

Full steam ahead

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Remembering an era

Popular TV drama is both love song and nostalgic salute to Shanghai

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CHINA DAILY

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New productive forces key to growth, Xi says

Boosting innovation, advancing sci-tech self-reliance stressed at study session

By XU WEI
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President Xi Jinping has underlined the key role of new productive forces in underpinning China's high-quality development, saying that the nation must beef up innovation in science and technology to attain a high level of sci-tech self-reliance.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, on Wednesday expounded on the theory of new productive forces while presiding over a group study session of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, the Party's core leadership.

The study session included contributions by He Lifeng and Zhang Guoqing, both vice-premiers, and Ma Xingrui and Yuan Jiajun, the Party secretaries of the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and Chongqing municipality, respectively.

Xi stressed the need to always keep in mind that high-quality development is the fundamental principle for the new era.

He urged efforts to ensure the sound implementation of strategic tasks such as accelerating the construction of a modern economic system, advancing high-level sci-tech self-reliance, speeding up the formation of a new development pattern and coordinating the deepening of reforms and high-level opening-up.

He stressed the need to guide the nation's high-quality development with new theories on productivity, with new productive forces having already taken shape and served as a strong impetus and pillar of high-quality growth.

Xi said that new productive forces are mainly driven by innovation and characterized by high-technology, high efficiency and high quality.

New productive forces, spawned by revolutionary technological breakthroughs, the innovative allo-

cation of factors of production and the transformation and upgrading of industries, are characterized mainly by a significant increase in productivity, he added.

Xi first mentioned the term "new productive forces" during a fact-finding trip to Heilongjiang province in September.

The annual tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference in December reemphasized the need to spur industrial innovation with sci-tech innovation, especially using disruptive and cutting-edge technologies to spawn new industries, new models, and new growth momentum.

In his 2024 New Year address, Xi underscored that new-energy vehicles, lithium batteries and photovoltaic products "are a new testimony to China's manufacturing prowess".

According to Chinese Customs, the value of the nation's exports of the three products grew 29.9 percent year-on-year to 1.07 trillion yuan (\$149.7 billion) in 2023.

Xi reiterated on Wednesday that sci-tech innovation is the core element for developing new productive forces.

China must perform well in the battle to develop core technologies so that original and disruptive sci-tech innovation outcomes can keep emerging, thus harnessing the new momentum for developing new productive forces, he said.

He highlighted the need to apply sci-tech innovations in industries and industrial chains to upgrade traditional sectors, expand emerging industries and plan for the development of future industries.

Xi laid out requirements to plan the development of industry chains centered on new productive forces to make industrial and supply chains more resilient and secure, and ensure that the industrial system is independent, secure and reliable.

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Nationwide news strike



Chicago Tribune newsroom employees pose in front of an inflatable rat and fat cat during a rally outside the newspaper's Freedom Center newsroom and printing plant Thursday in Chicago. More than 200 reporters, photographers and other staffers with the Tribune and six other newsrooms around the nation are on a 24-hour strike to protest years of "slow-walked" contract negotiations and to demand fair wages.

CHARLES REX ARBOGAST / AP

China remains attractive market for US companies

By ZHONG NAN
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China will continue to be attractive for companies from the United States, thanks to its massive consumer market and well-established supply chain networks that are hard to replicate, business leaders and analysts said on Thursday.

Since the content of Sino-US economic cooperation has expanded from just goods trade to all business fields, they stressed that confrontation is not conducive to the interests of either country or the global community. Strengthening political and business relations between the two countries is crucial not only for driving economic growth but also for improving the well-being of their people.

China's enormous market, supportive policies to attract global capital, ongoing industrial upgrading and its status as an increasingly strong innovator make the country one of the most important markets for many US companies, said Eddy Chan, senior

vice-president of FedEx Express and president of FedEx China, adding that the US logistics service provider opened its new China headquarters office in Shanghai last month.

Similar views were voiced by Joe Ngai, chairman for China at global consulting agency McKinsey & Company. "Finding another market that can provide the same level of quality, opportunities and value for investment as China certainly is a challenging task."

Despite some US businesses expressing concerns over de-risking and tariff-driven rising operation costs in recent years, the Chinese market remains significant to US companies. About half of them view it as among the top three global investment destinations, marking a 5-percentage-point increase from the record low observed in 2022, according to survey results released on Thursday by the American Chamber of Commerce in China.

The China Business Climate Survey, conducted in October 2023, found that rising tensions in

US-China relations have been the top concern for US businesses in China since 2021. This issue continues to be ranked as top priority among members of AmCham China. A total of 343 US companies provided data for the study.

Sean Stein, chairman of AmCham China, said the two-year business outlook for China has improved, with US companies showing increased optimism across the board, especially with regard to domestic market growth, estimated profitability and the economy.

"China is a vital market for many US businesses. It is also an important source of talent and innovation that helps US companies boost their global competitiveness," said Stein. "We hope the survey will inform policies on both sides of the Pacific Ocean and contribute to mutually beneficial relations between the two countries."

The survey revealed that about 77 percent of US companies have no intention of relocating manufacturing or sourcing operations away from China.

Minister of Commerce Wang

Wentao reiterated last week at a news conference in Beijing that the common interests of China and the US in the areas of economy and trade far outweigh their disputes, and the two sides should strengthen dialogue and communication to help companies solve different issues in cooperation and explore potential.

Upbeat about the Chinese market, Johnson Controls International, a US multinational conglomerate, established a joint venture with Tianjin Emagin Technology Co, a maglev high-speed rotating machinery manufacturer based in Tianjin in mid-January. The focus of this new company is to spearhead innovation and enhance energy efficiency in the heating, ventilation and air conditioning industry.

"This cooperation is not only a new move for us to deepen our investment in China, but also highlights our determination to seize more growth opportunities in the country," said Anu Rathnide, president of Johnson Controls Asia-Pacific.

Crafted dragons



Children demonstrate their cardboard dragon craft at a township in Haiyan, Jiangsu province, on Thursday. The children, whose parents live and work elsewhere, also received stationery and books to celebrate the upcoming Year of the Dragon. ZHOU QIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Continuing Gaza crisis poses quandary for the West

"Be on the right side of history." Those words are sometimes heard in the United States. They serve as a reminder that when history judges the people involved in a conflict, including analyzing what they said or did, or which side they supported, it will be impartial: Those who fought the good fight will be honored; those who did not will face an ignominious sentence.

As the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues — it has lasted well over 100 days and shows no sign of ending — it is a legitimate question to ask which nations will be "on the right side of history".

WORLD WATCH By Anthony Moretti

One nation — South Africa — has made clear what it sees as being on the right side when history issues its judgment. Representatives from that country recently made the case to the International Court of Justice that Israel had violated the Geneva Convention and was committing genocide in Gaza as it carries out its military onslaught on the enclave. Of course, Israel views its

actions there differently. The international court's interim ruling was not a full victory for the South African delegation, which had sought a declaration ordering an immediate cease-fire. Nevertheless, the court's judges did affirm that Israel had to do more to prevent potential genocide, had to stop the destruction of any evidence that might suggest genocide had taken place, and had to allow humanitarian efforts to be implemented without interruption.

Israel was also ordered to return to the ICJ in one month to verify that it was following through on

these and other issued orders. Although the ICJ has no mechanism to enforce its ruling or any future rulings, South Africa could ask the United Nations Security Council to support the ICJ's decisions and seek their enforcement. Should that happen, US President Joe Biden would face a conundrum: support the UN Security Council and end its support of the actions of one of its closest allies, or vote against any Security Council declarations and risk being defined as endorsing Israel's actions.

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YOUNG KEEPERS WORK THEIR ANIMAL MAGIC

Zoo's creatures in hands of talented, highly qualified professionals

By CHEN NAN
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On a cool summer night, Jiang Yao, a senior student at Nanjing Agricultural University in Jiangsu province, finished his day as an intern at Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo.

In-depth

As he walked through the zoo alone, a group of fireflies flew around him. Standing amid their glow, Jiang knew immediately

that this was where he belonged. "As one particular firefly circled around me, everything seemed to be in perfect harmony. At that moment in 2019, I decided to work at the zoo," said Jiang, now 25.

After graduating from the university with a bachelor's degree in biotechnology in 2020, Jiang started

work as a keeper at the forest zoo, which is home to more than 3,000 animals from 260 species.

Born and raised in a rural area of Jiangsu, he has loved animals and watched documentaries about them since childhood.

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INSIDE COP28 was a turning point for loss and damage funds Global Views, page 13

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During his job interview at the zoo, when Jiang was asked if he had any experience in saving animals, he said the first one he helped rescue was a small turtle his father found in a river near his village.

"I was just a little boy when I saw my father take the turtle home, where he offered it to me as a pet. I immediately turned the offer down, telling him that a turtle is not a pet and I didn't want to treat it like a toy. My father was very supportive of me, and we returned to the river to release the creature. I was so happy for the turtle," Jiang said.

Jiang formed the idea of becoming a zoo keeper when he was a student. During his fieldwork on Huangshan Mountain, Anhui province, he once met a graduate student who researched short-tailed macaques. Jiang was highly impressed by the knowledge of these creatures that the student shared with him.

"The student named each macaque and could tell the differences between them, just like parents spotting differences between twins. His passion for animals touched me deeply, and I wanted to follow in his footsteps," Jiang said.

On his first day at Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo, Jiang cleaned the birdhouses — a task he tried to perform without disturbing the birds, which he also spent many hours observing. Next, he was assigned to the animal rescue center, and now he mainly works as an amphibian keeper at the zoo.

Some of the animals arrived at the zoo via the rescue center after being saved by local people, Jiang said. A small number of rescued animals are released back into the wild after receiving medical treatment, but 90 percent of them remain at the zoo.

Due to the illegal trade in animals, many of those that are rescued are alien species, meaning they have spread to areas outside their natural range and dispersal potential. Many of the animals that Jiang cares for are protected species confiscated from owners who bought them illegally.

The sulcata tortoise, also known as the African spurred tortoise, which is one of the largest tortoise species in the world, requires special care from Jiang. Housing these adult tortoises indoors can be difficult due to their size, but they need to be provided with a warm living area.

"The tortoises require hot temperatures to remain healthy and active. Nanjing usually starts to get cooler in September, so the tortoises need to be taken care of indoors, where they are placed in a heated shed equipped with purifiers to circulate the air," Jiang said.

"There are detailed duties and responsibilities for an animal keeper, and the job is far different from what I expected," Jiang said.

"I need to prioritize the health and welfare of the animals in my care, which means I must devote a significant amount of time to continuous learning."

Jiang said that as he is shy and not good at communicating with other people, his job as a keeper seems perfect for him. When the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, the zoo closed temporarily, and he stayed there for more than a week to take care of the animals.

"There were no visitors, so I did nothing but look after the animals. I never felt bored, and had a very happy time with them," he said.

Young visitors

Dating to the 1920s, Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo is one of the most popular in China, and due to its daily livestreaming programs, the number of its followers has risen significantly.

Shen Zhijun, head of the zoo, said it welcomed about 6.7 million visitors last year. Some 60 percent of them were in the 20-30 age group, and 60 percent came from outside Nanjing.

More young people such as Jiang are joining the zoo as keepers, Shen said. Of the 140 keepers at the zoo, 40 percent of them were born after 1995, and 20 of the keepers were born after 2000.

Jia Tianci, 28, takes care of some 20 wolves at the zoo, where he started work in 2020 after graduating from Nanjing Agricultural University with a bachelor's

Wildlife: Conservation work strengthened



Top center: Shen Zhijun, head of Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo. Top right: Jiang Yao, who tends to amphibians. Above right: Jia Tianci, who takes care of some 20 wolves. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

degree in veterinary medicine.

One of the animals in his care is Stanley, a gray wolf that arrived at the zoo in 2021.

"Stanley arrived in Nanjing from Beijing as part of our work with the reproductive management of the animals, so it was vital to find him a mate to conserve genetic diversity and ensure the long-term viability and sustainability of the breed. For me, it was just like being a father worried about his son's marriage," Jia said.

Stanley and his mate now have six cubs at the zoo, where Jia enjoys watching over them each day.

"Being a wolf keeper is a magical job. Wolves have a clear social structure. Each pack has dominant individuals as well as those who rank lower in the hierarchy, just like different positions in a business such as CEO, team leader and basic employees. I work for the animals, just like an employee," Jia said.

Born and raised in Nanjing, Jia dreamed of becoming a vet. His parents didn't understand his decision to become a keeper until they saw him take care of the wolves.

"I feel content when the wolves are mentally and physically healthy. Although they obviously cannot speak like humans, I can tell from changes in their excrement, such as its color, consistency and smell, whether they are healthy," Jia said.

In addition to acting as a keeper, Jia escorts and chats with visitors to the zoo.

"I remember my visit to a zoo during my childhood. I loved watching the monkeys and feeding them cookies. However, after becoming a keeper, I realized that this type of behavior was totally wrong," Jia said. "People love interacting with animals, but the first thing we tell visitors is not to disturb them. Behavior such as banging things, shouting at the animals

and feeding them, are harmful."

The question of whether zoos are good or bad for animals is a delicate issue that has caused heated discussion. In modern society, zoos play a vital role in wildlife conservation, public education, and scientific research. However, some people insist that zoos do more harm than good.

Jia said: "At Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo, the old steel-bar enclosures and concrete cages have gone. We now use natural-looking barriers to separate the animals from the public, with habitats resembling the animals' living environment in the wild."

He added that a key task for the zoo's keepers is to implement enrichment programs to stimulate animals' natural instincts. Such programs include creating conditions for animals to hunt, forage and also stimulate them mentally and physically.

"We encourage visitors to respect the animals, which is also

the first rule for staff members at the zoo," Jia said.

Shen, the zoo's head, said: "Traditionally, breeding programs at zoos have been regarded as relatively simple. However, this view fails to take into account the diverse environmental requirements of individual species."

Demanding work

In 2013, Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo started to recruit young keepers who have master's degrees. Shen said that certain people considered the recruitment of graduates with such degrees to be a total waste of talent.

"Taking care of wildlife, especially endangered and vulnerable species, is a highly demanding job that requires continuous study," Shen said. "Working at a zoo also calls for a broad knowledge of subjects such as biology, zoology and environmentalism."

Shen, who is in his 50s, said that

during interviews at the zoo with job applicants, he notes the attitude they show toward animals.

"Many applicants tell me they have loved animals since childhood. They have cats or dogs at home, but we need more from them than that. We require people with qualities such as independence, stability, persistence and practicality," Shen said.

Dubbed "King of the Animals" on social media, Shen is one of the best-known zoo heads in China.

As a child, he dreamed of being a physician. He studied landscape architecture at university, and in 2008, started work at Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo, becoming the nation's youngest zoo director at that time. Since then, Shen has observed the animals at the zoo every day.

In 2021, when the zoo faced difficulties due to the pandemic, Shen took to the internet to introduce a 65-hectare wildlife park located in hillside forests north of Nanjing, with the idea of transforming the zoo from a traditional venue to one that values wildlife conservation.

Supporters were impressed by the efforts made by Shen and his team over the course of a decade, which changed the zoo's landscape and put an end to its animal shows — the financial lifeblood for many zoos.

Shen said: "People love coming to our zoo because they experience positive emotional connections with the animals. For example, when parents bring their children to see koalas, they love to see the koalas holding their joeys (babies)."

"Visitors also remain very quiet and spend a long time watching the koalas sleeping. We try our best to enrich the animals' living environment so that they behave naturally. As a result, they are happy and confident, and our visitors can sense this."

Shen said he was inspired by his son to make changes to Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo. Around 2008, Shen offered to take his son, who was 10 at the time, to the zoo, but the boy said he did not want to go.

"He told me zoos were for smaller kids and he didn't think they provided enough fun for him," Shen said. "I then realized that to attract visitors, the first thing was to make the animals happy."

"Now, my son is in his 20s and loves talking about the zoo with his friends, which makes me very proud."

Wang Zhiqiang, producer of *Tiny Cuties Great Events*, a six-episode documentary series produced by Bilibili, the leading video community for young generation in China, said: "Many people first encounter animals on visits to zoos. According to zoo architect Zhang Enquan, over 600 million people in the world make such visits annually, and thanks to zoos, we have the chance to get a glimpse of wildlife."

Making the series, which premiered on Dec 29, took the creative team to nearly all the popular zoos in China from the middle of 2021 to autumn last year. Destinations included Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo, Shanghai Zoo and Xining Wildlife Park, Qinghai province.

Besides zoos, the team also visited animal rescue centers, including Longqiao Black Bear Care Center in the suburbs of Chengdu, Sichuan province, and Beijing Raptor Rescue Center.

The series focuses on issues such as natural and artificial breeding, and animal rescue and release by featuring the daily work of staff members at zoos and animal rescue centers. The concept of modern zoos, reimagining spaces for zoo animals, and the use of nature to help stage exhibitions at zoos are also explored in the documentary.

Wang said: "Making the series allowed us to better understand the relationship between animals and humans. We saw numerous young keepers who are passionate about their work. Many of them are highly educated and have returned to China after studying abroad."

"They take care of the animals and are also affected by them. The young keepers and the animals they look after can be quite similar in their behavior. For example, those who tend to amphibians are extremely quiet, while those who look after primates are very lively," Wang added.

TOP NEWS

Experts call for appropriate use of AI tools

New tech has impact on teaching, learning and school management, educator says

By ZHAO YIMENG
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Generative artificial intelligence tools shouldn't be banned in schools but should be applied safely and appropriately to empower the innovative development of education, experts and officials said.

The swift advancement of ChatGPT and other generative AI technologies has offered more opportunities for teachers as well as students, experts said at the 2024 World Digital Education Conference in Shanghai, which concluded on Wednesday. It also poses new challenges regarding information security and education equality, they said.

Zheng Qinghua, president of Tongji University, said China should embrace the opportunities and challenges of AI-empowered education and guide young people to understand knowledge created by technology while stimulating their motivation for learning.

"Generative AI technology has become an essential tool for obtaining and spreading knowledge. It has an impact on teaching, learning and even school management," said Zheng, who is also an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

He said that various models developed by internet companies and universities have been applied to educational activities, and the majority of college students in China have used the technology, including Ernie Bot, an AI chatbot product developed by Baidu Inc.

These kinds of tools, with ChatGPT as a leading global example, are capable of writing essays and solving science problems, helping students with their assignments and tests.

A survey by the online learning platform Study.com found that 89 percent of students who responded had used ChatGPT to help with a homework assignment, which has raised questions about academic propriety and the disruptive effect of generative AI in education.

"We cannot simply let AI provide answers or do homework and tests for us. Instead, we should, based on the technology, better cultivate students to be more innovative and integrate professional disciplines to solve real problems," Zheng said.

"One of the new goals of AI-empowered education is to innovate

theories and methods to tackle engineering and technical issues instead of simply answering general questions," he added.

Colin Bailey, president of Queen Mary University of London and a fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering, said that with the rapid growth of ChatGPT, the question is not whether to use generative AI in education, but how to use it safely, effectively and appropriately.

"The worst thing we can do is to ban generative AI in schools. The major challenge is how to make sure we use these technologies appropriately to enhance the education so that students have the skills they require for the ever-changing job market," he said.

Universities and teachers can help prepare students for real-world applications of the technology they will encounter in the modern workplace, as many industries are embracing generative AI as a tool to increase efficiency, he added.

For teachers, the technology has been used to improve the marking and evaluation of students through personalized data analysis rather than exam papers.

