the precarious working conditions on the mountain ridge to restore multiple sections of the Great Wall that total roughly 20 kilometers in length.

In December, Wang was among the 10 people from all walks of life who were named "Beijing role model of the year" by the municipal publicity department.

Cheng still hikes up to this section of the Wall at least twice a week during the fieldwork season.

"I love the Great Wall to the point of obsession, and I know every blade of grass, every brick and every stone on it," he says.

He was born in a village in Huairou and began to learn tile masonry under the guidance of his uncle in 1972.

"At that time, being able to acquire a vocational skill was something to be proud of," Cheng recalls.

After more than 20 years, he mastered the trade's techniques, such as mortaring, paving and trenching.

In 1991, he joined the district's park and ancient architecture restoration company, and participated in the reconstruction of the main hall of the Hongluo Temple, marking the beginning of his journey in the preservation of cultural heritage sites.

"It was completely different from what I had been doing before," he says.

The much bigger bricks used in the ancient temple, elegant decorative elements, such as rooftop orna-



Great Wall guardian

A retiree has earned recognition for his commitment to protecting the iconic bulwark, **Yang Feiyue** reports.



ever you lay a tile, taking into account such factors as gradient changes ... The mules can carry the repair materials to the foot of the Great Wall, but we still need to carry them up to the (construction) sites ourselves."

He was head of a construction team of dozens of members, most of whom came from mountainous areas in neighboring Hebei province and were consequently good at trekking up and down the peaks.

Still, some places were too dangerous. Ordinary people couldn't even safely stand, let alone work, in these areas, he recalls.

Some workers' feet hurt so much that they couldn't walk properly. But under Cheng's leadership, they adapted to the challenging environment and built up their strength.

As his Great Wall experience increased and relevant aptitudes improved, Cheng came up with a five-principle restoration approach.

First, no disorderly or overlapping layers should emerge amid the original stone, brick and soil. Then, restoration can take place in accordance with the slopes' conditions, with attention given to angles.

The other principles are about following the original mountain bends, and repairing the Wall only as necessary, and remaining faithfully to its historical context, Cheng explains.

"It's of utmost importance to inherit and pass down the things left by our ancestors while not changing the original craftsmanship to leave real things for future generations," he says.

He started to work on the Jiankou section in 2016. The toughest stretch slopes to nearly 80 degrees, and the places for walking are only a few inches wide. It's called Yingfei Daoyang (Eagle Flies Upside Down), suggesting that even an eagle would have to soar vertically, with its beak pointing up directly toward the sky to fly over this spot. Most parts of the Wall here were about to collapse before the restoration, and about 40 meters of the fortification had tumbled into a trench dozens of meters below. Neither people nor mules could move the stones, which weighed hundreds of kilograms, Cheng says.

He overcame the problem by instructing the workers to use a winch to hoist the stones back into place. Each took six or seven attempts.

After years of efforts, the slope has regained its historical appearance, without any traces of repair.

Cheng says he feels proud whenever he steps on the solid and steady ground on the Great Wall without worrying about the bricks falling off anymore.

Zhao Xiaojie has worked side by side with Cheng since 2004.

"During work, he is our leader. But off-duty, we hang out like brothers," Zhao says.

"Cheng is meticulous when it comes to work. If something is not done well, he insists on redoing it. He has a real affection for the Great Wall, and he tirelessly guides the bricklaying and the rest of the work in person ... nothing seems to be able to keep him from the Great Wall."

Cheng says he's grateful to receive the Beijing role model recognition.

"It's a great honor for an ordinary person in an ordinary post, which encourages me to continue," Cheng says.

"Protecting the Great Wall is my responsibility. My physical strength is still adequate. As long as I can climb up the mountain, I'll do my best to lead my team, especially to assist them in accumulating experience and making their due contributions."

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ments shaped like creatures, and the use of glazed tiles were much more demanding in terms of skills, compared with the civilian construction work he'd done.

Fortunately, Cheng got to learn from Piao Xuelin, who was a senior engineer at the Palace Museum and a 15th-generation inheritor of the Xinglong School, a major carpentry and tiling shop involved in building the Forbidden City and other royal buildings in the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties.

Right after he cut his teeth on the ancient architectural restoration

Clockwise from top: A view of the Great Wall's Jiankou section that runs on top of the green mountain ridges in Huairou district; Cheng Yongmao demonstrates brick paving on the Great Wall; a construction worker carries restoration materials up the Great Wall; Cheng hikes on the Dazhenyu Great Wall to do restoration work.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

techniques under Piao's tutelage, he signed up for a three-month training program hosted by Beijing's construction authorities in October 1991.

Cheng systematically studied the evolution of ancient Chinese architecture, especially the royal styles of the Ming and Qing eras.

Although he didn't have a higher education diploma, his practical experience enabled him to readily take in the theories, which he says in turn improved his skills significantly.

Cheng picked up other skills,

such as drawing blueprints using computers.

This enabled him to take part in many key restoration projects, such as repairing the roofs of the Beijing West Railway Station and of the former residence of luminary Chinese writer Lu Xun.

Cheng received his first Great Wall assignment in 2004. It was for the Huanghuacheng section in Huairou.

"Working on the mountain ridges poses extra challenges, since everything is irregular," he says.

"You need to look around when-



From left: Artifacts unearthed along the Great Wall; Cheng points at a watchtower; a close-up of Yingfei Daoyang (Eagle Flies Upside Down) — the Jiankou Great Wall's toughest section, which features a slope of roughly 80 degrees. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY