

WORLD USA

Recalling key moments in China-US educational ties

PAGE 7



More discovered about habits of mysterious bird

CHINA, PAGE 5



Diversity in harmony

Greater Bay Area sets the stage for young musicians from far and wide

LIFE, PAGE 15

# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 MONDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2024

## Deadly inferno



Smoke plumes rise from a wildfire in Vina del Mar, a city in central Chile, on Saturday. Intense wildfires burning around a densely populated area of central Chile has caused at least 50 deaths, and officials said at least 1,100 homes had been destroyed. Chilean President Gabriel Boric said the death toll could worsen as four large fires continue to burn in the Valparaiso region. JAVIER TORRES / AFP

See story, page 6

## China's trade in services making inroads to world

By ZHONG NAN  
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

China's ongoing efforts to widen opening-up will make trade in services a pivotal driver in sustaining its economy and fostering fresh competitive advantages in the years ahead, said market observers and business executives.

Acceleration of the global value chain's restructuring has already led to an increased prominence of services segments, such as innovation, finance, logistics, marketing and branding, in the economic growth of China and also the world, they said.

Nie Pingxiang, a researcher specializing in trade in services at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said the global expansion of traditional manufacturing has slowed due to uncertainties such as softening goods demand, subdued global investment sentiment and mounting concern over geopolitics. However, the trend of globalizing trade in services has been gaining momentum, Nie said.

In contrast to goods trade, trade in services refers to the sale and

delivery of intangible services like transportation, tourism, telecommunications, advertising, computing and accounting.

The value of China's trade in services grew by 10 percent year-on-year to 6.57 trillion yuan (\$914.2 billion) in 2023, according to the latest data released by the Ministry of Commerce.

The country's commitment to improving the quality of its manufacturing sector is expected to drive demand for services related to innovation, technical expertise, information, professional support and design. This will fuel the growth of new business models, industries and operational methods both at home and around the world, said Chen Wenling, chief economist at the Beijing-based China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

China saw its exports of knowledge-intensive services amount to 1.54 trillion yuan last year, up 9 percent year-on-year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Chen said that a growing number of multinational corporations have started redirecting their resources toward innovation, logistics and digital solutions within China. This

strategic shift aims to expand their market footprint and foster two-way trade in services.

Similar views were expressed by Jens Hildebrandt, executive director of the German Chamber of Commerce in China (North China). "With China gradually opening up its services industry, German companies will have more access to the Chinese market in the coming years."

"The cooperation model is undergoing a transformation," Hildebrandt said, noting that in the past, German companies had supplied technology to China and benefited significantly from the Chinese market.

However, the current landscape shows that China boasts competitive brands and cutting-edge technologies that are effectively making inroads into both the German and other European markets, particularly in sectors related to decarbonization and healthcare, he added.

Speaking at a news conference in Beijing in late January, Guo Tingting, vice-minister of commerce, said the government will actively expand trade in services this year. The growth of this sector is expect-

ed to nurture new drivers for high-quality development of foreign trade.

As of the end of January, China had established 112 bases for services export, encompassing a wide spectrum of sectors, including culture, digital services, geographic information, intellectual property and language services, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Fueled by growing trade volume between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, BEST Inc, a logistics services provider based in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, opened a 220,000-square-meter sorting center — its largest in Southeast Asia — in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, in January.

"With many Chinese companies building plants in Southeast Asia, they have asked us to provide more customized services to ensure the operations of their supply chains in the region," said Johnny Chou, the company's chairman and CEO.

He said that BEST aims to further connect Thailand, Vietnam, Singapore and Malaysia in its logistics network, better enabling cross-border express delivery among these countries this year.

## Xi's visit before Spring Festival touches hearts

President carries forward practice of learning about and improving people's well-being

By XU WEI in Beijing and YANG CHENG in Tianjin

As the Chinese people prepare for family reunions during the upcoming Spring Festival, their most important holiday of the year, President Xi Jinping conveyed messages of good wishes, support and confidence for the Lunar New Year.

The messages were extended to Chinese at home and abroad as Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, made a two-day fact-finding trip to Tianjin starting on Thursday, during which he surveyed a disaster-hit village, a bustling ancient street and a museum.

The practice of visiting grassroots families, long upheld by the nation's top leader, showcases a people-oriented development philosophy and the strong emphasis of the nation's leadership on improving the people's well-being, analysts said.

Braving freezing temperatures, Xi visited the village of Diliufu, where farmland was hit by devastating floods in late July and early August.

It was the third time that the president has visited the flood-hit households since September, as he highlighted the need to ensure that the families have a warm winter.

In the village, Xi spoke with vegetable farmers whose facilities were damaged in August, before sitting down for talks with a family of four generations living under one roof.

While expressing his delight at the progress of the village's post-disaster recovery, Xi told the villagers that the Party's central leadership has "made a resolution to improve the livelihood of the people by striving to enhance the construction of water conservancy and flood control projects".

The message from the president resonated strongly with the villagers of Diliufu.

Zhang Caiyun, a 64-year-old resident, said the president's visit has "given the village a festive atmosphere before the arrival of Spring Festival", which falls on Saturday.

She said that for her, the visit was filled with touching moments, as Xi patiently inquired about the villagers' daily lives.

"I didn't expect that the general secretary would visit and that he would pay such particular attention to matters of our concern," she said.

The fact that Xi assured the residents that the nation's top leadership would scale up its investment in water management projects gave a lift to villagers like Zhang.

She said the flooding in August hit the village extremely hard, as farmers saw their rice paddies and greenhouses damaged. Part of the flooded farmlands has now been planted with wheat and vegetables, with a majority of the greenhouses already repaired.

Du Zixi, an entrepreneur who has invested in a tourism program in Diliufu, said the president not only conveyed warmth to the residents, but also extended confidence to businesses.

She said the flooding last year nearly washed away years' worth of her company's investment in the village.

As the president delivered assurances that more steps would be taken to improve water management projects for the public's well-being, Du said her company will continue to invest in the village and create more jobs for its residents.

Han Qiang, dean of the School of Marxism at Beijing Foreign Studies University, said that during the trip, the president rallied the public to have full confidence in the new year.

"Strong confidence is the key to overcoming the difficulties facing the economy. It is also a must for the nation as it navigates through a complex global landscape to secure its second centenary goal," he said. The second centenary goal is to turn China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful by the time the People's Republic of China celebrates its centenary in 2049.

See Visit, page 3

## Fresh global model needed in climate change fight

WORLD WATCH  
By Arvea Marieni

from the not-always-rational mechanisms of finance.

The global environmental challenge of climate change requires policies both to reduce the carbon intensity of the economy as well as to enhance carbon sinks, which are natural systems, such as forests and oceans, that absorb more carbon from the atmosphere than they release. Incentives for energy, industry, transportation, agriculture and taxation are the main sectoral policies to be involved in addressing climate change.

A recent analysis published by Carbon Brief, a United Kingdom-based website covering climate issues, shows that China is witnessing a massive shift in industrial investment toward green economy sectors. The main beneficiaries are renewables, batteries, electric cars and power grids, as well as railways, all of which have become major drivers of the country's economy.

See Energy, page 3

## TRADITIONAL CULTURE GIVEN A MODERN TWIST

New enthusiasm revitalizes time-honored brands

By YANG FEIYUE  
yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn



Liu Dai'e completed dozens of orders for her handmade scarves and shawls bearing distinctive cultural elements of the Tujia ethnic group in time for Spring Festival, which falls on Saturday.

Born and raised in a village in Hunan province, Liu has introduced over the past two years a new technique to the traditional craft of Tujia brocade weaving, which in 2006 was named as a national intangible cultural heritage.

"Many of my customers like to wear these scarves and shawls for Spring Festival, or send them to

their families and friends as gifts," said Liu, whose village is situated in Miao'ertan town, Longshan county.

In the Tujia language, the local brocade is known as *xilankapu*, which translates as "flower-patterned cover". Made by skilled weavers and involving more than 10 processes, including spinning, threading, knotting and rolling, Tujia brocade features over 200 classic designs.

See Crafts, page 2

## March of the dragon



A young performer takes part in traditional celebrations during a Chinese New Year parade in Barcelona, Spain, on Saturday. Members of the Chinese community and cultural organizations held a big parade in Barcelona to welcome the Year of the Dragon.

AXEL MIRANDA VIA NEWSCOM



INSIDE  
Job vacancies surging in emerging sectors  
Business, page 9

www.chinadailyglobal.com  
Member of ANN  
China Daily Global ©2024 All Rights Reserved

Newsstand prices:  
US \$1 Canada CSI:  
UK 1.6 EU 1.6  
Kerya 50 Kenya Shilling  
Asia Pacific: Thailand 120  
Philippines 120 PHP; Myanmar 2000 Kyat;  
Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

## PAGE TWO

*Crafts: Innovative creations attract young customers*

A phone holder, designed by Su Dayou in Beijing, has blue-and-white porcelain designs. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

With a background in animation and painting from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, he uses designs on blue-and-white porcelain for items such as maps and artworks.

After he graduated from the academy in 2007, like many art students Su mainly worked on oil paintings and sketches. "The more I painted, the more I felt like channeling my own thoughts into my works," he said.

He found his calling in 2010, when he became particularly attracted by abstract designs. "Even road signs can set my imagination buzzing," he said.

The image of an ancient enamel jar in a magazine set Su on a quest to find traditional designs.

"The jar looked robust and featured images of lotus flowers and cranes in its design — all rendered in an exquisite indigo blue," he said.

Su next studied and took note of the designs of various ancient vessels in different styles displayed at museums across Beijing.

"The designs blew my mind, and were extremely detailed — with the work completed in one go by ancient craftsmen," Su said, adding that some designs depicting five dragons require long-term training.

More important, he was intrigued by the abstract nature of the traditional cultural designs. As he saw more of them, he started to sense that he could apply them to modern life through his own creations.