However, poor design and misuse of AI systems could cause individual and social harm due to biased data and insufficient privacy, Bailey said.

Approaches to regulating AI have been emerging globally to support the ethical and responsible use of generative AI, such as the release by the United States of the Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights and a pro-innovation approach to AI regulation in the United Kingdom.

In China, the Cyberspace Administration and other departments have jointly issued interim measures, which took effect in August, for managing generative AI services.

Chen Jie, vice-minister of education, said at the conference that education and research institutions should cooperate to avoid problems brought by AI, including privacy leaks, bias and algorithm abuse.

"We should work together to promote the equal access of technologies and prevent security risks," Chen said.

China has established an expert advisory body for education digitalization and an ethics committee for AI, which have formulated a standardized system for the application of digital education, he added.



Protests spread

Italian farmers hang a placard on a tractor during a protest in Cuneo, Lombardy, on Wednesday. The placard reads "Giving the right value to products for the future of our youth". Small groups of farmers are staging impromptu protests across Italy, with now daily gatherings taking place as they demand an audience with Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's government. Their demands are various, from complaints about European Union regulations to the impact of inflation and the cost of fuel.

MARCO BERTORELLO / AFP

Hollywood films' appeal declines amid shifting Chinese preferences

By RENA LI in Los Angeles
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55 billion yuan

Total 2023 box office market in China, with imported films only accounting for a little more than 16 percent of receipts

Despite Hollywood films maintaining a notable presence in the Chinese market over the past two decades, their performance has declined significantly since the COVID-19 pandemic.

While specific blockbuster movies have achieved success, one expert attributes the downturn to what she said is an outdated, hackneyed narrative style that fails to resonate with the current interests and aspirations of Chinese audiences.

"Hollywood's routine narrative style has lost its appeal in China," Zhi Feina, a professor at the China Academy of Arts, told China Daily.

"There is nothing new in this narrative, and there is too much political correctness," she said. "The gap between the means and value orientation of these narratives and the needs of China's main audience is getting big, so its routinization will not work."

Zhi, a chief expert for the Chinese Film Industry Research Report, found that the decline in Hollywood movies' influence isn't unique to the Chinese market, but has also happened in Japan.

Even in 2023, with the lifting of pandemic restrictions and market recovery, Hollywood films like *Oppenheimer* and *Black Panther 2* didn't achieve significant box office success in China, according to Zhi.

In 2023, Japanese films like *The Journey of Suzuya* and *The First Slam Dunk* achieved noteworthy success at the Chinese box office.

The Journey of Suzuya emerged as the highest-grossing Japanese film ever in China, surpassing 807 million yuan (\$112.7 million) at the box office.

"In fact, China's National Film Administration is very open to imported films, especially Hollywood films," Zhi said.

In 2023, China's film market showed signs of recovery, with the total box office reaching 55 billion yuan. Domestic films dominated the market, generating 46 billion yuan, or 83.77 percent of the total, while imported films accounted for a little more than 16 percent. All top 10 films at the box office were domestic productions.

Among them, *Fengshen Trilogy 1*, an epic fusion of history, folklore and mythology spanning more than 3,000 years, achieved a remarkable gross of \$156 million after just 11 days in Chinese theaters, topping the Chinese mainland box office in 2023.

Fengshen Trilogy is a cinematic venture positioned as China's response to the *Lord of the Rings* and *Iron Man* sagas.

The highest-grossing imported film was *Fast and Furious 10*, at 984 million yuan, followed by *The Meg 2: The Trench* (851 million yuan), *The Journey of Suzuya* (807 million

yuan), and *Avatar: The Way of Water* (743 million yuan). Those movies led the total box office for imported films, which surpassed 8 billion yuan.

Despite those successes, the figures reflect a significant decline compared with the peak of Hollywood movies earning more than 20 billion yuan in previous years, indicating a notable decrease in market share compared with domestic films.

"This kind of market shrinkage is a manifestation of the fact that the Chinese market basically has few policy restrictions on Hollywood movies, which shows that Hollywood movies are no longer particularly favored by Chinese audiences," Zhi said, the China Academy of Arts professor.

Stanley Rosen, a professor of political science and international relations at the University of Southern California, who has long studied the performance of Hollywood movies in the Chinese film market, said that the relationship between US films and the Chinese market is shaped by a dynamic interplay of cultural understanding.

Analyzing Hollywood films in China for 2023, eight out of the top 10 were sequels or continuing series, such as *Fast and Furious 10*, *Transformers: Rise of the Beasts*, and *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3*. The only two exceptions outside the top 10 were *Oppenheimer* and *Barbie*, which earned about \$50 million and \$35 million, respectively, in China.

"I think these series films had an impact in China, but the box office performance of Hollywood movies was not necessarily great," Rosen told China Daily.

Returned artifact



Officials display an artifact sent back to Nepal from a museum in the United States during a news conference at the Department of Archaeology in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Wednesday. Nepalese heritage activists and the nation's government worked together to get dozens of stolen artifacts repatriated from The Rubin Museum of Art, the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Brooklyn Museum. NIRANJAN SHRESTHA / AP

From page 1

The US president should then ask himself which decision would "be on the right side of history".

That quandary would not be limited to Biden, of course.

As CNN recently reported, the US and its allies are not unified in their response to the ICJ's order. The report said: "Reactions from the Global North to the ICJ case have been mixed. While some nations have maintained a cautious diplomatic stance, others, particularly Israel's staunchest allies in the West, have criticized South Africa's move." The US and the United Kingdom have been the most prominent in the latter camp.

Meanwhile, we should also recognize that there is another issue at stake here. The waning influence of the US and the West throughout the developing Global South helps to explain why South

One conclusion continues to be reached: The dominant powers increased their wealth at the expense of the poorer nations.

Africa was confident enough to demand that Israel be held accountable for what has happened so far in Gaza.

Without question, while the West seems confused about what to do next, many countries of the Global South support South Africa. One of the reasons is the legacy of struggle against apartheid in that country, while the other is the history of oppression by the West throughout the Global South. South Africa has validated ridding

itself of apartheid and now wants no other nation to ever conduct activities that would equate to that awful form of racism and hatred.

Throughout the Global South, memories are long. Whether reflecting on US actions in Latin America, British actions in South Asia or French actions in Africa (to name just three broad examples), one conclusion continues to be reached: The dominant powers increased their wealth at the expense of the poorer nations.

According to a study published in *New Political Economy* in 2021, the Global North, roughly defined as the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Japan, the Republic of Korea and well-to-do Europe, beginning in 1960 and continuing through 2020, pilfered "\$62 trillion in real terms. If this value had been retained by the South and contributed to Southern growth, tracking with the South's growth rates over this

period, it would be worth \$152 trillion today". The continuing extraction of valuable raw materials, combined with rampant poor wage scales in the Global South, guarantees that the conquest will continue.

Furthermore, the West's influence over the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund assures that it will retain control over the Global South.

As a result, any claims from these nations suggesting that Israel will "be on the right side of history" are mocked.

One is left to wonder how Western leaders think history will judge them.

The author is an associate professor in the Department of Communication and Organizational Leadership at Robert Morris University in Pennsylvania. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Session: Developing new productive forces requires deepening reform

From page 1

Green development is the underlying part of high-quality development, and new productive forces are essentially green, he said.

China must expedite the green transformation of growth models to aid its goal of peaking carbon emis-

sions before 2030 and attaining carbon neutrality before 2060, he stressed.

While reaffirming the nation's commitment to follow a path prioritizing ecological protection and green development, Xi called for steps to build up the green manufacturing sector, develop green services and

expand the green energy industry.

It is important to develop green and low-carbon industrial and supply chains, and develop a green and low-carbon circular economy system, Xi added.

He stressed the necessity to further deepen reform to develop new productive forces, saying that

reform of the nation's economic system and sci-tech system must be deepened and a high-standard market system must be established.

Xi also set out steps to train talent, which is in short supply for the development of new productive forces, including fine-tuning the disciplines of the nation's higher

education institutions and improving the income distribution system by incorporating new elements.

Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy, said the vision laid out by Xi for developing new productive forces will help navigate the Chinese economy toward a path of high-quality

and more sustainable growth.

He noted that China's economy has entered a period in which traditional growth engines are gradually weakening, and emerging sectors and new technologies have taken the lead.

"The development of new productive forces not only improves the overall growth efficiency and competitiveness of the economy but also lays a more solid foundation for future high-quality economic development," he added.

CHINA

More than 4,000 parcels are generated every second in China, adding up to over 350 million each day, with the average person receiving more than 90 last year.

This thriving parcel delivery industry has not only benefited Chinese consumers, altering their behaviors and lifestyles, but has also created millions of jobs.

An elderly Beijing resident traveled to Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture in Southwest China's Yunnan province last month to escape the harsh winter in the nation's capital.

Planning to stay for about a month, he and his wife took two large suitcases with them.

"We older people always like to bring everything with us when we travel," the 75-year-old said.

But they forgot to pack their swimming gear, including the special swimming goggles he needs due to his myopia. Unable to find -7.0 nearsighted goggles in town, they turned to an online shop and were surprised when the goggles arrived within a week.

"Xishuangbanna is a remote border area," he said. "Although we are staying in a downtown hotel, I expected it would take at least a week to receive the goggles. Surprisingly, they arrived on the third day after my order."

"My daughter always urges us to travel light and purchase what we need along the way. I might heed her advice next time."

He said that if products can be delivered to border areas in days, delivery to other parts of the country would likely be even faster.

China's parcel delivery sector handled 132 billion consignments last year, up 19.4 percent year-on-year and accounting for over 60 percent of the global total.

As the network has expanded, the number of consignments processed in China each year has surged from over 10 billion in 2014 to over 100 billion since 2021.

Since March, the network has been handling more than 10 billion parcels a month.

According to a report released in November by the Development and Research Center of the State Post Bureau, China's parcel delivery network is now more than 48.7 million kilometers long, with over 230,000 stations capable of serving 700 million clients a day.

The report said the delivery sector's global parcel volume reached about 189.2 billion in 2022 and was expected to reach 200 billion last year.

In 2022, the sector's revenue amounted to about 4.1 trillion yuan (\$571 billion) — a year-on-year increase of over 12 percent — with the global per capita delivery volume standing at around 24 parcels.

"After years of rapid development, China is not only a leading and active express delivery market but also a catalyst for global parcel delivery development," Wang Xibin, the center's deputy director, said.

According to the Pitney Bowes Parcel Shipping Index, China handled 110.6 billion parcels in 2022,



Workers sort parcels according to their addresses in a logistics park in the Haimen district of Nantong, Jiangsu province, on Jan 23. XU CONGJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

China shows world how to deliver parcels

Country's 48-million-kilometer network handled 132 billion consignments last year. **Luo Wangshu** reports.

while the United States handled 21.2 billion, Japan 9.1 billion, and the United Kingdom 5.1 billion.

It added that parcel volume growth in China in 2022 was significantly affected by COVID-related shutdowns in Shanghai.

But China changed its COVID-19 management strategy last year and lifted travel restrictions, resulting in double-digit growth in parcel volumes.

At the sector's annual conference in Beijing last month, Zhao Chongjiu, head of the State Post Bureau, said: "Last year, the parcel delivery sector improved its ability to ensure smooth circulation, boosted its efficiency and capability to handle parcels and enhanced the development of intelligent delivery."

China's first express mail was delivered by China's express mail service in 1980. In 1993, STO Express, the first private parcel delivery company in China, was founded in Hangzhou, Zhejiang. In the same year, SF Express, another major parcel delivery company, was



A resident of Wushi village, Zhejiang province, puts a parcel inside an unmanned courier vehicle on Aug 24. SHI KUANGBING / XINHUA

established in Shunde, Guangdong province.

Over the years, such services have been enhanced, becoming faster, safer, more convenient and extending to most parts of China.

An SF Express automatic sorting

center that opened in Beijing last year can handle up to 1.5 million parcels a day. As parcels of different sizes and destinations move along belts in the center, they are scanned and automatically placed in the appropriate bags, significantly

improving efficiency.

E-commerce companies also store products in warehouses close to the country to expedite delivery times.

In October, a customer from Qingdao, Shandong province, ordered a down jacket online. To her surprise, she received it just six hours later, in China's 100 billionth parcel delivery of the year. The jacket was produced in Changshu, Jiangsu province, and had been pre-placed at a warehouse in Qingdao.

Ahead of this month's Spring Festival, many Chinese people have opted to purchase and send their holiday gifts home using the parcel delivery system.

In the past, people would bundle luggage filled with gifts onto trains, planes, cars and ships as they journeyed home for the holiday.

One Shanghai resident who will be spending the holiday in South China's Hainan province has sent two packages to her holiday house, containing her son's homework and her yoga mat.

"I even send clothes and gifts home while on business trips," she said.

China now has about 5 million couriers, many of whom hail from rural areas.

Song Yufeng began working as a courier in Jiayuguan, Gansu province in 2014. The flexibility of the job enabled her to care for her paralyzed husband, her father-in-law who has senile dementia, and her son, a student.

"I did not have a strong background. Back then, it was the only job with good pay that could support my family," she said.

Song was a housewife until her husband was badly injured in a work accident in 2009. She then tried various jobs, including doing odd jobs and running a small restaurant, but none proved sustainable.

She said she is grateful to be a courier, as it has supported her through challenging times.

Zeng Junshan, director of the bureau's Policy and Regulation Department, said China's parcel delivery industry has established a successful formula and become a prominent calling card for China on the global stage.

"The keyword for the next stage is to better connect with the world and strive to build a more secure, convenient, efficient, green, economical, inclusive and resilient sustainable express delivery system," he said. "This system aims to better connect urban and rural areas, integrate production and life, communicate domestically and internationally, and reach all corners of the world, promoting the smooth flow of goods."

Wei Jigang, a researcher at the Development Research Center of the State Council, said: "The ultimate goal for the development of the parcel delivery sector is to extend the network to every corner and deliver all kinds of products to all people, regardless of their location."

The sector aims to handle 142.5 billion consignments this year.

Zhao, the head of the State Post Bureau, outlined the sector's development strategy, goals and work priorities for 2024 at last month's conference.

He emphasized that the country's parcel delivery network and logistics system will be further improved, with a focus on building major infrastructure and enhancing cargo transportation capabilities by air and road.

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

The network and service quality in rural areas will also be enhanced, with scheduled passenger buses to be used to solve the "last kilometer" delivery problem in rural areas.

Zhao said another major goal for the parcel delivery sector this year is green development, with companies to be encouraged to use more new energy vehicles for transporting parcels.

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Left: A worker does one final check of a truck loaded with parcels in Jinhua, Zhejiang province, on Jan 24. JIN SICHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY Middle: Workers sort parcels on a belt in a logistics park in Donghai county, Jiangsu province, on Nov 11. ZHANG ZHENGYOU / FOR CHINA DAILY Right: A courier sorts parcels ready to be delivered in Guizhou province on Nov 12. QU HONGLUN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Industry bears fruit for common people

By **LUO WANGSHU**

About 1,200 years ago, a Chinese poet criticized the luxurious lifestyle of an emperor and his consort earlier in the Tang Dynasty (618-907): "A steed rides through the dust, which pleases the imperial consort, no one knows it is the arrival of fresh litchi fruits on time."

The poem referred to Emperor Xuanzong, who reigned from 712 to 756, and his favorite consort Yang Guifei. Yang had a penchant for litchi, but the fruit easily decayed during transportation, necessitat-

ing a fast and high-standard delivery service to maintain its freshness. To satisfy Yang's desire, the emperor dispatched military messengers to transport litchi fruits from Southern China to Chang'an, the Tang capital in what is now Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

Although the swift delivery service preserved the fruit's freshness, it was criticized by people at the time and later by poet Du Mu, who lived from 803 to 852.

Nowadays, the transportation of litchi from South China to other parts of the country has become a

hallmark business for China's parcel delivery companies in recent years.

Chinese people's appetite for litchi has remained unchanged for over 1,000 years. However, unlike in the past, common people can now enjoy the fruit no matter where they live.

Now, if I order a box of litchi from Hainan province, the parcel can be delivered to my Beijing doorstep the next day. The individual fruits are meticulously wrapped and placed in boxes with foam packaging materials.

Thanks to the rapid development of China's parcel delivery industry, the country has established the world's largest postal and express delivery network, allowing most people, including myself, to enjoy this convenient service. Last year, I received over 170 parcels.

As an emerging industry, the parcel delivery sector has provided many Chinese people, particularly those from rural areas, with a valuable opportunity to lead stable lives and support their families.

According to a report on China's

private parcel delivery development released in December by the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, China has about 5 million couriers. They are the most familiar strangers in the community, especially in urban areas, with knowledge of residents' last names and mobile phone numbers, and sometimes even the structure of their families.

I am acquainted with more than five couriers responsible for collecting and delivering parcels to my home, although we have not engaged in substantial conversations. They are consistently busy, swiftly dropping off items and rushing to the elevator.

Last year marked the 30th anni-

versary of the founding of the first private parcel delivery company in China, STO Express. I participated in a group tour marking the occasion with a dozen couriers. One of them shared that he had a reckless youth, engaged in wrongdoing and spent time in jail. He recalled how challenging it was for him to secure a well-paying job until he found work as a courier.

"I can leave my past behind and build a new life," he said. He now also volunteers to aid people affected by natural disasters.

This industry has not only brought convenience to ordinary people but has also provided new opportunities for people from all walks of life.

WORLDUS

Tech CEOs testify in heated US hearing

Lawmakers: Social media giants failed to protect children from online dangers

WASHINGTON — United States senators grilled leaders of the biggest social media companies on Wednesday, as one lawmaker accused them of having “blood on their hands” for failing to protect children from escalating threats of sexual predation on their platforms.

The executives convened by the US Senate Judiciary Committee were put to task in a session titled “Big Tech and the Online Child Sexual Exploitation Crisis.”

Tech giants are confronting a torrent of political anger for not doing enough to thwart online dangers for children, including from sexual predators and teen suicide.

“Mr Zuckerberg, you and the companies before us, I know you don’t mean it to be so, but you have blood on your hands,” said Senator Lindsey Graham, referring to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg. “You have a product that’s killing people.”

Also testifying to senators were X’s CEO Linda Yaccarino, Shou Zi Chew of TikTok, Evan Spiegel of Snap and Discord’s Jason Citron.

Senator Dick Durbin, the Judiciary Committee’s Democratic chairman, cited figures from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that showed skyrocketing growth in financial “sextortion”, in which a predator tricks a minor into sending

explicit photos and videos.

“This disturbing growth in child sexual exploitation is driven by one thing: changes in technology,” Durbin said.

As the hearing kicked off, the committee played a video in which children spoke about being victimized on social media.

“I was sexually exploited on Facebook,” said one child in the video, who appeared in shadow.

Angry parents

In the hearing room, dozens of parents held pictures of their children who they said had been harmed because of social media. Some parents jeered at Zuckerberg, whose company owns Facebook and Instagram, during his opening statement and shouted comments at his other points during the hearing.

In a heated question and answer session with Zuckerberg, Senator Josh Hawley asked him if he has personally compensated any of the victims and their families for what they have been through.

“I don’t think so,” Zuckerberg replied.

“There’s families of victims here,” Hawley said. “Would you like to apologize to them?”

Zuckerberg stood, turned away from his microphone and directly addressed the parents in the gallery.

“I’m sorry for everything you have all been through. No one should go through the things that your families have suffered,” he said, adding that Meta continues to invest and work on “industrywide efforts” to protect children. But he stopped short of taking responsibility for facilitating the abuse, as Hawley suggested he should.

TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew said the company is vigilant about enforcing its policy barring children under 13 from using the app.

Yaccarino said X, formerly Twitter, does not cater to children.

She said the company supported the Stop CSAM Act, legislation that makes it easier for victims of child exploitation to sue tech companies. The bill is one of several aimed at addressing child safety. None have become law.

X has come under heavy criticism since billionaire Elon Musk bought the service and loosened moderation policies. This week, it blocked searches for pop singer Taylor Swift after fake sexually explicit images of her spread on the platform.

Under US law, web platforms are largely shielded from legal liability in relation to content shared on their site.

While lawmakers would like to set up more rules to increase online safety, new laws have been stymied by a politically divided Washington and intense lobbying by Big Tech.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Go-to old-timer Facebook turns 20

SAN FRANCISCO — Founded 20 years ago as a simple hangout spot for young people, Facebook has since become a battle-hardened behemoth with an insatiable appetite for your attention.

“I will never forget the day that I ran up to my high school’s Mac lab and signed up for Facebook,” Jasmine Enberg, an analyst at research company Insider Intelligence in New York, told Agence France-Presse.

“You simultaneously felt that you were part of this small, exclusive community where your parents, grandparents and teachers weren’t — but also part of something much larger.”

Launched as thefacebook.com by Mark Zuckerberg and three friends on Feb 4, 2004, the site was originally restricted to Harvard College students. It became available to students at other universities

in the United States before opening to anyone in 2006.

Facebook became a venue for connecting with just about anyone, anywhere, and by last year reported being used by more than 3 billion people monthly.

“Facebook, when it launched, was revolutionary,” Enberg said.

She noted Facebook’s famous “feed” that served up photos, comments or other “posts” its algorithm figured would grab the attention of users. The more users engaged with the social network, the more it could serve up money-making advertisements targeted using the vast amount of information people shared on Facebook.

In 2022 — a bad year for the Silicon Valley-based company — its profits reached \$23 billion.

A business model built on using people’s personal data to offer more attention-grabbing content

and targeted advertisements has earned Facebook complaints and fines.

In 2021, it came under fire over whistleblower accusations that executives put profit over the safety and well-being of users.

Despite it all, Facebook has continued to grow.

Enberg called buying Instagram in 2012 as part of a pivot to smartphone lifestyles one of the best business decisions made by Facebook.

The move eliminated a rival, provided a new forum for advertisements and appealed to younger internet users losing interest in Facebook.

“Above all, it gives the company an app to rival Snapchat and TikTok,” which are “ultra-popular with teenagers,” Enberg said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Denver to limit migrants’ shelter time

By BELINDA ROBINSON

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Denver, much like New York City, will start limiting the number of days that migrant families with children can stay in city shelters and ensure that those who overstay have to leave to find their own accommodation.

Starting Feb 5, the city in Colorado, with a population just over 711,000, will become the latest city to respond to the strain that the influx of migrants who have entered the US illegally has put on the city’s key services.

The city is housing 4,500 migrants. But they must now vacate the premises after 42 days. Officials said that nearly 40,000 migrants have arrived in Denver over the past year, costing the city \$40 million.

The strain on the city’s budget is not just being felt in its shelters but in its schools and hospitals.

Denver Mayor Mike Johnston estimated that this year the city will need \$100 million to pay for services to cope with the asylum seekers.

At least 3,000 immigrant children, mainly from Venezuela, have been enrolled in the Denver public school system since July 2023, NBC News reported.

School budgets are based on the number of children enrolled in October, so the additional children have been difficult to manage financially.

Denver Health, a hospital which

treats anyone in need, is also asking for help from the federal government and the state to pay its \$10 million in unpaid medical services for treating migrants.

The Biden administration has asked Congress for \$1.4 billion to help local governments and nonprofits for shelter, food and other help for the migrants.

But Republicans are not budging until Democrats and the White House agree to stricter immigration controls at the southern border.

The problem in Denver is being repeated in large cities across the country.

Nearly 2.5 million asylum seekers crossed the southern border in the fiscal year of 2023, according to the Department of Homeland Security.

Migrants are arriving from Asia, Africa and South America. The large movement of people has caused one of the biggest population displacements in Latin America’s modern history after more than 6 million Venezuelans fled their country.

In December, a record 302,000 people crossed the US southern border. Most are likely to claim asylum. The US court system is so backed up that cases can take years to process.

In New York, Governor Kathy Hochul proposed \$2.4 billion in her \$233 billion budget in January to help the city manage an estimated 70,000 migrants.

Hochul said: “We must support the city of New York in this moment”

New York Mayor Eric Adams estimated that the cost of providing shelter, food and medical care for the migrants will be \$10 billion by 2025.

In October, Adams placed a 60-day limit on how long migrant families with children can stay in a shelter. From January 16, he also implemented a strict curfew at four migrant shelters from 11 pm to 6 am after locals complained of anti-social behavior.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott said that his state had bused over 102,000 migrants to various “sanctuary” cities, including 37,500 to New York City.

Both Adams and Hochul, much like officials in Denver, have urged the federal government and President Joe Biden to do more to help fix the border crisis.

In Chicago, where thousands of migrants have arrived since 2022, Mayor Brandon Johnson announced on Jan 29 that he will delay, until March, re-enforcing the city’s 60-day limit on migrants in shelters.

“This has been unprecedented. This challenge has certainly been a weight in our city,” he said. “Our plan for emergency temporary shelter was never meant as a long-term housing solution.”

Hundreds of migrants had faced eviction on Feb 1 from shelters. But the Chicago mayor backtracked after local aid groups pleaded for leniency. However, the city said that 5,600 new migrants would be evicted on March 16.



Chinese Consul General in San Francisco Zhang Jianmin receives a proclamation on Chinese-American Friendship and Heritage Day from San Francisco Mayor London Breed on Wednesday at a reception at the consulate to commemorate the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the US in 1979. CHANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

Key notes for enhancement of ties sounded at SF consulate

By CHANG JUN in San Francisco
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Goodwill, potential and more people-to-people collaborations were the buzzwords at a reception at the Chinese Consulate General in San Francisco.

Morever, guests at the reception Wednesday evening shared their insights about why it is crucial to advance the robust subnational relationship between the Golden State, the city of San Francisco and China.

The event, which commemorated the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1979 between the People’s Republic of China and the United States of America, drew hundreds of representatives from all walks of life in Northern California and beyond.

In his speech to guests, Counsel General Zhang Jianmin acknowledged contributions of people in both countries to help develop the relationship. “(It) could not be possible without efforts from people from all walks of life in both countries,” Zhang said, citing a handful of trailblazers who have pushed forward the friendship.

On Jan 28, 1980, one year after the normalization of the bilateral relationship, Shanghai Vice-Mayor Zhao Xingzhi and San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein signed the “Agreement on the Establishment of a Friendship-city Relationship between Shanghai and San Francisco”, debuting the sister-city collaboration between the two major cities.

Since then, decades of close exchange between the two in various

fields such as trade, culture and sports, science and technology, and other areas continues despite political headwinds and pandemic obstacles.

Zhang, a native of Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, shared with guests an anecdote about a cypress tree that President Richard Nixon had brought and given to the Chinese city during Nixon’s historic visit in 1972.

Planted on a grassy slope in a Hangzhou garden, the tiny California redwood was dwarfed by several other trees. When Nixon told Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, who accompanied him in a stroll around the garden, that it would take centuries for the little sapling to reach its maturity, the 73-year-old Zhou replied, “The next generations can enjoy it!”

Forty-five years later, “The tree has grown tall and big,” said Zhang. “There is even a song written to capture this episode (of friendship).”

London Breed, mayor of San Francisco, agreed. “I am excited to celebrate this partnership that exists between San Francisco and China for many, many years,” she said, adding that her city being the host of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders’ Week in November 2023 “was extraordinary”, especially the Bay Area summit between President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden.

It was in California at the Filoli estate that the two heads of state had a candid and in-depth exchange of views, and the “San Francisco Vision” was initiated.

Specifically, the vision is that China and the US should jointly develop a right perception; manage

disagreements effectively; jointly advance mutually beneficial cooperation; jointly shoulder responsibilities as major countries; and jointly promote people-to-people exchanges. Those are the five pillars and the foundation for the stable development of China-US relations.

Engage with one another, Mayor Breed stressed. “We establish a better partnership through San Francisco that could help bridge the gap to ensure a better US-China relationship,” she said.

The improvement and development of China-US relations have brought practical benefits to the people of both countries and promoted peace, stability and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific region and the world, Zhang said.

The bilateral trade volume between the two countries increased from less than \$2.5 billion in 1979 to nearly \$760 billion in 2022, and two-way investment has increased from almost zero to more than \$260 billion.

There have been 284 pairs of sister provinces, states and sister cities. China and the United States also have had useful cooperation on many international, regional and global issues.

“However, there is more that needs to be done and can be done,” said Zhang, adding that San Francisco and California can deliver on that.

Breed echoed that San Francisco and California can play an important role in bridging gaps and focusing on things that “bring us together — our growth, our business development, our history and culture, and our relationship that exists so many years.”

Chinatown bookstore’s reopening welcomed

By MINGMEI LI in New York

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The reopening of an Asian American-owned bookstore in Manhattan’s Chinatown following a July fire has received a warm welcome back from its supporters.

Yu & Me Books, described as the first female-owned Asian American bookstore in New York City, raised more than \$369,000 for repairs since a tragic fire on July 4; it reopened on Wednesday.

“We are so excited to welcome you all back to our Yu & Me Books home,” the store announced on Instagram. “We can’t wait to shed tears, laugh loudly and open our hearts with all of you who have made us feel at home.”

The fire in an apartment above the bookstore on Mulberry Street killed one of the building’s residents. Smoke and water damage also devastated Yu & Me Books, destroying almost all its inventory and equipment, according to a GoFundMe campaign that store owner Lucy Yu set up to recoup costs.

During the restoration and renovation of the original bookstore, the business operated from a location within The Market Line, an underground marketplace on the Lower East Side, and several pop-up shops in the city.

“It was a bookstore I always wanted to visit, and I’m so happy that they were able to reopen,” Charlotte Leinbach, a teacher for New York City’s



The Yu & Me Bookstore in Manhattan Chinatown, owned by a Chinese American woman, reopens on Wednesday after a devastating fire in July, attracting old and new customers to visit. MINGMEI LI / CHINA DAILY

Education Department told China Daily.

Leinbach hadn’t been to the bookstore before the fire, but she had heard quite a bit about its fate. She bought two books, the second and third in the series Before the Coffee Gets Cold.

“It’s hard to find a lot of books in translation to these books, written in Japanese, translated to English, and those are not as common to find in other books,” she said. “The design (of the bookstore) is really nice, and the layout is great. I love that they also sell used books. I love buying new books because it’s fresh, it’s nice, but it’s always nice to see people in the community giving their books back and reselling and just passing them on.”

She said she will continue to support the women-run small businesses that focus on people and authors of color.

“I actually came on the day of the opening, but it was too many people, too crowded, so I just haven’t had a chance to look at it,” Liam Li told China Daily.

“This place is unique. It’s in Chinatown. As Asians live in New York City,

I feel this offers the most space for the community. I understand like a minority in this society, it is not easy to have a store like this,” he added.

Asian American authors also are returning to the bookstore.

“I’m in the neighborhood a lot, so I went by when Lucy was here working on the store,” Ava Chin, a Chinese American author who wrote about immigrant restrictions and her family’s story about the impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act, told China Daily.

“It means so much to the community to have this bookstore. I don’t think we realized that we needed a bookstore quite like this until Lucy arrived. I can go in and run into people that I haven’t seen in a while. You can sit down and browse a book and see what you want to buy,” she said.

“I can’t think of another bookstore, English-language bookstore that is focused on Asian American literature,” she added. “You can write these books, but to have a space where they’re promoting the literature and letting people know about your books and our stories is really important. So, I couldn’t be more thrilled that she’s back open!”

WORLD

Pacific Islands' woes worsen amid worries over climate

By KARL WILSON in Sydney
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For people in Tuvalu and other Pacific Island nations, retaining their homeland or searching for new homes are becoming big questions as constant seawater rises threaten to submerge their countries in coming decades.

Tuvalu, formerly known as the Ellice Islands, can be one of the first countries in the world to disappear due to climate change. Comprising nine islands midway between Australia and Hawaii, over 11,000 people have their homes on a landmass of just 26 square kilometers.

A great majority of Pacific Islands' people will still be adapting to climate change in their home country by 2050, according to a comprehensive report on Pacific Islands' population trends to 2050 by the University of Auckland.

"It is true that many low-lying atolls are increasingly affected by climate-related conditions like rising sea levels and coastal inundation," Yvonne Underhill-Sem, co-lead of the University of Auckland research team, told China Daily.

She said Pacific Island nations are working on a range of technological ways to protect and even expand some land in the future.

"They are also working on ways to retain their sovereign status even as their physical boundaries shrink," Underhill-Sem said.

Moreover, their population is expected to increase rather than decrease, from 13 million to 20 million by 2050, according to the report released earlier in January.

Many residents are expected to move away to other countries, including New Zealand and Australia, and there are a range of possible mobility options, she said.

In November, Australia and Tuvalu announced a landmark treaty where Australia offered permanent residency to the people of Tuvalu.

Under the agreement, Tuvalu citizens will be allowed to live, study and work in Australia.

They would be able to access Australian education, health, and key income and family support. Although the exact number was not outlined in the agreement, it was widely reported the program will be open to 280 Tuvaluan citizens each year.

Underhill-Sem noted this is a proposed policy which has yet to be fully implemented.

"It is highly unlikely that the numbers offered permanent residence in Australia will be enough to mitigate the population momentum on the islands," she told the correspondent.

"There is a very strong desire to stay and retain a place called home, perhaps with a smaller population."

Many Pacific Island countries which have allowed their citizens to participate in labor mobility programs are increasingly concerned about the social and economic effects of the loss of mostly able-bodied citizens. So they are also reducing the numbers allowed to travel.

"Iran's response to threats is decisive and immediate," he added. Hossein Salami, chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, or IRGC, said on Wednesday that the country is not after war but not afraid of war either, vowing to let no threat go unanswered, according to the semi-official Fars news agency.

He made the remarks at the closing ceremony of a national congress to commemorate the country's martyrs in Teheran, also a reaction to some threats uttered by US officials against Iran over the past few days.

Salami said, "We are not warmon-



Palestinians inspect the debris of Al-Urube school, which was targeted overnight by Israeli airstrikes in Nuseirat camp in the central Gaza Strip on Wednesday. MAJDI FATHI / GETTY IMAGES

Hamis reviews truce plan as conflict rages

GAZA STRIP — Hamas is reviewing a proposal for a six-week truce in its fighting with Israel, a source told Agence France-Presse on Wednesday, as fighting raged in southern Gaza and the UN sought to restore aid funding.

Israeli strikes killed at least 125 people overnight and into the early morning across the Palestinian territory, the health ministry in the Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip said, while the military announced it had begun flooding the militants' tunnels.

AFP TV footage showed smoke rising over central Gaza and Khan Younis, the coastal strip's main southern city that has become the focus of fighting in recent weeks.

As Qatari- and Egyptian-led mediation efforts gathered pace, a Hamas official said the group's leader Ismail Haniyeh was due to be in Cairo on Thursday to discuss the truce proposal.

A separate Hamas source told AFP the three-stage plan would start with an initial six-week halt to the fighting, now in its fourth month, that will see more aid deliveries into the besieged Gaza Strip.

Only "women, children and sick men over 60" held by Gaza militants will be freed during that stage in exchange for Palestinian prisoners in Israel, the source said, requesting anonymity due

to the sensitivity of the talks.

There would also be "negotiations around the withdrawal of Israeli forces," with possible additional phases involving more hostage-prisoner exchanges, said the source, adding that the territory's rebuilding is also among the issues addressed by the deal.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ruled out withdrawing forces from Gaza.

'Constructive' talks

He has also ruled out releasing "thousands" of Palestinian prisoners as part of any deal, though his office earlier called the talks "constructive".

Ron Dermer, an Israeli minister close to Netanyahu, met on Wednesday with US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan in Washington, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken is due for another Middle East trip in the "coming days", a US official said.

The United States was among several top donor countries that suspended funding to the UN's aid agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told a UN committee he had "met with donors to listen to their concerns and to outline the steps we are taking".

He called UNRWA "the back-

bone of all humanitarian response in Gaza".

UNRWA spokeswoman Tamara Alrifai said the agency supports "an independent investigation" into the Israeli claims that led to the funding crisis. Israel accused several UNRWA staff members, out of the agency's 33,000, of involvement in the Oct 7 attack that sparked the conflict.

Alrifai said "if the countries that suspended their funding to UNRWA maintain their decision, the impact will be catastrophic on the people of Gaza" who face mass displacement, threats of disease and famine and dire shortages.

The conflict was triggered by Hamas' Oct 7 attack on Israel, which resulted in the deaths of around 1,140 people, according to an AFP tally based on official figures.

Militants also seized about 250 hostages. Israel says 132 of them remain in Gaza, including at least 29 people believed to have been killed.

Following the deadliest attack in Israel's history, its military launched a withering air, land and sea offensive that has killed at least 26,900 people in Gaza, most of them women and children, according to the territory's health ministry.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Teheran warns Washington against threats

TEHERAN — Iran on Wednesday warned the United States not to threaten it, after Washington said it decided on a response to an attack that killed three US troops in Jordan.

"America must stop using the language of threat and projection and focus on a political solution," Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said, according to the official IRNA news agency.

"Iran's response to threats is decisive and immediate," he added.

Hossein Salami, chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, or IRGC, said on Wednesday that the country is not after war but not afraid of war either, vowing to let no threat go unanswered, according to the semi-official Fars news agency.

He made the remarks at the closing ceremony of a national congress to commemorate the country's martyrs in Teheran, also a reaction to some threats uttered by US officials against Iran over the past few days.

Salami said, "We are not warmon-

gers, but they impose wars on us. Therefore, we defend our causes and do not let foreigners interfere in our internal issues."

Amir-Abdollahian and Salami's remarks came after US President Joe Biden linked Iran to the recent killing of three US soldiers at a military base in northeastern Jordan near Syria's border. Biden said the United States "will hold all those responsible to account at a time and in a manner (of) our choosing".

Baseless accusation

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani on Monday rejected the country's involvement in the drone attack targeting the US forces in Jordan, saying the accusation is "baseless and provocative".

Still, the US on Wednesday attributed the drone attack to the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group of Iran-backed militias, as Biden weighs his options to respond to the strike.

The US on Wednesday imposed sanctions on three entities and one individual in Lebanon and Türkiye for "providing critical financial support" to a financial network used by Iran's Quds Force and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, the Treasury Department said.

The entities "have generated hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of revenue from selling Iranian commodities, including to the Syrian government", the department said in a statement.

The killing of the US troops in a drone strike on Sunday marked the first US military losses since the conflict in Gaza broke out on Oct 7. Iran has denied any links to the attack and said it was not seeking an "expansion" of conflict in the Middle East.

Regional tensions have intensified since the conflict in Gaza broke out, drawing in groups in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Yemen.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Global South urged to make voices heard

G77 and China can play bigger role in tackling world challenges, experts say

By OTIATO OPALI
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At a time when the world is faced with multiple crises ranging from climate change to conflicts and inflation, calls have been made to emphasize the importance of the Group of 77 and China as a mechanism for developing countries to make their collective voices heard.

While commenting on the Third South Summit that concluded in Uganda's capital Kampala last week, Claver Gatete, executive secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, said if there was ever a time when multilateralism demanded more from the Global South, now is the time, and the leadership role of the G77 and China will become even more critical.

"As we prepare for the Summit of the Future later in the year, the unified voice of the G77 and China will be a critical factor for success. The principle of 'leave no one behind', which was the theme of this year's summit is more than the North-South divide. It is about the most basic and fundamental right and dignity of our people," Gatete said.

In a statement released following the Third South Summit, representatives from G77 and China stated that the organization, which comprises more than 130 countries, underscored their critical role in providing the Global South with the means to articulate their shared vision, promote their interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity.

"We are proud of the great legacy and achievements of the Group in defending and promoting the interests of the developing countries and in pursuing sustainable development and shared prosperity," the statement said.

The group also resolved to intensify its efforts to work collectively for the well-being and prosperity of the countries and the peoples of the South, for mutually beneficial cooperation and a world order that is just, equitable, stable and peaceful.

Yoweri Museveni, Uganda's president and the group's new

chairman, said the grouping remains united in its pursuit of collective interests at the global level and must ensure that priorities of the group are promoted and defended.

Solutions to challenges

Mohamad Maliki Bin Osman, minister in Singapore's Prime Minister's office and the second minister for foreign affairs in Singapore, said that as the largest grouping of developing countries at the UN, the G77 and China mechanism has a unique role in contributing to solutions toward the array of development challenges that they face.

He reiterated in a statement the significance of the group's position to amplify the voice of the South on these issues, and work with others within a rules-based multilateral framework to find collective solutions.

While commenting on the outcome of the summit, Zhou Pingjian, China's ambassador to Kenya, said that it was clear from the summit that in today's rapidly evolving world characterized by unprecedented transformations, the Global South countries are confronted with a complex international environment.

Despite this, he said that as the world's largest developing country, a dedicated partner of the Non-Aligned Movement and a member of the Global South, China remains committed to the collective advancement of all developing nations.

According to Gatete, Global South countries should support initiatives such as the implementation of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area agreement and the African Union's Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa as master plans for transforming member countries.

The G77 and China is the largest grouping of the Global South representing 80 percent of the planet's population. Gatete said that member countries should take advantage of this to articulate and promote their collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on all major international economic issues, and promote South-South cooperation for development.

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Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad (right) receives the credentials of the new ambassador of the United Arab Emirates to Syria, Hassan Ahmad al-Shihi, in Damascus on Tuesday. SANA VIA REUTERS

1st UAE envoy to Syria takes post after 13 years

DAMASCUS — Hassan Ahmad al-Shihi officially presented his credentials on Tuesday to Syria's Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad, becoming the first United Arab Emirates ambassador to Syria in 13 years.

During his meeting with Mekdad in the Syrian capital Damascus, al-Shihi conveyed to the Syrian side his commitment to enhancing bilateral relations between the two countries, the official Syrian news agency SANA reported.

Al-Shihi also pledged to work to strengthen cooperation and achieve

mutual progress between the two Arab states, the report said.

Mekdad expressed Syria's deep appreciation for the UAE's solidarity and support for Syria during challenging times.

The UAE embassy was reopened in Syria in late 2018 and a charge d'affaires has been in charge of the diplomatic mission since then. Al-Shihi arrived in Damascus on Monday, Syrian newspaper Al-Watan reported.

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad visited the Gulf country in March 2022, the first Arab country to

receive him since Syria's civil war erupted nearly 13 years ago. Following the Feb 6, 2023, earthquake that killed more than 50,000 in Türkiye and about 8,000 in Syria, the UAE sent dozens of planes loaded with aid to Syria.

In May, the 22-member Arab League agreed to reinstate Syria, ending a 12-year suspension and taking another step toward bringing Assad back into the fold. Assad, who visited the UAE twice since 2022, took part in the Arab League summit in Saudi Arabia in May.

Regional powerhouse Saudi Ara-

bia, which last year reached an agreement with rival Iran to restore bilateral ties under China's mediation, has opened the door for possible dialogue with Damascus, especially on humanitarian issues.

Al-Watan reported that Riyadh would be sending an ambassador to Damascus soon.

Al-Shihi's arrival came as Syria is in the grip of a severe economic crisis, part of it as a result of the conflict that has killed half a million people, displaced millions of others and left large parts of the country destroyed. Western sanctions on the war-torn country have led to Syria's severe economic crisis.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

GLOBAL LENS



Left: Lunar New Year decorations are displayed at a street stall in Chinatown in Singapore on Jan 26. ROSLAN RAHMAN / AFP Right: A child holding a lion toy interacts with a Chinese lion dance performer during a new year parade in Los Angeles on Jan 27. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Traditional dragon dance performers showcase their moves to crowds of spectators at a shopping mall in Kuala Lumpur on Jan 16 as part of Lunar New Year celebrations. CHONG YOON CHUNG / XINHUA

SPRING FESTIVAL FOR ALL



Traditional Lunar New Year celebrations held worldwide

The Year of the Dragon, according to the traditional Chinese calendar, begins on Feb 10, 2024.

As the Lunar New Year approaches, cultural events and items auspiciously themed in line with the fifth of the 12 Chinese zodiac signs adorn celebrations worldwide.

China looks forward to celebrating the new year with the world and hopes all civilizations will live in harmony and prosper together, a Chinese foreign ministry spokeswoman said in December.

Spokeswoman Mao Ning made the remarks at a daily press briefing when asked to comment on the fact that the 78th UN General Assembly has adopted a resolution by consensus to list the Lunar New Year as a UN floating holiday.

"Some rough estimates suggest that the festival is a public holiday in almost 20 countries and is celebrated in various ways by about one-fifth of humanity," Mao said.

Traditional celebration activities are organized in nearly 200 countries and regions. The festival has become a global cultural event, bringing joy to people around the world, she added.

Mao said that the Lunar New Year symbolizes joy, harmony and peace, and its Chinese name "Spring Festival" conveys the greetings and warmth of the spring season, and the festival embodies the core values of harmony, love and peace in Chinese culture.

"We look forward to celebrating the Spring Festival with the world and hope all civilizations will live in harmony, prosper together and engage in exchanges and mutual learning, and that people of all countries will enjoy better mutual understanding and friendship and work together to build a community with a shared future for humankind," Mao said.



From top: A teacher from the Confucius Institute at Philadelphia University in Jordan holds up a piece of Chinese paper cutting at a Spring Festival cultural event in Amman, Jordan, on Jan 16. MOHAMMAD ABU GHOSH / XINHUA Children hold on to Chinese dragon decorations at a temple near Kuala Lumpur on Jan 26. MOHD FIRDAUS / GETTY IMAGES

From top: Children pose with the Chinese character "fu", which means "good fortune", during a cultural event at the University of Luxembourg on Jan 28. ZHAO DINGZHE / XINHUA A man views Chinese dragon-themed items at the State Museum of the History of Religion in St. Petersburg, Russia, on Jan 19. IRINA MOTINA / XINHUA

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

BUSINESS

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Provinces bullish on growth this year

By OUYANG SHIJIA in Beijing, and ZHOU LIHUA and LIU KUN in Wuhan

Most provincial-level regions in China have set their 2024 economic growth targets at above 5 percent, reflecting collective confidence in the nation's economic prospects and hinting at a year of steady recovery.

Analysts expect China to set an annual growth target of around 5 percent for 2024, similar to the previous year, which will help boost business confidence and stabilize expectations.

While a slump in the property sector will likely drag down economic growth, they said any GDP growth target of around 5 percent would be achievable this year given strong fiscal policy support and the country's intensified efforts to foster new productive forces.

As of Tuesday, 31 provincial-level regions on the Chinese mainland had released their latest government work reports.

"The 31 provincial-level regions have set their annual GDP targets at 4.5 percent to 8 percent this year, with the weighted average standing at 5.4 percent," said Xiong Yuan, chief economist at Guosheng Securities.

"China will likely set its economic growth goal in early March at around 5 percent this year, with economically strong regions playing a key role in driving economic recovery."

Central Hubei province, which enjoyed robust growth of 6 percent last year, has retained the ambitious 6 percent growth target this year as well.

The southern coastal province of Guangdong, and East China's Jiangsu province, the top two economically strong provinces, have set their annual economic growth goals at 5 percent and above 5 percent, respectively.

Citing those regions' latest government work reports, Xiong said most regions have highlighted the importance of fostering productive forces, pledging more efforts to intensify support for technological innovation and accelerate the building of a modern industrial system.

According to its latest government work report, Hubei will intensify efforts to make breakthroughs in emerging technologies including high-end artificial intelligence chips, intelligent numerical control machine tools and high-end medical equipment.

With a key focus on nurturing new productive forces and accelerating the advancement of new industrialization, the province will boost development in areas such as life sciences, AI large language models, cutting-edge materials and future energy while accelerating development of the digital economy.

Looking ahead, Guangdong aims to construct a more internationally competitive modern industrial system this year.

The focus will be on developing emerging industries such as integrated circuits, new energy storage, cutting-edge materials, ultra-high-definition displays, biomanufacturing and commercial aerospace.

Feng Jianlin, chief economist at Beijing FOST Economic Consulting Co, said the economically strong provinces, with their robust innovative capacities and ongoing efforts to deepen reforms and opening-up, will continue to play an important role in supporting China's overall economic growth this year.

"We believe an annual growth target of around 5 percent will be achievable this year, given China's continued recovery trend, anticipated improvement in services and employment, steady growth in people's incomes and consumption, and accelerated growth in investment," Feng said.

Contact the writers at ouyangshijia@chinadaily.com.cn



Visitors participate in a promotional event held by Douyin, known as TikTok overseas, in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TikTok reenters Indonesia with GoTo deal

By FAN FEIFEI fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

Short-video app TikTok, owned by Chinese tech company ByteDance, has completed its deal to take control of Tokopedia, an e-commerce unit of Indonesia's biggest internet and tech firm PT GoTo Gojek Tokopedia Tbk.

Industry experts called this a key move, saying it will allow TikTok to restart what is a fast-growing online shopping business in the Southeast Asian country.

GoTo said late on Wednesday that TikTok has finished a deal agreed last December to buy 75.01 percent stake in Tokopedia for \$840 million from the conglomerate.

Under the deal, the business of TikTok Shop, TikTok's e-commerce service, in Indonesia will be integrated into the enlarged Tokopedia entity.

The move came after TikTok halted its online retail operations in Indonesia as the country banned e-commerce transactions on social media platforms in September 2023, citing the need to protect local small merchants and users' data.

"Today marks the completion of a partnership with TikTok that will continue to bring benefits to Indonesia and its MSMEs (micro, small and medium-sized enterprises). It is also a big step forward for GoTo Group," said the latter's CEO Patrick Walujo in a statement.

TikTok said it views this moment as a significant milestone in its commitment to contribute to Indonesia, local MSMEs and the growth of digi-

tal economy with GoTo as a partner.

As previously announced, TikTok has committed to investing over \$1.5 billion over the long term to provide future funding required by the business without additional dilution to GoTo.

GoTo benefits from the growth of the enlarged entity and remains an ecosystem partner to Tokopedia, through its digital financial services via GoTo Financial and on-demand services via Gojek.

TikTok, which began rolling out its e-commerce service in Indonesia in 2021, has made forays into the United Kingdom, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam. It launched TikTok Shop in the United States in September. The service enables users to find and buy directly products featured in livestreaming broadcasts and short videos.

Indonesia is TikTok's second-largest market with 113 million users, just behind the US, which has 116.5 million TikTok users, according to data analysis company DataReportal.

Zhang Zhouping, an independent analyst who has been tracking the cross-border e-commerce sector for more than a decade, said, "TikTok's reentry into Indonesia is of great significance for the company given that Indonesia serves as a very important overseas market among TikTok's overall business layout in Southeast Asian countries."

Data from market research firm Statista showed that the penetration rate of e-commerce in Indonesia is expected to reach 85.5 percent in 2027, with the number of e-com-

merce users amounting to 244.7 million. The revenue from Indonesia's e-commerce sector will exceed \$67 billion by then.

Zhang said, "As a social media and short video platform, TikTok has huge data flows, which lays a solid foundation for the platform to get involved in cross-border e-commerce."

However, it needs to strengthen the construction of supply chain systems and continuously adjust its development strategies in accordance with local laws and regulations, Zhang added.

Moreover, TikTok is facing intensified competition from established players in overseas markets such as Amazon and Alibaba Group's AliExpress, and some emerging cross-border platforms including Temu and Shein, which are ratcheting up efforts to expand their global presence, he said.

Temu, a cross-border online marketplace owned by Chinese online discount PDD Holdings, has witnessed a surge in popularity among overseas shoppers. Launched in the US in September 2022, Temu offers discounted products shipped directly from China, and is now present in more than 40 countries in North America, Europe, Asia and Oceania.

Chen Tao, an analyst at internet consultancy Analysys in Beijing, said Chinese online retailers are accelerating their layout abroad to seek new sources of revenue, as growth in the domestic e-commerce sector is slowing, adding they need to grasp the demand from, and preferences of, local consumers, and place an emphasis on localized operations.

ByteDance's platform takes on US e-tailers

By BELINDA ROBINSON belindarobinson@chinadailyusa.com

TikTok, the wildly popular video-sharing platform, is attempting to challenge e-commerce giants such as Amazon of the United States and Shein and Temu of China with its own e-commerce shop that sells made-in-China goods to Americans directly via its app.

The e-commerce shop offers everything from clothes to electronics to kitchen gadgets and aims to tap into the potential buying power of TikTok's 150 million users in the US. The company hopes the move will enable it to achieve a goal of \$17.5 billion in merchandise volume this year, according to Bloomberg.

But Z. John Zhang, professor of marketing at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, sounded a note of caution over a company's ability to immediately use its base from one thing (like video sharing) to succeed in another sector, such as the sale of goods.

"It is not yet totally clear that a large customer base built for some other reasons can be converted into profitable retail customers," Zhang said.

TikTok, owned by Beijing-based ByteDance, which has \$80 billion in revenue, first launched its shop in Saudi Arabia and in the United Kingdom in 2022. It is also available in Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Indonesia.

It has been successful in Southeast Asian markets such as Indonesia, where it has more than 100

million active users. It was set to make \$20 billion in global gross merchandise sales in 2023.

The US version of the shop was first available in September 2023. Analysts said that it is clear that TikTok is positioning itself to take on Amazon, and Chinese-owned companies Temu, Shein, Shopee and Alibaba's AliExpress, which are already popular in the US.

However, those brands are a few steps ahead, as their e-commerce platforms have already gained momentum. And since 2019, Amazon has had a livestreaming service that allows for items to be sold through live videos.

While it is yet to be seen if the in-app marketplace can rival the biggest in the business, as of October, TikTok Shop was selling about \$7 million worth of products daily in the US, The Wall Street Journal reported.

Users in the US can buy goods while scrolling through an endless number of short videos and livestreams. They simply click a button on the video that leads them to a link to purchase.

Buttons that connect to the shop also are on the app's home screen and allow shoppers to buy products without leaving the app. That, it is hoped, will lead people to buy goods impulsively, according to analysts.

"With TikTok Shop, we're giving people a place to experience the joy of discovering and purchasing new products without leaving the app," the company said in a statement.

The tactic of entertaining people and encouraging them to shop has been successful for Douyin, the

domestic Chinese version of TikTok and JD.

Content creators and influencers also are able to review or market the merchandise and receive a commission on the goods sold — much like a similar program by Amazon.

George Yip, emeritus professor at Imperial College London and a distinguished visiting professor at Northeastern University in Boston, said he believes that TikTok is simply following a tried-and-tested method of how apps operate in China.

"What's different about China is that they have these all-in-one apps," Yip told China Daily. "That is their main focus, such as Tencent's WeChat, which is now bringing people in to purchase as well. The Chinese are very good at all-in-one apps, and (TikTok is) simply trying to follow that practice in the US."

The TikTok shop is linked to third-party platforms like Shopify, Salesforce and Zendesk, according to Reuters.

It is trying to lure the same US customers who spent a record \$38 billion online in the US during Cyber Week — the five days from Thanksgiving on Nov 23 to Cyber Monday on Nov 27.

But it will have an uphill battle competing with Amazon. During the same timeframe, it had an extended Black Friday and Cyber Monday promotion, which led customers worldwide to order more than a billion items, giving Amazon "record-breaking" sales.

Yip said: "Amazon, of course, has the advantage of its distribution system and warehouses. So that's hard to beat."

Fiscal policy aims to whet consumption

Moves also target boosting economic recovery momentum, livelihoods

By LIU ZHIHUA liuzhihua@chinadaily.com.cn

The Ministry of Finance will moderately step up proactive fiscal policy adjustments this year while improving fiscal governance efficiency and effectiveness in order to expand domestic demand and boost economic recovery momentum, Wang Dongwei, vice-minister of finance, said on Thursday.

Experts said China can increase central government spending and enhance policy outcomes, with a focus on promoting national agendas, including sci-tech innovation.

Wang said at a news conference in Beijing that China will maintain an "appropriate level" of fiscal expenditure this year to send positive signals, and properly coordinate government investment scales to amplify investment dividends.

"We will strive to expand domestic demand through effects regarding two aspects — investment and consumption," Wang said, adding that the ministry will scale up effective investment and stimulate consumption.

The ministry will make good use of funds raised from Treasury bonds, issue a certain scale of local government special-purpose bonds and appropriately increase the scale of central government budget-based investment this year, he said.

Focusing on stimulating buying sentiment, the ministry will further promote new consumption growth points in sectors like culture, tourism, education and eldercare, he said, adding that social security, transfer payments and other adjustments will also be strengthened and incomes of urban and rural residents will be raised in order to improve people's willingness and capacity to consume.

The vice-minister stressed that the ministry will adopt more powerful and effective measures this year to promote construction of a modern industrial system led by sci-tech innovation, and vigorously develop new productivity drivers.

Supporting the accelerated construction of a modern industrial system will be a key task for the ministry this year, he said, adding it will make good use of policy tools, such as fiscal subsidies, loan interest subsidies and tax incentives to focus on key indus-

trial chains, such as new-generation information technology and integrated circuits, and remedy bottlenecks associated with basic products, core technologies and key software.

The ministry will also give full play to the functions of government investment funds, such as those for manufacturing upgrading and advanced manufacturing promotion, to attract social capital to invest in key areas of the manufacturing sector in a market-based manner in order to cultivate emerging sectors, he said.

The vice-minister said the country will increase transfer payments to less privileged regions to secure people's basic livelihoods, public sector salaries and government operations at the grassroots level. It will also optimize tax and fee policies by making them more accurate, target-oriented and effective.

In addition, the country will continue to improve fiscal policy quality and efficiency through more efforts on six major fronts — practicing governmental frugality, optimizing fiscal expenditure structure, enhancing performance management, enforcing financial discipline, enhancing fiscal sustainability and strengthening policy coordination, he added.

The ministry said China's fiscal revenue rose 6.4 percent year-on-year to over 21 trillion yuan (\$2.92 trillion) in 2023, while fiscal expenditure grew by 5.4 percent on a yearly basis to 27.46 trillion yuan.

Fiscal spending on science and technology increased 7.9 percent last year. It expanded from 832.7 billion yuan in 2018 to around 1.06 trillion yuan in 2023, with an average annual growth of 6.4 percent.

Chang Haizhong, executive director of corporates at rating agency Fitch Bohua, said he expects China's fiscal policy in 2024 will be more positively expansionary, with increased expenditures tilted toward major national strategic projects and people's livelihoods.

Feng Lin, a senior analyst at Golden Credit Ratings, said that to balance promoting growth and preventing risks, local infrastructure investment this year will likely rely largely on local government special-purpose bond funds, central fiscal support and policy-based financial instruments.



An image shows the construction site of a bridge on the Xi'an-Chongqing High-speed Railway in Chongqing last week. The railway is being built by State builders including China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Cross-border RMB use surges in Hainan

Hainan province recorded 326.8 billion yuan (\$46 billion) of cross-border renminbi transactions in 2023, representing a 122.9 percent year-on-year increase, said local authorities on Wednesday. It marked the first time the province had seen its cross-border RMB use account for over half of its total cross-border settlements in both domestic and foreign currencies, said Huang Ge, deputy head of the Hainan branch of

the People's Bank of China.

Hongqi vehicle sales soar in Jan

Hongqi, a car brand under China's leading automaker FAW Group Co Ltd, sold more than 40,000 vehicles in January, up 82.9 percent year-on-year, the group said on Thursday. The brand alone recorded accumulated sales of 370,000 units last year, up 29.5 percent compared with 2022.

XINHUA

BUSINESS



'Building blocks' pile up for urban renewal, better livelihoods

Major builders shouldering aged community redevelopment showcase cutting-edge green construction techniques

Employees of China State Construction International Holdings Ltd supervise the installation of housing modules at the Huapichang Hutong No 8 Building redevelopment project in Beijing in January. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By ZHUANG QIANG
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Being able to go back home soon is always good news to be told. And Jin Guilian, a resident of Beijing's Xicheng district, was told such news last week after three months of "long wait", as redevelopment of the No 8 building in the Huapichang Hutong Community — where she and her 19 neighbors had been living in for decades — will soon be completed.

In fact, for a time-worn housing project established in the 1970s, a redevelopment period of only three months is not generally deemed by builders as a long wait, considering there is tons of work to finish before the new building is finally erected, but for the resettling residents, "it's never too early to get back to the new house".

As transformation unfolds across the capital city, many old residential communities like Huapichang Hutong are undergoing a facelift. According to an urban renewal plan released by the Beijing government in 2022, more than 160 million square meters of aged community area will be redeveloped and renovated by 2025.

In the plan, sustainability and environmentally friendly building are highlighted by the government for developers and builders concerned. In particular, large-scale demolition and construction of projects is prohibited to avoid dis-

turbing normal social operations and people's daily lives.

And when it was Huapichang Hutong's turn last year, what its redevelopment undertaker China State Construction International Holdings Ltd (CSCI), a unit of China State Construction Engineering Corp, was facing were some real hard nuts to crack — a location in an alley near the central urban Second Ring Road, a sustainable building commitment to fulfill and an old No 8 Building of which every supportive facility is old.

"We thought it would be a project lasting for years, which, if it were the real case, would have triggered piles of complaints, because many of us living in this building are seniors who are not supposed to go through a whole resettlement process," said Liu Qingshun and his wife, residents of the No 8 Building.

"In the past three months, we almost came back from the temporary accommodation to the construction site every day. And day by day, we found something unfamiliar taking place in the community we are most familiar with," Liu said.

It is indeed not hard to notice the difference on the construction site of the project, as in the Huapichang Hutong community, gone are the noisy construction sites with flying mud and dust clouds. Instead, cranes gently piece together housing modules that are all set and well-decorated, creating a serene

The project team had been prioritizing green, low-carbon and energy-efficient principles during construction, and 90 percent of the work was done in factories."

Tao Yang, project manager of the No 8 Building redevelopment

environment in the quiet alley.

What CSCI did to echo the call of the urban renewal plan was to seamlessly blend advanced technology with the finesse of reconstructing a building as if it were a giant's delicate game of building blocks.

"Modular integrated construction, what we call MiC, is a greener way of building homes. Think of it like assembling parts in a factory before bringing them to the construction site," said Tao Yang, project manager of the No 8 Building redevelopment.

"Compared to traditional methods, MiC shortens construction periods by over 60 percent. In the case of the Huapichang Hutong project, we achieved an 80 percent in actual construction time," Tao added.

With a total construction area of 374 square meters, the five-story residential building accommodates 20 units. The builder prepared 55 concrete modular units in advance to ensure the project was on track to finish upon schedule in 90 days —

way faster than the estimated 15 months with traditional methods.

"The project team had been prioritizing green, low-carbon and energy-efficient principles during construction, and 90 percent of the work was done in factories. Ultimately, we not only managed to reduce material waste by 25 percent, but also cut overall construction waste by 75 percent," said Tao.

"Building blocks" though the whole on-site construction process seems to be, there were tons of coordinating work among various building processes such as prefabrication, transport and installation, which, in this case, were all carried out by CSCI's C-SMART platform — a digital management system that connects data across design, factories, logistics, construction sites and installation.

"The C-SMART platform enables real-time and intelligent control of the entire construction process, allowing managers to oversee module transport and coordinate warehouse, transit depot and

construction site operations. It played a very important role in urgent project construction like the Huapichang Hutong, while alleviating pressure on surrounding traffic and the environment," said Guo Yang, C-SMART manager of the project.

With a due completion date before Chinese Lunar New Year, construction workers are putting finishing touches to the brand new No 8 Building, where making indoor visits is now safe and permitted. Some of its residents took the opportunity to have a glance at the new homes they are about to resettle in. Some even brought festive decorations during the visits to prepare for Spring Festival gathering.

"My new home has excellent light and ventilation, and it is such a relief that finally there is an elevator in this building. My neighbors and I are all satisfied and extremely happy with our new house," said resident Jin.

Like the Huapichang Hutong project of the CSCI, projects concerning livelihoods nationwide have long been participated in by major Chinese builders, as "the urgency, significance and other special points of notice of such projects call for years of building experience and high efficiency in fields such as logistics and prefabrication", said Long Chaocan, an investment consultant with China Galaxy Securities Co Ltd.

"Participation of major Chinese builders in urban renewal projects demonstrates their supportive role in helping drive the nation's socio-economic development and promoting livelihoods. This, in turn, offers them better experience and credentials while bidding for similar projects overseas, especially those in the markets involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, where such demand has been booming in recent years due to growing urbanization," Long said.

In recent years, the nation's infrastructure edge has gained way much reputation in BRI economies than before, not only with landmark projects, such as the new central business district rising in the desert area of Egypt, but also with those elementary projects which, however, are necessary to local livelihoods.

A project in Papua New Guinea explains it well. Located in the Kila Kila village near Port Moresby, the Butuka Academy, completed by the CSCCEC in 2018 under the BRI, has become a key educational infrastructure for local primary and secondary school students who had difficulty attending school in the past.

With the voices of students reading aloud across the village, the largest multi-functional school, which has the most advanced facilities in the South Pacific, has indeed become a marvelous credential of Chinese building enterprises overseas.



Left: An Chunhua, a resident of Huapichang Hutong No 8 Building, decorates her newly redeveloped house with a festive paper cutting on window in Beijing in January.

Right: Employees of China State Construction International Holdings Ltd load completed housing modules to be installed at the Huapichang Hutong No 8 Building project at a facility in Zhuhai, Guangdong province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



BUSINESSFOCUS



People flock to a big screen for the livestreaming of a rocket launch event, in Haiyang, Shandong province, in January. LI ZHENG / XINHUA

Cities mobilize high-tech for improved development

Hubei lake makes strong comeback, while Haiyang industry 'far out'

BEIJING — Chinese cities are pursuing high-quality development in various ways, but new technologies are a consistent choice and have already helped some explore smarter, greener and more innovative paths.

Huangshi, an industrial city in central China's Hubei province, has reaped the benefits of intelligent technologies.

Mining may conjure up images of a dirty, labor-intensive and dangerous sector. But that is not the reality in Huangshi, where mining relies on unmanned machines, remote monitoring technologies and intelligent coordination systems.

Dressed in a blue work suit and white shirt, Daye Iron Mine worker Yuan Jianjun sits in front of several computers in a spacious command center. His eyes are glued to the screens, which show live images of underground mining machines and real-time data from sensors placed inside the mine and on the tools in operation.

In the past, Yuan toiled underground in a very dusty environment amid the deafening din of heavy machinery. "It used to be a challenging job both physically and mentally," he said.

The coal miner, who is in his mid-forties, underwent additional training and then resumed his career as a white-collar worker. Now, machines are controlled remotely from an office environment to collect minerals.

Tech support has reduced labor intensity and improved workplace safety, enabling more mining sector employees like Yuan to work in a safer and healthier environment than previous generations.

"It has become a decent job," Yuan said.

Technology is also driving green development in Xiongan New Area. Local tourist destination Baiyangdian Lake offers the public a glimpse into how cutting-edge technologies are assisting the ecological conservation of Huangshi, characterized as a "future city."

Many Chinese people have a special place in their hearts for Baiyangdian, the largest freshwater wetland in the region. In several famous literary works from the 1940s, the lake was described as flourishing with reed beds and towering lotus fields, and offering an abundant harvest from the water.

Between the 1960s and 1980s, however, it severely suffered from industrial pollution. Wastewater and chemicals polluted the water and lake beds, decimating aquatic life, with the lake nearly drying up in the 1990s due to scorching weather. Habitat loss and human interference then caused the lake's avian population to drastically decline.

Baiyangdian's rehabilitation and protection activities have improved since Xiongan New Area was established in 2017.

Tech companies and academic

organizations have been pushing to develop monitoring devices using new modalities. People who work near the lake have deployed drones and carried out unmanned boat patrols with real-time video feedback in the 360-square-kilometer lake area. The 5G network's high speed and low latency, combined with virtual reality equipment, enable people to inspect the lake's surface visually and obtain data in real time.

Since 2019, the lake's new technology system has significantly decreased manual labor and increased work efficiency, enabling workers to identify pollutants more quickly and accurately.

Increasing species of wildlife are returning to Baiyangdian as the water quality improves, and the lake has steadily evolved into a haven for lotuses, reeds and abundant fish species.

Another beneficiary of new technologies is Haiyang in East China's Shandong province. The small coastal city used to rely on the textile sector, but it is now attempting to capitalize on a booming commercial rocket launch industry to increase its competitiveness.

The city made national headlines in early September when a private rocket maker completed a launch from off the city's coastline. The spectacular launch attracted thousands of spectators to an onshore viewing site.

It was the sixth sea-based rocket launch from the location. On June 5, 2019, a Long March rocket blasted off from a mobile offshore platform at Haiyang Port, marking China's first space launch at sea.

Spacecraft launches have long been the domain of China's State-owned aerospace companies, but private space firms have emerged since a government policy was implemented in 2015 to encourage commercial enterprises in the industry.

"There are limited launch pads available for commercial rockets, and the sea spaceport in Haiyang is a perfect complement to land sites," said Orienspace CEO Bu Xiangwei.

Orienspace is one of China's newest launch startups and is headquartered in Haiyang. The company said that the total cost of a sea launch can be 10 percent less than a land launch, and the preparation period can be shortened by 50 percent.

The local government in Haiyang also aims to establish an entire industrial chain to tap into innovation-driven economic growth potential. Since 2020, it has stepped up its efforts to build Haiyang Oriental Aerospace Port, which covers an area of over 34 sq km and includes an industrial manufacturing park for rocket makers and supporting firms, a satellite data center and a tourism zone for fans of astronomy and space travel.

Haiyang's aerospace ambitions are both lofty and down-to-earth. Facilities such as aerospace museums, space-themed hotels and restaurants are also being planned. The local government hopes that space-related tourism will also improve the livelihoods of people on the ground.

XINHUA

Digitalization breathes new life into culture, tourism in Shaanxi

XI'AN — A captivating 14-second jump-cut video showing an actress seamlessly changing into various roles from traditional Chinese opera has rapidly gained attention among netizens.

With over a million views and tens of thousands of likes, the video introduced her online fans to the rare national intangible cultural heritage known as *Han Diao Guangguang*. This localized style of Qinqiang Opera from Shaanxi province can be traced to the Song Dynasty (960-1279).

The distinctive genre, prevalent in the city of Hanzhong, was officially included on the national intangible cultural heritage protection list in 2006.

Li Yazhi, from the *Han Diao Guangguang* Inheritance and Development Center in Hanzhong, is the creator behind the recent viral success. She was first inspired to make short videos to promote the traditional opera in 2022, and has already amassed over 14,000 followers on Douyin, a popular short-video platform.

"The ancient opera has found a young audience online," Li said. While initially drawn by the performative spectacle of opera, she said her fans quickly began to ask for more insight and knowledge about the practice itself.

The era of short video platforms offers huge potential for practitioners and inheritors of intangible cultural heritage. A report issued by Douyin earlier this year reveals that there were an average of 19,000 intangible cultural heritage live broadcasts every day on Douyin as of May 2023.

Digital technology can help overcome spatial limitations while creating new modes and ways for communication, experiences, cultural protection and inheritance in the cultural and tourism industries, said Li Biao, deputy dean of the School of Journalism and Communication, Renmin University of China.

China has introduced a series of policies aimed at fostering and regulating the development of emerging digital business models in the cultural and tourism space, with the hope of igniting digital exploration across the industry.

In October, the Ministry of Cul-

XINHUA



A scene from 3D Qinqiang Opera film *Three Drops of Blood*. XINHUA

China's 'porcelain capital' shines in livestreaming spotlight amid hot demand

NANCHANG — Holding a smartphone, 31-year-old Wei Lingyan maneuvers her way past several hundred stalls selling porcelain items, showcasing the goods to fans via a livestreaming platform.

"Welcome, new friends! Feel free to let me know your preferences," said Wei, a native of Jingdezhen, the renowned "porcelain capital" located in East China's Jiangxi province.

Wei has embraced the role of a "walk-streamer", a novel undertaking that is gaining traction on Taoxichuan Ceramic Art Avenue in Jingdezhen. Since launching her social media account last year, she has attracted over 5,000 fans, achieving monthly sales ranging from 150,000 yuan (\$20,950) to 200,000 yuan.

Duan Haonan, head of the entrepreneurship business unit at the Taoxichuan management committee, said the emergence of walk-streamers has opened new sales channels for ceramic stall owners.

In the first 10 months of 2023,

livestreaming e-commerce sales exceeded 2.2 trillion yuan in China, surging 58.9 percent year-on-year, driving the growth of total online retail sales by 7.5 percentage points.

The influence of livestreaming is also evident in Jingdezhen, with over 10,000 livestream hosts engaged in the ceramics industry. Last year, they collectively generated approximately 7 billion yuan in sales.

Another such marketer, Momo, oversees six livestreaming accounts. She has amassed a fanbase surpassing 1 million. Her livestreaming rooms generate a staggering annual revenue of some 200 million yuan.

"In addition to ceramic sales, my livestreaming sessions also delve into promoting ceramics culture. I often invite inheritors of intangible cultural heritage to share the stories behind ceramics," she said.

Jingdezhen's history of ceramics dates back over 2,000 years. Its past role as an official and imperial kiln has elevated the art of porcelain



A seller promotes porcelain items via livestreaming during an expo in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province, in October. MA NING / XINHUA

making to unprecedented heights.

Nowadays, the internet connects Jingdezhen's traditional ceramic culture with international elements

and fashion trends, creating new opportunities for the handmade porcelain industry.

At 1 am, Emrah Hakan Caliskan, a

Turkish online influencer based in Jingdezhen, stepped into a live broadcast room at a local ceramics industrial park, introducing new products to consumers worldwide.

On the smartphone screen before him, comments from customers kept rolling in, including: "Engrave my name on the bottom of the cup" or "Paint my pet on the front".

Caliskan's wife, Cheng Linyao, is a municipal-level inheritor of porcelain drawings in Jingdezhen. "We integrate Sino-Turkish culture into our ceramic works," said Caliskan, showcasing a teacup. "Turkish people often use this geometric pattern decoration in architecture and clothing, and it has a unique charm when painted on blue-and-white porcelain."

During the 2023 China Jingdezhen International Ceramic Expo, his ceramic works gained favor from fans from many countries.

While Jingdezhen represents ancient kilns and millennia-old porcelain craftsmanship for many, it

also represents a realm of vibrancy for Liu Nan, head of the Phonbay Training Institute.

As night fell, a group of young people displayed their singing, dancing and musical instrument skills through livestreaming from Taoxichuan Ceramic Art Avenue.

They hail from the Phonbay institute, which was established in December 2021. Each of their roadshows draws approximately 100,000 viewers, with some watching online and others attending on site.

"I hope both domestic and international visitors can appreciate not only the static beauty of our ceramic culture, but also its dynamic essence," Liu said.

"In this place, everyone pursues what they truly desire, and this is not limited to pottery. Each person can discover a lifestyle and approach to work that suits them," Wei said.

XINHUA

COMMENT

Editorials

Confrontation the result of competition taken to excess at expense of cooperation

In a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations on Tuesday, United States National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan once again elaborated on the current administration's approach to relations with China. Underlining the idea that constructive engagement with China is in the national interest of the US, he reiterated the White House's commitment to the "3C framework" for the US' China policy — "collaborate, compete, confront".

It is inspiring that the two sides are talking more about collaboration on such subjects as climate, fentanyl and military-to-military communications. But it is worth noting that the competitive aspects of bilateral relations may get unnecessarily confrontational as a result of Washington's attempts to throttle China's technological advancement.

To deny China access to advanced chips, the US has launched expansive embargoes on chips as well as related equipment, technology and investments. It is finalizing a new decree aimed at excluding Chinese users from US cloud services, which it is claimed enable the latter to access advanced chips otherwise unavailable to them to train artificial intelligence models.

Apparently, more is to come. US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo has just identified one more "loophole" to plug. Also on Tuesday, at an Atlantic Council roundtable, the US commerce chief urged people to keep an eye on electric vehicles from China.

"Forget about trade. Forget about tariffs. Forget about the economics of it. I'm just talking national security," said Raimondo. "A sophisticated EV, and then an autonomous vehicle, is filled with thousands of semiconductors and sensors. It collects a huge amount of information about the driver, the location

of the vehicle, the surroundings of the vehicle."

In her eyes, and those of others, EVs should be considered as part of the front line of the fight to frustrate Chinese technological progress. While taking advantage of all available alliances and partnerships to build "small yards with high fences", the Joe Biden administration is making all-of-government efforts to make sure they are impenetrable fortresses.

On Wednesday, the US Department of Defense released an updated roster of "Chinese military companies", operating directly or indirectly in the US. A dozen more names were added to the blacklist. Those firms allegedly constitute "national security risks" to the US.

But not only have such US companies as Nvidia suffered dearly as a result of these moves, so too have those of some of the US' allies. Republic of Korea media have found a significant drop in their countries' exports of semiconductors. The ROK semiconductor industry may become the "biggest victim" in the China-US competition, they said.

The ever-expansive interpretation of "national security" by the US is a damaging form of trade distortion, as well as national security risk. After all, over time, the negative feelings about each other accumulated through malicious competition will inevitably undermine cooperation and lead to confrontation.

Both Sullivan and Raimondo acknowledge the need and benefits of normal economic and trade exchanges with China. On that basis they should seek to make 3C a mnemonic in Washington, for "cooperation prevents competition from becoming confrontation", which would otherwise lead to a 3D scenario of detriment, damage and disaster.

Wellington should measure twice before cutting

The foreign and defense ministers of New Zealand and Australia held their first-ever "2+2" meeting on Thursday in Melbourne. Since New Zealand's cooperation with the AUKUS alliance was apparently on the agenda, it has raised concerns. Questions are being asked about whether New Zealand will hold firm to its nonnuclear stance and what are intentions of the trilateral military group in trying to draw New Zealand into its fold.

When the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia formed AUKUS in 2021 with the main purpose of helping Australia acquire a fleet of nuclear-powered submarines in response to "regional security concerns", New Zealand seemed comfortable about the fact that it was not party to the pact.

However, since a coalition of right-wing parties took power in November last year, New Zealand's stance on AUKUS has begun to change as its new government wants to join pillar two of the AUKUS agreement, which reportedly centers on advanced technology sharing, including artificial intelligence and cyberwarfare, and military interoperability.

New Zealand may have calculated that its participation in pillar two of AUKUS, not pillar one that focuses on Australia's acquisition of nuclear submarine technology, can help it get closer to its Western allies in a rapidly changing world environment while still maintaining its own nonnuclear stance.

But if so, it is being naive as the geopolitical inter-

tion of AUKUS cannot be more obvious. The group has been formed for the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology, materials and know-how. New Zealand should recognize that it not only undermines the international nonproliferation regime, but also fuels a regional arms race and imperils peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

Given the grave regional and global impacts of the AUKUS nuclear deal, the group has drawn worldwide opprobrium and opposition since its formation. Hence, New Zealand should think twice before accepting any invitation to join it. The US, of course, is keen to draw its Five-Eye partner into the military alliance to facilitate its bloc competition both regionally and globally. But such a prospect would not best serve the interests of New Zealand.

Unlike some Western countries that have aped each move taken by the US to contain China, New Zealand has maintained its strategic autonomy, and benefited from doing so. For more than a decade, China has remained the country's largest trading partner. Robust cooperation with China continues to create enormous trade, economic and job opportunities for New Zealand. It has everything to gain by maintaining its good relations with China.

Whatever role New Zealand is being solicited to play in joining AUKUS, it would no doubt cast a shadow on bilateral ties and even offset what has been achieved in advancing bilateral cooperation.

Statehood is right of Palestinian people

Shortly before his trip to the Middle East on Wednesday, UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron told Arab ambassadors at a Westminster reception on Monday that the United Kingdom is mulling recognition of a Palestinian state so that Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side in separate countries.

Although that proposal was greeted by Husam Zomlot, head of the Palestinian mission in London, as a "historic" change, as the UK's recognition of a Palestinian state would be "a contribution to a peaceful solution rather than an outcome".

Yet Cameron set very strict prerequisites for the UK's recognition of a Palestinian state, which he said the UK would then seek to persuade its allies to support — Hamas releasing all hostages and agreement by Israel and Hamas to a peace-oriented cease-fire.

Neither of those will be any easier to realize just because the UK is calling for them. The two conflicting parties' hatred against each other has been allowed to fester for so long that it has become ingrained. The UK has played an ugly role in this process by indulging Israel's continuous encroachment on the living space of Palestinians starting from the war in 1948, which has resulted in about 5.9 million Palestinians being displaced from their homes over the years.

Even if the two requisite conditions were met, the future Palestinian state envisioned by the UK government, according to Cameron's remarks, would be

nothing but a de facto proxy of the West. "We have a responsibility there because we should be starting to set out what a Palestinian state would look like, what it would comprise, how it would work".

Cameron and those like-minded Western politicians who are trying to hide their own agenda under their so-called two-state solution should be reminded that the real two-state solution the UN and the broad international community have agreed on is strictly stipulated. It envisions an independent State of Palestine alongside the State of Israel with their boundaries based on the 1967 lines and with East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state. The two should be equal with each other in every regard in international law. As an independent sovereign state, Palestine's sovereignty belongs to its people and no country has any legitimate power or right to dictate its internal affairs.

By implanting "authorities" recognized by the West, if not Israel, in the "Palestinian state" as Cameron seems to suggest, what the UK has essentially proposed will be a one-state reality akin to apartheid.

Currently, 139 of the 193 UN member states recognize Palestinian statehood. The Palestinian people have never compromised and will by no means sacrifice their statehood for the recognition of the UK and its allies. Statehood is what the Palestinians are entitled to and what is long overdue. It is not a gift that can be condescendingly given by any country.

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Washington has to look within to put an end to fentanyl crisis

The first meeting of the China-US Counternarcotics Working Group was held on Tuesday. For years, antidrug cooperation has become a point of contention in Sino-US relations, which is closely related to the uncontrolled proliferation of fentanyl-like substances in the United States. On the day of the meeting, officials in Oregon announced that due to the rampant spread of fentanyl, a state of emergency had been declared in the downtown area of Portland. According to data recently released by the US Drug Enforcement Administration, fentanyl is a leading cause of death among Americans aged 18 to 45.

The widespread prevalence of fentanyl in the US has various reasons. On the one hand, driven by financial interests, the crisis can be traced back to the overprescription of opioid painkillers in the 1990s and early 2000s. Pharmaceutical companies lobbied politicians for policy protection, pharmaceutical representatives encouraged doctors to prescribe

more such drugs, while pharmacies vigorously sold them, forming a complete chain of interests. This led to widespread opioid dependency and addiction, laying the groundwork for the crisis. On the other hand, the intensification of political polarization in the US in recent years has delayed legislation on combating trafficking of the potent synthetic opioid that is relatively easy and inexpensive to produce and its availability has increased exponentially in recent years, contributing to its widespread use.

The root cause of the fentanyl abuse crisis in the US lies in the country's failure of governance. Yet US policymakers, being unwilling to address that issue, habitually resort to shifting the blame and responsibility for the crisis onto others. Previous US administrations launched lawsuits and sanctions against some Chinese companies and individuals, while in the past few years the US government has adopted "the US is sick but let China take the medicine" approach, placing Chi-

nese companies and individuals on its entity list.

China, historically afflicted by the harm of drugs, has maintained a "zero tolerance" policy, rigorously cracking down on drug production, trafficking and various drug-related crimes. In May 2019, China became the first country globally to comprehensively control and regulate fentanyl-like substances, categorizing 25 different varieties, surpassing the 21 specified by the United Nations. According to US government sources, there have been no seizures of fentanyl-like substances from China since September 2019.

Sino-US antidrug cooperation can only help the US create external conditions to address related issues. But to truly end its fentanyl crisis, the US needs a multifaceted response including stricter regulation, harm reduction strategies, expanded access to addiction treatment, and efforts to address the social and economic factors that contribute to substance abuse.

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

Reform and opening-up still crucial to growth

The main players of China's economy are the millions of entrepreneurs with a pioneering and innovative spirit and the hard-working workers in all walks of life. The "running water" flowing from countless micro sources converges into the "vast ocean" of the world's second-largest economy.

After decades of rapid growth, the cost of labor, land and other resource factors in China has been rising, which is higher than that of many other developing countries.

In the current context of shrinking external demand and sluggish domestic demand, China must rely on reform and opening-up to solve the problem of its development lacking endogenous power and vitality. It should deepen the reform of State-owned enterprises to enhance their core functions and core competitiveness, and accelerate the implementation of a number of measures that support private enterprises in terms of market access, acquisition of factors,

and protection of rights and interests, to promote the development of the private economy.

It should steadily expand institutional openness in rules, regulations, management, and standards, and strive to create a law-based business environment. Various forms of local protection and market segmentation practices should be eliminated to facilitate the building of a unified market across the country.

— PEOPLE'S DAILY

What They Say

No grounds for India to be adversarial

In his dialogue with Indian university students on Tuesday, Indian Minister of External Affairs Subrahmanya Jaishankar told the younger generation of the world's most populous country although there is competition in diplomacy and influence between India and China, there is no need to be scared of the latter.

"India must learn to compete, not just with China, but with all," said Jaishankar. "We should have the mindset that foreign policy is about competition between rising powers."

Although competition is better than rivalry and conflict, it is cooperation and collaboration that should be the mainstay of relations between China and India. They are not only the world's two largest developing countries that are obliged to unite the Global South and promote the common development of the world, but also major players on the world stage, buttressing the multilateral international order with the United Nations at its center.

China-India relations have encountered some setbacks in recent years. That is not in the fun-

damental interests of either side. There are always some forces trying to provoke conflict between the two neighbors and create divisions in the region.

That's why Beijing highly values New Delhi's strategic autonomy on the world stage. New Delhi should approach bilateral ties and economic cooperation more objectively, showing more foresight and bearing the bigger picture in mind.

China and India clearly have greater common interests than differences. Their realization of common development and common prosperity has global significance. The two sides should support and care for each other's core concerns instead of consuming or being suspicious of each other.

The two nations should thus focus their energy and resources on their respective development and the improvement of people's livelihoods, and not let specific issues define the overall relationship. They can meet each other halfway and find a solution to the border issue that is acceptable to both parties.

To create an atmosphere that is conducive to mending bilateral ties, India should in the first place provide a fair, transparent and nondiscriminatory business environment for Chinese companies, and actively promote people-to-people exchanges between the two sides. That can help expand common interests and deepen peoples' mutual understanding, avoiding narrow nationalism, jingoism or brinkmanship from hijacking or distorting public opinions toward each other.

Stabilizing relations with India at a strategic height has always been a key task of China's neighborhood diplomacy. Dedicated to providing fair and law-based business and development environment for all foreign companies and talents, including those from India, China has never scapegoated India, or any other country, for its domestic issues, which is itself a fool's errand, and never joined a geopolitical bloc targeting India.

New Delhi has every reason to reciprocate that.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Tommy Suen and Kacee Ting Wong

Taiwan leader shouldn't be a puppet of US

Although Lai Ching-te has been elected the next leader of Taiwan, his pro-independence stance will further plunge the island into the vortex of Sino-US rivalry. Muddying the political waters further is some US politicians' elusive attempt to build "collective deterrence" against a manufactured delusion of the Chinese mainland's military threat to Taiwan.

That the pro-independence movement in Taiwan poses a serious threat to the core national interests of Beijing and the Chinese people as a whole is evident to all. "Taiwan independence" is regarded by Beijing as a serious threat to the Chinese nation.

Outgoing Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen's refusal to acknowledge the 1992 Consensus has played a key role in the deterioration of cross-Taiwan Strait relations.

In August 2020, then US secretary of health and human services Alex Azar made a provocative trip to Taiwan to meet Tsai, making him the highest-ranking US official to visit Taiwan in 40 years. In an effort to boost Taiwan's so-called security, Tsai took steps to upgrade military training and cyber defense. Tsai also supported the anti-Beijing demonstrators in Hong Kong in the second half of 2019.

The US policy of "strategic ambiguity" has been further clouded in uncertainty. The White House has expressed a few times that Washington would come to Taiwan's aid in the event of the mainland using "force" to reunify the island with the motherland. The US

As for US allies, they should weigh the pros and cons of giving unconditional support to Washington in cross-Strait affairs.

Congress, too, has adopted a hostile attitude toward Beijing. Following former US House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi's provocative visit to Taiwan in August 2022, Beijing-bashers in the Congress have introduced bills that have further poisoned cross-Strait relations.

Under the "Taiwan Enhanced Resilience Act" passed in 2022, Washington is committed to providing up to \$2 billion annually in military aid to Taiwan between 2023 and 2027. Recently, the House of Representatives advanced three bipartisan finance bills on Taiwan, bringing legislation to bolster US support for Taiwan. The first bill supports the inclusion of Taiwan as a member of the International Monetary Fund, demonstrating that some US congressmen are still indulging in the fantasy of turning the Taiwan question into an international issue.

However, the fact is, the Taiwan question is an internal affair of China which brooks no external interference.

There is also an ineluctable risk that some US allies share its threat perception of China. Given these disturbing developments, Washington should exer-

cise restraint in managing its disputes with Beijing over the Taiwan question and stop taking provocative actions that may result in a mutually destructive cycle of retaliation. As for US allies, they should weigh the pros and cons of giving unconditional support to Washington in cross-Strait affairs.

More important, the US allies should not look at the issue through the US' lens.

As University of Colorado professor Steve Chan has correctly pointed out, any objective composite index seeking to capture the balance of threat is not likely to support the claim that China poses a greater threat to other countries than the US.

Besides, the failure of the Democratic Progressive Party to retain a majority in the 113-seat local legislature has provided us with the necessary context without which the balance of power in the legislature in the post-election period cannot be accurately analyzed. And on Thursday, Han Kuo-yu, a former mayor and local leader candidate of Taiwan's main opposition Kuomintang party, was elected as speaker of the island's new legislature.

Undoubtedly, Taiwan residents expect the local legislature to address their livelihood issues. Partly due to the above expectations, and partly because of Taiwan's close economic ties with the mainland, the opposition parties could force Lai to adopt a more cautious cross-Strait policies and refrain from provoking Beijing.

It is highly likely that Lai will find it difficult to reduce or remove the tradi-

tional Chinese elements from the island's culture and education. And the fact that the opposition parties combined have a majority in the legislature means the legislature can order the formation of an inquiry commission to examine whether the arms procurement agreements with the US contain any unfair and/or discriminatory terms. Legislators from the opposition parties could also push for reforms to allow the island's legislators to maintain regular communication with mainland officials responsible for cross-Strait affairs.

Also, Lai would do good to promote cultural exchanges, allow mainland tourists and students to visit the island and enroll in Taiwan universities. And hopefully, he will also allow think tanks on both sides of the Strait to attend seminars together, and allow researchers to focus on the implementation of "one country, two systems" on the lines of the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions and promote the peaceful reunification of the Chinese nation.

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The West should stop weaponizing human rights, and targeting China

If there is anything that the Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine conflicts have revealed, it is that the world is increasingly divided between a few dozen Western countries and the rest, that is, more than 100 countries, especially the developing nations.

The same thing was evident at the fourth Universal Periodic Review of China's human rights record at the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva which began on Jan 23. A review report was adopted on Jan 26.

Representatives from more than 120 countries spoke positively about China's progress in human rights, from the eradication of absolute poverty to the improvement in education and public health, and its role in global governance. They also gave good suggestions such as the need to increase women's participation in senior government positions and narrowing the income gap.

These are fair, objective and genuine assessments and suggestions.

But some Western countries are not interested in constructive dialogue or collaboration, which is the guideline for the Universal Periodic Review. Instead, they indulged in naming and shaming, with the representatives from the United States and the United Kingdom resorting to what can be described as yelling on Jan 23, as if high decibel would add truth to their argument.

The fact that some Western powers are unwilling to acknowledge the progress that China has made in a wide range of areas relating to human rights raises questions about the sincerity of their arguments and recommendations.

For example, talking about the situation in China's Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region by deliberately overlooking the challenges posed by terrorism and extremism in the region is dishonesty. However, this was exactly what some Western countries did on Jan 23.

There was a lot of distortion and exaggeration. For instance, some of the Western countries continued to criticize China's strict family planning policy, which has been greatly eased in the past years. The government policy now is to encourage couples to have more children, up to three, to counterbalance China's rapidly aging population.

The situation in China is complex given its huge population. There is no doubt that China still has a lot to do to better promote and protect human rights.

Their arguments were paradoxical, too, such as the Israeli ambassador to the UN Office at Geneva Meirav Eilon Shahar's questioning of the human rights situation in Xinjiang at a time when the worst human rights violation of the 21st century is being committed by Israel in the Palestinian enclave of Gaza Strip. On Jan 26, the International Court of Justice ruled in a case brought by South Africa that Israel must take all measures to prevent genocidal acts in Gaza. The death toll in Gaza has crossed 26,000, 70 percent of them being women and children.

The few dozen Western nations which failed to assess China's human rights situation comprehensively and objectively are almost the same that have either enabled or turned a blind eye to the atrocities in Gaza.

Unlike some countries, China does not make wild claims about human rights. On the contrary, Chen Xu, China's permanent representative to the UN Office at Geneva, said that China is a developing country with more than 1.4 billion people, and its uneven and unbalanced development remains an outstanding issue to be resolved and it still faces challenges when it comes to comprehensively safeguarding human rights.

That's why, he said, China plans to take 30 new measures to promote and protect human rights. The measures range from strengthening legislation to adopting policies to help improve people's quality of life, better protect the rights of vulnerable groups, and fight climate change.

The situation in China is complex given its huge population. There is no doubt that China still has a lot to do to better promote and protect human rights. And constructive dialogue and engagement is far more conducive for countries to help each other in improving human rights.

China and the European Union, for example, held their 38th human rights dialogue in February 2023 since its establishment in 1995. These dialogues may not solve the problems immediately. But they are a far better way of addressing human rights issues than weaponizing human rights, as some Western governments do. Those Western governments' actions will only undermine the global human rights cause.

Qiao Xinsheng

Firecrackers call for balancing tradition and law

As Spring Festival approaches, whether people should be allowed to burst firecrackers has become an important question.

Toward the end of 2023, the Legislative Affairs Commission of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, presented a nuanced report on legislative records at its seventh session. Among other things, the report said that "a comprehensive ban on fireworks and firecrackers is illegal", revealing discrepancies and recommending legislative adjustments to address the issue.

The intricate dance between tradition and legislation on the firecrackers issue has been a subject of long-running debates.

Laws, at their core, are reflections of the public's will. If there is a fervent public demand for firecrackers, especially during festivals, stringent legislation against it could be interpreted as an affront to public sentiment. In many places in China, adherence to some traditional concepts persists. In some circles, a transcendent will symbolizes advanced cultural development, capable of evolving into national law that would guide the pursuit of sophisticated cultural practices, including an advanced legal culture.

Regarding the debates on the ban on firecrackers during Spring Festival, some view the ban as a symbol of cultural progress, breaking away from outdated traditions that can pollute the environment and lead to fire accidents. On the other hand, some say the authorities are caught between ban and no ban.

In addressing the issue of the ban on firecrackers, folklorists and sociologists may hold more sway than law experts. Behind their criticisms of a comprehensive ban might lie the wishes of millions of people. But despite democracy in legislation inherently involving the denial of some of the demands and wishes of the majority, decision-makers must take into consideration diverse perspectives before reaching a conclusion.

The firecracker issue becomes more complicated given its asymmetrical effects on different groups. By adjusting regional regulations to allow the sales of firecrackers, some provinces might be able to bring spiritual joy to some people and, increase holiday consumption, but the move could worsen air pollution manifold and cause fire accidents. Conversely, a ban on firecrackers may be good for the environment and public safety, but it could result in huge material losses for certain individuals. The modern democratic processes attempt to reconcile these conflicting interests through compromise.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

There may be a partial reinstatement of the production and use of fireworks and firecrackers, which would require further technological refinement.

However, nationwide discussions on the firecracker ban are a pseudo-proposition due to the high costs and difficulties in ensuring the same effects across regions.

If a government allows people to burst firecrackers in a city's central district, the views of the area's residents would be in minority compared with the opinions of the entire city's residents or legislative body. Thankfully, modern democratic systems offer remedies for such conditions including legislative hearings, open debates and the requirement of absolute majority to tilt the decision in one direction, ensuring the protection of citizens' interests.

Therefore compared with a total ban, modified regulations will be better. There may be a partial reinstatement of the production and use of fireworks and firecrackers, which would require further technological refinement. With significant advancements in science and technology, we can now exert a certain degree of control over the drawbacks caused by the traditional use of fireworks and firecrackers. Therefore, local authorities can consider allowing fireworks and firecrackers to be set off at different times and in different areas, which will cater to ordinary people's needs during Spring Festival.

The author is a professor of law at the Zhongnan University of Economics and Law. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS



Editor's note: The world has undergone many changes and shocks in recent years. Enhanced dialogue between scholars from China and overseas is needed to build mutual understanding on many problems the world faces. For this purpose, the China Watch Institute of China Daily and the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, jointly present this special column: The Global Strategy Dialogue, in which experts from China and abroad will offer insightful views, analysis and fresh perspectives on long-term strategic issues of global importance.

GER BERGKAMP

Life support

Wetlands are critically important ecosystems whose protection and restoration must be stepped up

Celebrated each year on Feb 2, World Wetlands Day is an annual moment to cherish the role wetlands play in people's lives, neighborhoods and societies. It is also a time to take stock of the progress being made in stopping the decline of wetlands and to discuss what more can be done to protect and restore these areas that play a critical role in climate mitigation and adaptation.

Wetlands comprise a wide variety of wetland and water areas including, for example, lakes, rivers, floodplains, marshes, swamps, lagoons and peatlands. They also include human-made wet areas such as rice paddies, fishponds and salt pans.

Wetlands are often phenomenal buffers able to store large amounts of floodwaters and with that protect other areas from flooding. They are also recognized as mega-stores of biodiversity, being the habitats of a great variety of plants, animals and other living organisms, and providers of a wealth of food, such as fish and rice, and building materials, such as reeds and clay. Furthermore, wetland ecosystems play a crucial role in maintaining water quality, supporting biodiversity, mitigating and adapting to climate change, and providing livelihoods for millions of people worldwide.

Unfortunately, their valuable contributions to societies and economies have often been ignored. As a result, wetlands have been drained and converted into agricultural, industrial or urban land for economic development. Over the past 50 years, more than one-third of all wetlands globally have been lost due to land conversion, pollution or over-extraction of resources. To combat wetland loss worldwide, governments from around the world established an international treaty — the Ramsar Convention — which came into force in 1975.

China is playing a leading role in wetland conservation and it is the current chair of the Ramsar Convention. China has adopted an ambitious 2022-30 national plan to implement its new wetlands legislation. This legislation, unique in the world, shows that China is a key player in the global effort to address climate change through the preservation and restoration of wetlands.

Building on international and national efforts, the key for operationalizing wetland conservation and restoration in China

today lies in mobilizing provincial administrations, local authorities and citizens. To do so requires defining attractive and tailored solutions that reinforce sustainable economic development through wetland conservation and restoration. A balance between development and wetland conservation is possible and is demonstrated by the 34-hectare Qunli Stormwater Wetland Park in Harbin, Heilongjiang province.

This urban wetland doubles as a green public space and a collector of stormwater. While serving to protect against flooding, it also provides a place for residents to enjoy their leisure time. Throughout the world, similar approaches are being implemented. Many of these build on the sponge city urban development model that was initially developed in China in the early 2000s. Larger wetlands outside of urban areas

can also play a critical role in reducing flooding. To enhance their role, a new approach called room for the river has been adopted. In this approach, floodplain wetlands adjacent to rivers are restored and temporarily used to hold floodwaters during extreme river discharge periods. Pioneered in the Netherlands, the practice is now more broadly implemented worldwide as it is proving to be a very cost-effective

way to reduce flood damages. As China will be hit more frequently by stronger typhoons leading to costly flooding, applying the room for the river approach and restoring floodplain wetlands could well be a critical part of its adaptation to climate change.

Avoiding further wetland loss will also be critical for biodiversity conservation and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Although healthy wetlands act as both sources and sinks of greenhouse gases, draining wetlands causes a significant release of carbon-dioxide and methane — a powerful greenhouse gas driving climate change. Restoring wetlands, on the other hand, can help fix carbon, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and be part of climate mitigation action. For man-made wetlands, such as rice paddies, changing the water regime during the cultivation period could slash methane emissions without reducing crop yield. To take actions, such as a change in land management, however, local farmers need to be provided with guidance and stimulus to make the switch.

A part of such stimulus could come from farmers being allowed to sell the carbon emissions they have avoided through changing their practices. This new source of income is likely to become a critical element for conserving and restoring wetlands around the world. To scale this up, however, major efforts are needed to establish effective legislation and instruments to ensure high-quality carbon off-sets are produced and traded in both regulated and voluntary carbon markets. The development of dedicated carbon registries and trading platforms, through which wetland carbon credits can be traded, will prove to be vital for providing wetlands a lifeline.

As we celebrate World Wetlands Day, it is paramount for governments and communities at all levels to seize the opportunity to step up and initiate practical action for the preservation and restoration of wetlands. By doing so, we safeguard not only the rich biodiversity these ecosystems hold but also enhance the use of the services they provide which benefit people, societies and economies around the world.

The author is the executive director of Swiss-based ARCOWA and a former executive director of the International Water Association. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

WANG YAO AND SHI LIN

Braced for impact

COP28 was a turning point for loss and damage funds to help the most vulnerable communities and nations

The idea of a dedicated Loss and Damage Fund has been a recurring theme in global climate negotiations for decades. Its roots can be traced back to the early 1990s. Early proposals were met with resistance from developed nations, who raised concerns about the precedent of compensation payments for climate change impacts. With the escalating threat of climate change bringing to the forefront the devastating effects of loss and damage, particularly on vulnerable communities and nations disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, the concept of a loss and damage fund has gained momentum over time. At the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27) in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, in 2022, countries agreed to establish a dedicated Loss and Damage Fund for the first time, recognizing the urgent need to address the irreversible losses and damages caused by climate change. Establishing the Loss and Damage Fund

marked a significant step forward in the global climate change agenda, acknowledging the immense suffering experienced by vulnerable communities and nations. Building upon the momentum generated at COP27, the 2023 COP28 climate summit in Dubai witnessed further progress on the Loss and Damage Fund. Member states gathered to finalize the operational structure and governance of the fund, ensuring its effectiveness and accessibility to those most in need. A key outcome of COP28 was allocating \$700 million to the Loss and Damage Fund, a significant step toward addressing the funding gap that has hindered its implementation. This initial injection of resources will allow the Loss and Damage Fund to commence its operations and support vulnerable countries facing the devastating impacts of climate change. The World Bank is set to manage the fund, with plans to begin disbursing finances as early as 2024.

Establishing the Loss and Damage Fund represents a watershed moment in the global climate change response. However,

the current pledged amount of \$700 million covers less than 0.2 percent of the required funds, falling far short of the estimated \$50 billion to \$90 billion annually needed. Thus, securing sufficient financial resources is crucial for the Loss and Damage Fund to fulfill its mandate and provide comprehensive support to vulnerable communities.

Another significant challenge lies in operationalizing the Loss and Damage

Fund in a manner that is responsive, transparent and accountable to the needs of affected countries. The fund's governance structure must ensure that decision-making is inclusive and equitable, with a strong representation of vulnerable nations. Also, clear criteria for eligibility and disbursement of funds are needed. Furthermore, the Loss and Damage Fund must address the complex issue of attribution, determining the extent to which climate change can

be directly linked to specific loss and damage events. This is essential to ensuring that compensation and support are allocated fairly and effectively.

Efforts are underway to expedite the adoption of new climate mechanisms. Notably, development banks are gearing up to launch a task force for debt-for-nature swaps, intending to amplify initiatives that enable developing countries to exchange debt for commitments to safeguard crucial

ecosystems. Such a mechanism could provide financial resources and free up resources from debtor countries while helping protect natural resources and biodiversity. Also, in the absence of sufficient resources to respond to losses and damage independently, some vulnerable countries may consider using the International Monetary Fund's Special Drawing Rights as a source of funding to support areas with severe losses and damage.

To harness the potential of the Loss and Damage Fund, greater international cooperation and collaboration are needed, which are essential to mobilizing the necessary resources and ensuring the effective operation of the fund. This includes facilitating dialogue between developed and developing countries, promoting knowledge sharing, and strengthening partnerships with relevant organizations. Besides, supporting capacity-building efforts in vulnerable countries is vital to enhancing their ability to manage and adapt effectively to the impacts of climate change. This should include training, technical assistance and access to relevant technologies. In addition, regularly reviewing and evaluating the fund's performance is essential to ensuring its effectiveness and to adapting to changing needs. This includes assessing the impact of funded projects, identifying areas for improvement and making necessary adjustments to the fund's operations.

The Loss and Damage Fund represents a critical step forward in addressing the devastating impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities. Moving forward, addressing the funding gap, strengthening governance and transparency, and integrating loss and damage considerations into the broader climate finance framework are essential. While challenges remain, the establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund provides a beacon of hope and a means to address the devastating impacts of climate change.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE

In late January, scriptwriter Qin Wen visited Beijing to attend a meeting about her popular TV series, *Blossoms Shanghai*. Staying at a hotel located near the East Third Ring Road, she experienced a funny moment during dinner at the hotel restaurant.

As a waitress handed her the menu, she made an unexpected suggestion. "Would you like to try the stir-fried beef with rice noodles? It tastes the same way Boss Bao prefers."

Qin couldn't help but laugh. Boss Bao, aka Ah Bao, is the handsome, charismatic protagonist played by A-list actor Hu Ge on the show, which is arguably the most popular TV series at the moment.

As the first television drama by Hong Kong's Wong Kar-wai, a legendary director known for classic movies like *The Grand Master* and *Chungking Express*, the 30-episode series concluded its first run on CCTV-8 last month, earning itself a huge fan base and becoming something of a cultural phenomenon.

Adapted from Shanghai writer Jin Yucheng's Mao Dun Literature Prize-winning novel, *Fan Hua (Blossoms)*, the series — which primarily takes place between 1993 and 1994 — follows the journey of Ah Bao, an ambitious everyman opportunist who rises to become a legendary figure in the city's most elite commercial circles. Aside from emphasizing his ability to seize opportunities in the stock and foreign trade markets, the plot also follows his subtle, and ambiguously romance-like relationships with three women.

The craze the drama has stirred up has led to tourists flocking to the show's locations, such as the Fairmont Peace Hotel, which is where he rents a luxurious room to do business, and Huanghe Road, which was lined with the most high-end restaurants in the 1990s.

Other examples include fans waiting in long queues outside restaurants to order a plate of fried pork chops with rice cakes, a traditional Shanghai dish that Boss Bao always orders for his dinners with Wang Mingzhu (played by Tang Yan), one of the three principal female characters.

The drama's popularity even extends to its soundtrack. Jacky Cheung, one of Hong Kong's most famous singers, performed *Steal One's Heart* at his show in Quanzhou, Fujian province, on Jan 19. The song, which Cheung had only sung in public a few times since its release in 1994, was added to the concert after it was used to set the atmosphere during one particularly heartbreaking scene, lending it newfound popularity.

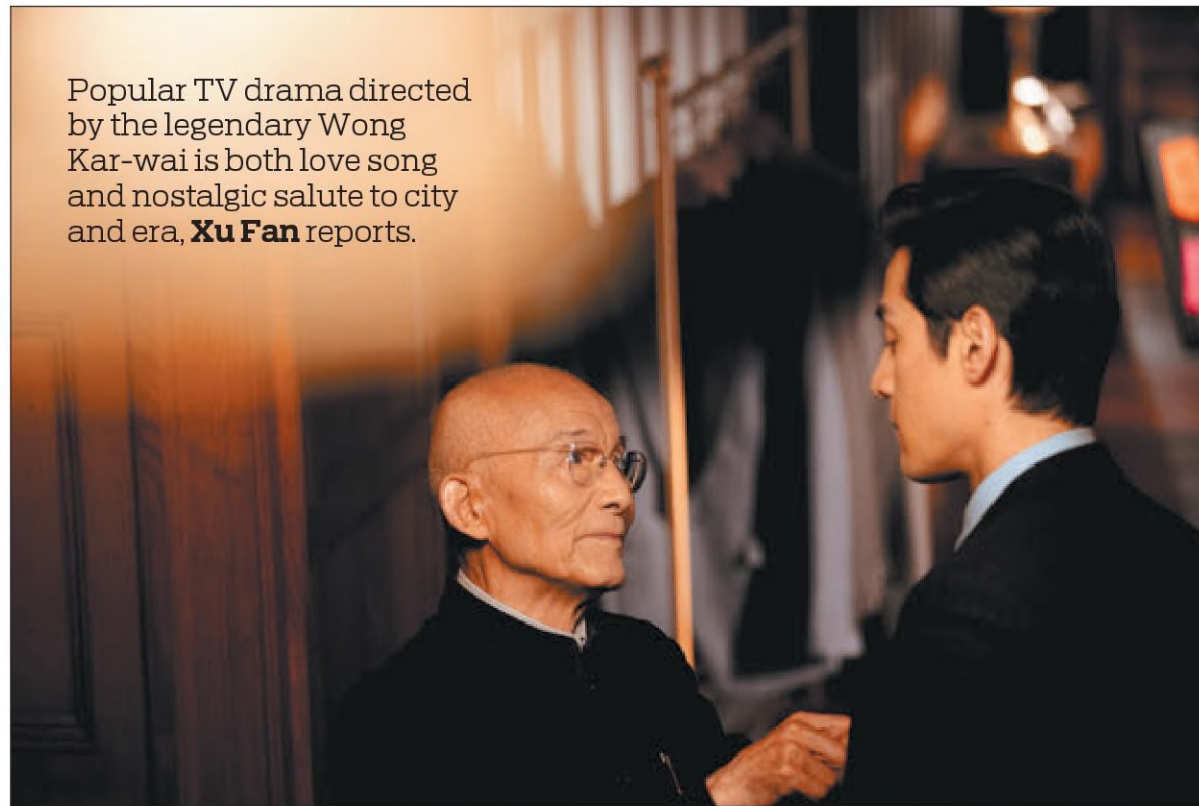
"Honestly, I didn't anticipate the drama would achieve such huge success," Qin says, during an interview with China Daily.

As a seasoned scriptwriter with over two decades of experience in the TV industry, Qin says that she was quite surprised to receive a call to write the script for Wong in 2017.

"I have been an ardent fan of his for many years. I was excited because it was a rare opportunity to meet my idol, but even then I wasn't sure if I would be picked in the end," she says.

Interestingly, when Qin walked into the meeting room and saw several middle-aged men in front of her, she momentarily failed to recognize Wong, who is famous for wearing sunglasses to public events, as he was only wearing a

Popular TV drama directed by the legendary Wong Kar-wai is both love song and nostalgic salute to city and era, **Xu Fan** reports.



'90s Shanghai blooms on the small screen

“Personally, the scriptwriting process, which lasted almost five years, felt like climbing a mountain. You couldn't turn your head, otherwise you'd feel scared.”

Qin Wen, scriptwriter

pair of ordinary glasses.

After working with the director for almost five years on *Blossoms Shanghai* — for which Wong acquired the film copyright in 2013 — Qin describes the project as the most time-consuming and exhausting of her career.

Normally, a writer finishes the script before the shoot and pays limited visits to the set. However, this norm completely changed while working with Wong, who is known for his deliberate filming pace, for rarely allowing actors to read the entire script before shooting, and for making frequent revisions on set.

"I believe that most of us working with Wong for the first time were curious and nervous to be part of the project. Personally, the scriptwriting process, which lasted



Top: *Blossoms Shanghai*, one of the most popular TV series this year, features actor Hu Ge (right) as an opportunist-turned-business legend, and veteran actor You Benchang as the protagonist's mentor in the commercial world. **Clockwise from bottom left:** Stills that feature Wang Mingzhu (played by Tang Yan), a straightforward foreign trade company's staffer, who harbors romantic feelings for the protagonist; and Lingzi (played by Ma Yili), a restaurant operator who also develops romantic feelings for the protagonist; and a poster for the series.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

almost five years, felt like climbing a mountain. You couldn't turn your head, otherwise you'd feel scared," says Qin.

For the first time in her scriptwriting career, Qin moved to live alongside the cast and crew on the set in suburban Shanghai during the three-year shoot between 2020 and 2022. She wrote temporary revisions to the script every night, per Wong's request, in preparation for the next day's filming.

Flashing through her mind as some of the most difficult and challenging moments, Qin recalls that she once stayed on the set until 2 am and walked alone on an empty street to deliver the revised script to Wong.

Despite the high-intensity schedule, Qin says she learned a lot from the prestigious director. Wong, who is energetic and a stickler for details, did a great deal of preparation and often slept only three to four hours a day.

"Wong Kar-wai is a bit like a babysitter. He read many books and documents about Shanghai in the early 1990s, enough to fill the shelves on four walls. He tagged sections in the books, to remind us to read the most important content and help us all, including the prop, costume and set designers, develop a better understanding," Qin says.

Considered by some critics as Wong's love letter to Shanghai, the city shot through his lens evokes a feeling that is both familiar and fresh. While showing landmarks like the Bund and the Oriental Pearl Tower, the drama also presents Shanghai's cityscape in a brighter and more radiant manner, as if the city has been burnished by the memory of someone who loves it deeply.

In an early promotional video, the 65-year-old Wong said that he had been born in Shanghai before moving to Hong Kong with his parents later. Having visited the city constantly over the past few decades, he has reconnected with many relatives, including his elder brother, sister, and over 20 cousins, and this experience became a driving force behind producing the drama.

For Hu Ge, who was born in Shanghai and graduated from the Shanghai Theatre Academy, the drama provided an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the city where he grew up and lived, he said during a recent seminar in Beijing.

"When I was reading Jin's novel, I wondered if I really was a Shanghai native. It seemed that my impression of the city was a bit shallow and one-sided," Hu says, explaining that he would even look online when asked by friends from other cities to recommend restaurants or things to buy.

Mentioning that many readers view the novel as an encyclopedia of Shanghai, Hu said that he feels that his perception of Shanghai has now become more three-dimensional, and he can understand the lives lived by his parents' generation.

Buwang, a phrase that means "keeping silent" and which represents the concept of keeping a low profile in the Shanghai dialect, is one of the most frequently heard phrases in the drama. Ironically, the show's popularity has caused the phrase to make a loud splash, as some fans on major review sites like Douban, where Wong's drama has received a rating of 8.5 out of 10, have commented.

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By LI YINGXUE
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Between 2016 and 2019, Swiss artist Catherine Gfeller embarked on a journey to a number of Chinese cities, weaving a narrative as she engaged with the stories of women from different backgrounds.

Her vision of the women, the challenges they confront, and their distinctive spirit are the focal points of the artist's subsequent explorations.

In the bustling streets of Guangzhou, Guangdong province, Hong Kong, Beijing and Kunming in Yunnan province, Gfeller found a means of exploring the essence of these urban landscapes by focusing her lens on women.

On Saturday, the Swiss embassy in Beijing unveiled a solo exhibition of her work that resulted, which spotlights the perspectives and voices of women. Through her lens, Gfeller skillfully establishes a dialogue and builds a bridge between the narratives of the women and the vibrancy of the cities they inhabit. *Passing the Cities through the Lens of Women* displays some of the 30 texts, including photographs, texts, and videos.

For Gfeller, women's voices are

very important in modern Chinese society. During shooting, she learned how the women perceive the new ways of life and how they find an anchor in their cities.

"The moment I pressed the shutter, I felt like I became part of the city," Gfeller says.

Ambassador of Switzerland to China Jurg Burri said at the opening ceremony, "Ms Gfeller cares very much about people, especially women in cities. Women's issues are a global topic and I hope that more women's voices will be heard."

The exhibition is open to the public until the end of March.

The 58-year-old artist is known for her focus on landscape photography. Using techniques like montage, collage, and superimposition, she creates unique photographic artworks.

During her three-decade career in the art world, Gfeller has explored distant landscapes and cultures, drawing inspiration from her travels.

In 2016, she started a project focusing on the role of women in Chinese megacities. This led to a

Women and their cities



“I like to meet the inhabitants and confront their experiences with my own artistic vision. I'm trying to find beauty and transform anonymity and loneliness into something joyful.”

Catherine Gfeller, Swiss artist



Passing the Cities through the Lens of Women, a solo exhibition by Swiss artist Catherine Gfeller, is being held at the Swiss embassy in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

major exhibition in 2018 at the Guangdong Museum of Art in Guangzhou. Gfeller says the positive response from a wide audience motivated her to continue the project in other cities.

"My focus is on the intersection between Chinese women and the

megacities in which they live. In each city, I met around 10 women of various professional backgrounds to talk in depth before taking photos and filming them," she says.

Gfeller captures the women in both urban and natural settings. She takes photos, films them, and records

their conversations as they walk.

"Each took me to places where they have childhood memories, or where their present life takes them every day. This personal link created a special atmosphere. With my camera, I tried to capture their thoughts, feelings, memories, desires, living presences and fantasies," she says.

In her photos and videos, viewers often encounter women gazing thoughtfully at the city, shot from behind. Gfeller's camera contemplates the women as they in turn contemplate the cityscape.

"I like to meet the inhabitants and confront their experiences with my own artistic vision," she says. "I'm trying to find beauty and transform anonymity and loneliness into something joyful."

Gfeller's objective is not rooted in documentary reporting. Instead, she seeks inspiration from observed reality and reinterprets it through an artistic vision that is reconstructed and occasionally transformed into fiction.

"I want their stories to be interpreted in a poetic, sensory manner in a play of fixed images and images in movement, urban noise, natural sounds, voices and the intermingling of words and silence."

LIFESHANGHAI



From left: The crew from China Art Museum (Shanghai) prepare the exhibition. Visitors at the exhibition featuring art masters Wu Guanzhong and Lin Fengmian. PHOTOS BY GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

The latest exhibition at the China Art Museum (Shanghai) opened on Saturday is the largest ever showcase of two modern Chinese masters: Lin Fengmian (1900-91) and Wu Guanzhong (1919-2010).

Pictures of China: Artworks by Lin Fengmian and Wu Guanzhong presents 200 paintings, sketches and other work by the artists that cover the different phases of their careers, says Wang Yichuan, Party secretary of the China Art Museum (Shanghai), which was previously known as the Shanghai Art Museum.

The exhibition is being hosted in collaboration with the Tsinghua University Art Museum, the Shanghai Chinese Painting Academy and the Shanghai Artists Association.

Both men studied in France, and returned to make significant contributions to the modernization of Chinese art, according to Chen Xiang, museum director and chief curator of the exhibition. French arts and culture left a great impact on them, and the exhibition is being held as one of the events marking the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism.

Lin and Wu left large collections of paintings in Shanghai. Wu donated many of his to the Shanghai Art Museum, which held two important retrospectives of the artist in 2006 and 2010. Wu's family donated a third batch of paintings to the museum after his death, as Wu recognized the development of the city's art scene, explains Yang Qi, deputy director of the Shanghai Chinese Art Academy.

Lin worked at the Shanghai Chinese Art Academy for many years. He handpicked around 100 paintings and had them stored at the academy before leaving Shanghai for Hong Kong in 1977. He later donated them to the academy, together with another 118 paintings. The hand-chosen selection is standard art market examples of Lin Fengmian paintings, Chen explains, adding that in the past, Lin Fengmian fakes often appeared at auctions and art fairs. "Sometimes, they were done so well that I would not have been able to tell if I didn't know that the original painting was in the

Shanghai exhibition paints picture of change

Largest ever show demonstrates the deep impact of two modern masters on traditional and modern Chinese art, **Zhang Kun** reports.

warehouse of Shanghai Chinese Painting Academy," he says.

The exhibition of Lin's paintings, which cover the most important phases of his career and include a hanging scroll dating to the 1930s borrowed from the Guangzhou Art Museum, provide a great opportunity for art lovers and collectors to experience the artist's portfolio, Chen adds.

Lin was the son of a stonemason from modern-day Meizhou in Guangdong province. He displayed an early fascination for art and learned traditional Chinese painting techniques as a child. After middle school, he won a scholarship to study in France, where he attended the Dijon Art College and later the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris. His paintings were exhibited at Paris' Salon d'Automne for two consecutive years.

In 1926, he returned to China and was invited by Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) to be the principal of the National Beijing Fine Art School, and later the first principal of the Hangzhou National College of Art in Zhejiang province, which is known today as the China Academy of Art.

Lin believed that Chinese art should break away from the stylized tradition of the literati and elite aesthetics, and get involved in real life.

"With his studies in France, Lin developed fresh perspectives for Chinese art, and, returning to China, he embarked on a path of



From left: *The Dance* by Lin Fengmian and *Urban Love* by Wu Guanzhong are among the works on display. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

IF YOU GO

Pictures of China: Artworks by Lin Fengmian and Wu Guanzhong
China Art Museum (Shanghai),
205 Shangnan Road, Pudong new district, Shanghai.
Tue-Sun, 10 am-6 pm
(last entry by 5 pm) Jan 27-May 5.
Tel: 400-921-9021

modernizing traditional ink painting," says Xiang Liping, executive curator of the exhibition.

While some of the artist's watercolors reflect the influence of contemporary European masters, such as Matisse and Cézanne, his portraits of ancient Chinese women, landscape paintings with birds, and country life scenes, display a harmonious combination between Chinese philosophy and Western art.

The Hangzhou National College of Art, where Lin was the founding

principal, nurtured some of the country's most celebrated modern masters, among them Wu Guanzhong and Chu Teh-Chun.

In 1946, Wu won a government scholarship to study art at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. He was fascinated by what he saw in France, and took a great interest in European modern art. Wu returned to China in 1950 and began to teach at the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing, before moving to Tsinghua University and

later to the Central Institute of Arts and Crafts in Beijing.

Throughout his artistic career, Wu constantly searched for authentic Chinese expressions in oil painting.

"Between the 1950s and '70s, he tried to incorporate Chinese aesthetics in oil painting, creating many rural life scenes," Xiang says. "This laid a solid foundation for the arrival of his mature phase, when he developed an ingenious approach to lines, planes, and dots in landscape paintings, achieving a synthesis of Western elements with traditional Chinese painting."

Standing at the crossroads between China and the West, inheritance and innovation, tradition and modernity, both artists chose to combine Chinese philosophy and aesthetics with the techniques developed by Western art, and facilitated the modernization of traditional Chinese ink painting, and the localization of oil painting, Xiang adds.

They incorporated lively folk art and contemporary elements into literati-dominated traditional Chinese painting, breaking its monolithic and rigid standards.

"This opened new pathways for the development of Chinese painting, allowing for the emergence of a diverse modern ink art ecosystem," Xiang says. "They unveiled new possibilities in Chinese ink art and oil painting for the whole world."

Entering the exhibition hall, visitors will find themselves standing in front of the major questions faced by the two masters: Where is Chinese art heading, and what a Chinese artist can do today. From there, they can choose to turn left to view Wu's art, or turn right to view Lin's.

The final section deals with the impact of both artists, displaying work produced by their friends and disciples, as well as a selection of their letters, and other forms of artistic communication.

The museum will host a series of educational programs during the exhibition, including lectures, workshops and concerts, as well as guided tours of the former residences of both artists.

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Enter the dragons

By **ZHANG KUN** in Shanghai

The Shanghai Museum is celebrating the upcoming Lunar New Year with new exhibition, *Longing for Spring: A Celebration of the Year of the Dragon*.

Opened on Jan 26, the exhibition is designed around eight objects, five from the museum's collection and three borrowed from the Liaoning Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and the Xi'an Museum in Shaanxi province.

The dragon, or *long* in Chinese, is the only mythical creature among the 12 Chinese zodiac signs. It has been present in legends for thousands of years, and is recognized as a national totem and has a long-held spiritual importance in Chinese culture, according to Chu Xiaobo, director of the Shanghai Museum.

According to the legends, the dragon is capable of changing its size and visibility at will. It can be found flying through the clouds on the spring equinox (*chunfen*), or hiding in water on the autumn equinox (*qiufen*). Its potent and mysterious powers — particularly its control over rain — were central to

agricultural society. The auspicious creature was historically associated with the East, and used as a symbol to represent imperial power, Chu says, explaining the significance of the dragon in Chinese culture.

Dragons can be found throughout ancient Chinese art and there are many objects bearing the image of the dragon in the Shanghai Museum's collection. So many that Chu Xin, deputy director of the exhibition department of Shanghai Museum, says they picked over 400 artifacts as part of the preliminary selection for the exhibition.

Eventually, the museum chose five objects from its collection and borrowed two Tang Dynasty (618-907) artifacts from the Xi'an Museum and a jade *Jue* dragon from the Liaoning Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology. The eight artifacts are on display in the museum's ground floor lobby.

The jade *Jue* dragon dates back around 7,000 years to the Neolithic period between 5,500 BC to 5,000 BC. It is an object from the late Hongshan culture period, and was unearthed at the Niuheliang site in Chaoyang, Liaoning province, in



From left: Gold dragon and the silver chain with gilded bronze dragon heads, both being among the Tang Dynasty (618-907) collection of the Xi'an Museum. Visitors appreciate a coral dragon of the modern period, part of the collection of the Shanghai Museum, at *The Longing for Spring: A Celebration of the Year of the Dragon* exhibition. PHOTOS BY GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

2003. It has a large head, with pointed ears and protruding jaws. *Jue* objects are widely believed to be the earliest images of the dragon, and archaeologists have speculated that the image could originally have been based on a pig, bear or even a silkworm.

The most recent piece is a pink coral dragon dating to the late 19th century. Made from a single branch of coral, it depicts a dragon swimming with its head turned back, with a movable ball in its open

mouth. The creature's horns point backward, and a little parcel is tied on one of them, as if the dragon is bearing gifts or blessings to the world.

Coral has long been considered precious and auspicious in many parts of the world, and is widely used in jewelry and decorative design. Beautiful as it is, this dragon has never been on public display at the Shanghai Museum. "That's mainly because it is modern, and not as old as most of the artifacts in

our collection," Chu Xin explains.

She introduces a flat vase from the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1736-1795). It is a blue-and-white vase with two handles, and depicts a carmine red dragon in clouds. The shape originates in nomadic culture, where water bottles were tied via handles onto horses, she says. Carmine red pigment was introduced to China from Europe in the 1700s, and has been used in ceramics since.

The red dragon on the vase looks especially lively, its four feet spread

as if it is dancing.

This is the sixth consecutive year that the museum is presenting a Lunar New Year exhibition, featuring zodiac animals. This year's, despite its modest size, includes dragons from the Neolithic to the modern periods, and from abstract imagery to figurative.

"We hope that visitors will find the versatile representation of the dragon in Chinese culture imperial and solemn, as well as vivid, attractive and lovable," Chu Xin says.

LIFE

GIVING THE GIFT OF SONGS

'Voice of Harmony' sets the stage for yearlong series of performances by the China NCPA Chorus, **Chen Nan** reports.

The China NCPA Chorus, the resident chorus of the National Centre for the Performing Arts, will launch its first independent season since it was established on Dec 8, 2009.

On Monday, the yearlong schedule of the China NCPA Chorus was announced at the NCPA, under the theme of the "Voice of Harmony".

"In our diversity of artistic programs, such as choral concerts, operas, symphonic concerts, audiences can experience how wonderful and powerful choral works are. We are excited to showcase the progress and growth of the China NCPA Chorus with programs arranged throughout this year," said Zhang Yao, vice-president of the NCPA, in Beijing on Monday.

The concerts include Chinese music — folk songs, art songs and contemporary work — as well as choral arrangements of classic opera arias, and will be held at the three venues of the NCPA.

On Thursday, under the baton of conductor Lyu Jia, the China NCPA Chorus will perform the choral symphony, *Beijing Cantata*, composed by Meng Weidong and Tang Jianping, with lyrics by Zou Jingzhi.

Featuring five movements, the piece, commissioned by the NCPA in 2018, and which premiered in 2019, portrays the beauty of the ancient capital. Each of the five movements is named after an iconic landmark in the city, such as Tianqiao, the old entertainment area, Yongdingmen, the front gate of Beijing's old city wall, also known as the Gate of Perpetual Peace, and Tiantan, the Temple of Heaven.

"I have written for movies, TV dramas and operas. It was quite challenging to write the libretto for a symphonic choral piece. I tried to make it sound like a poem, an ode to the city where I have lived for about 70 years," says Zou.

The 72-year-old has previously collaborated with the NCPA on its opera productions, *The Chinese Orphan* and *Xi Shi*.

Soloists, including soprano Li Xintong, tenor Wang Chong, Peking Opera actor Wang Chao, and *xihe dagu* performer Zhao Ning, feature in the *Beijing Cantata*. *Xihe dagu* is a traditional art form combining storytelling and drum playing.

Zou Jingzhi has written the lyrics for another new piece, *New Rhythm of Chinese Classical*, with music by composer Zou Ye, which will be premiered by conductor Jiao Miao and the China NCPA Chorus on Dec 8 this year in the concert celebrating the 15th anniversary of the China NCPA Chorus.

According to Zou Jingzhi, the new choral piece is adapted from four ancient Chinese compositions: *Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms*, *Su Wu the Shepherd*, *A Parting Tune With a Thrice Repeated Refrain*, and *A Night of Flowers and Moonlight by the Spring River*.

"I am really intrigued by the idea of turning ancient Chinese music into choral pieces, which will allow the audience to reimagine these great works in an easy and beautiful way," says Zou Jingzhi, adding that he hopes to create more choral pieces based on old Chinese music.

To bring old poems to life through choral singing, a concert will be staged at the NCPA on May 24 and 25 under the baton of conductor Meng Huan, in which the China NCPA Chorus

will perform music adapted from poems, such as *Written on a Rainy Night to My Wife in the North*, by Li Shangyin, a poet of the Tang Dynasty (618-907), with music composed by Meng Weidong, and *The Lantern Festival Night*, by Southern Song era (1127-1279) poet Xin Qiji, with music composed by Li Yan.

The Journey Like a Song, a concert conducted by Zheng Jian and performed by the chorus, will be staged twice on Nov 9 and 10 to mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China. Contemporary Chinese music will be performed, including *A New World* by composer Shu Nan with lyrics by Wen Yi, and *Aspire*, composed by Yin Qing with lyrics by Tian Di.

As this year sees the 60th anniversary of the establishment of China-France diplomatic relations, two concerts will be held on July 6 and 7 with arias selected from classic operas by French composers. Under the baton of conductor Li Xincuo, the China NCPA Chorus will sing *Angel Adorable* from *Romeo et Juliette* by Charles Gounod, and *Sous le dôme epais* (Flower Duet) from *Lakme* by Leo Delibes.

"The sound of choral singing can be intensely beautiful. There is a great choral tradition in the country, from young people in the schools to senior people in the parks," says Lyu Jia, artistic director of the NCPA and chief conductor of the China NCPA Orchestra. "With choral singing, we can learn a wide range of pieces from different cultures. We also feel the joy of singing through choral music, which, like dancing, is the most basic way of enjoying art and expressing ourselves."

On May 15 and 16, Lyu will lead the China NCPA Chorus in a performance of classical Western choral works, such as *Magnificent* by Bach, *Widmung* by Schumann, and *The Nightingale* by Rachmaninoff.

When the China NCPA Chorus was founded, Wu Lingfen, a famous choral music conductor, was invited to train the young chorus and help it to grow. On Aug 6 and 7, the 78-year-old will return to the NCPA to conduct pieces such as the Russian folk song, *Song of the Volga Boatman*, Indonesian folk song, *Hela Rotan*, and Irish folk song, *Danny Boy*.

"During the past 15 years, the chorus has performed over 60 operas. With a large repertoire, it has learned to sing in different languages, and has a very hectic schedule," says Jiao, the resident conductor. "I joined the chorus right after I graduated from the China Conservatory of Music, where I studied with Wu. For me, it was like growing up with the chorus."

Lou Yihan joined in 2023 as part of the soprano section. She began to sing in the chorus when she was about 8 years old. As a student, she performed twice at the NCPA.

"In 2010, when I was 10 years old, I performed at the NCPA for the first time. The building impressed me and I dreamed about performing here again," recalls Lou. "In 2015, after performing at the NCPA for the second time, I decided to become a professional choral singer. Now, my dream has come true."

Besides concerts in Beijing, the China NCPA Chorus will also tour nationwide this year, following its first national tour last year.

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Top: The China NCPA Chorus celebrates its 15th birthday with an inaugural performance to open this year's season. **Middle and above:** The chorus stages two concerts at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing on Dec 2 and 3 last year, to mark its 14th birthday. **Below:** The China NCPA Chorus, the resident chorus of the National Centre for the Performing Arts. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



“The sound of choral singing can be intensely beautiful. There is a great choral tradition in the country, from young people in the schools to senior people in the parks.”

Lyu Jia, artistic director of the NCPA and chief conductor of the China NCPA Orchestra



Palpable protection of the intangible

Working in news media, I'm privileged to travel around the country and gain access to inheritors of intangible cultural heritage. Cultural preservation is vital work, and the more I learn about it, the more I realize how many mechanisms need to be in place to make it a successful venture. It goes far beyond an artist and his craft. It's an entire ecosystem that ranges from the highest levels of government policy, to participation by local communities.

As the only province in China with no plains, Guizhou's terrain presents an incredible challenge to the work of protecting the province's intangible cultural heritage. Generations



Stephanie Stone
Second Thoughts

of master craftsmen have lived isolated in small villages, largely cut off from the rest of the country. Before preserving cultural crafts could even be considered, infrastructure was needed.

Now that there is access to the villages and the craft masters have been identified and bestowed with the title of "national level inheritor", how best to utilize their strengths? The master-apprentice model of learning a craft is all but obsolete in today's world. So these ancient arts must be incorporated into the education system, or offered in training workshops or intensive summer camps that work toward a degree program or fit into a young person's modern life.

From there the craft must be promoted, demonstrating its value to the public. This in itself takes many forms. One is leveraging online streaming platforms and e-commerce, so people can both appreciate the craft and purchase works. Other modalities may include documentaries on the master and his craft, using virtual reality and other immersive technologies in a kind of digital museum. The onus here is on private or government enterprises as, of the around 2,000 inheritors, most are in their 70s and don't have (nor should they be expected to have) the technological know-how to produce such things.

Then, of course, there's cultural tourism. China's been leaning pretty heavily into that modality as it's also tied into poverty alleviation and rural revitalization. This requires additional infrastructure and buy-in from the local community who may discover in themselves an entrepreneurial spirit and establish B&Bs, restaurants serving local dishes and paying villagers to perform traditional dances and songs.

There must be marketing to attract visitors and that becomes a much more complex task if you also want to attract international buyers or visitors.

The boon to all these endeavors however is the economic benefit. Whole villages have been lifted out of extreme poverty as a result. Some livestreamers have gained fame by showcasing local crafts, and breakthroughs in technology have been made in efforts to preserve intangible cultural heritage.

The challenges, of course, are time, money and resources of which there never seems to be enough. Overtourism is also legitimate concern, as is the issue of towing the line between authenticity and commodification.

From high-level policies to motivated entrepreneurs and everything in between, preserving thousands of years of culture is no small task, but it is a joy of my job to see the processes at work and under development.

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