He began by creating a series of stickers and paintings featuring elements of blue-and-white porcelain.

"Those in the forms of a fish and a red cross were particularly popular," said Su, who opened an online store in 2013 to sell his creative cultural items.

He also created a Chinese map with porcelain designs, which attracted considerable attention online.

"This shows that our traditional culture is becoming increasingly popular and that more people are embracing it on a personal level," Su said.

After his innovative use of traditional Chinese cultural elements caught the attention of Beijing Gongmei Group, Su's designs now appear on phone holders and scarves. The company has been involved with the inheritance and development of China's arts and crafts culture for about 70 years.

"Cooperation with the company greatly encouraged me and further motivated me to incorporate more ancient designs with contemporary elements," Su said.

**New enthusiasm**

Wang Jingjing, head of Beijing Gongmei Group's operations management department, said traditional Chinese brands have been revitalized in recent years with a new wave of enthusiasm, attracting rising numbers of young customers.

Last year, the company launched the Yuxun program, which focuses on innovative art creations.

The program is aimed at setting up collaborative artistic projects with enterprises, design studios, professional designers, art school faculty and students, as well as individuals passionate about art.

"We aim to come up with brand new interpretations of Chinese intangible cultural heritage," Wang said.

The program has contacted some 300 artists to explore a modern-day conversion of traditional arts and crafts. Partnerships have also been formed with more than 30 artists with expertise in a wide range of traditional fields, including filigree inlay, imperial embroidery, Yi embroidery, and purple clay teapots.

Wang said, "We have discussed ways for traditional crafts to shine in the modern era, and how to market them and make them a brand, such as highlighting the history behind them, as well as their new looks and functions."

The general aim is to produce cross-disciplinary creations and bring more exquisite quality to artworks containing elements of Chinese culture by using new materials.

After a design is agreed upon, production is assigned to craftsmen before the marketing plan is formulated, Wang said.

Some cultural products have been developed as part of the program, with Tibetan incense one of the most popular, she added.

The culture of such incense is particularly important in Tibetan Buddhism and folk beliefs. For example, Nimu Tibetan incense made from cypress wood has a history of more than 1,300 years.

In 2008, the craft of making Tibetan incense was named as a national intangible cultural heritage.

"We have preserved the intricate and meticulous traditional water milling process, which is all done by local artisans, but have integrated it with a modern incense burner," Wang said.

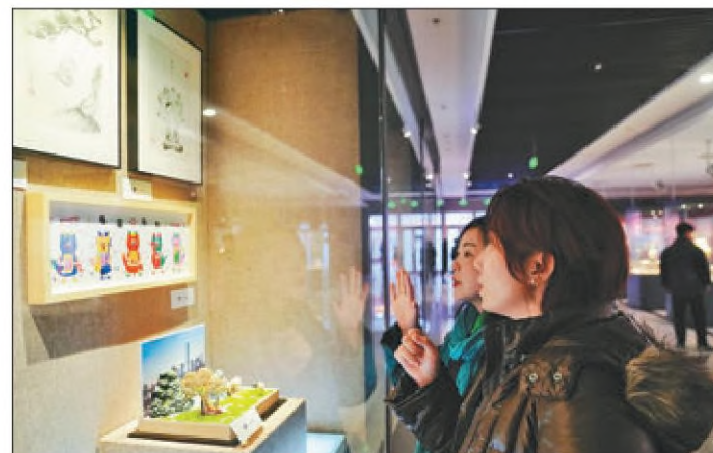
The burner is portable, and a dozen different types of incense can be placed in it. "We found that many young consumers



Liu Dai'e practices the traditional craft of Tuja brocade weaving in her home village in Longshan county, Hunan province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Items made with traditional techniques under the Yuxun program, which was launched by the Beijing Gongmei Group, on display in Beijing in October.



Visitors tour an exhibition of works created under the Yuxun program at the Beijing Arts and Crafts Museum in October.



Works created under the Yuxun program on sale at the Gongmei Mansion in Wangfujing shopping area in downtown Beijing.

are drawn to this delicately designed incense burner to buy products, which in turn could help promote intangible culture," Wang said.

In December, the Yuxun program launched a second creative project that aims to re-create eight imperial handicrafts, including enamel, gold lacquer inlay, and filigree inlay, as well as collections at the Beijing Arts and Crafts Museum.

The program will last for four months and candidates are encouraged to send their artworks for review. The finalists, who will be announced in March, will receive support from the program for further development.

"We have managed to revitalize intangible cultural heritage. Now, it's all about branding and adding value," Wang said. "We can surely go further once standardized products with the characteristics of traditional Chinese culture are in place," she said.

Song Junhua, director of Sun Yat-sen University's Institute of Chinese Intangible Cultural Heritage, said such heritage is primarily a dynamic culture, which is key to harnessing its significant modern-day impact.

He has noticed four trends in achieving the potential of intangible cultural heritage through innovation.

"The first is to transition from innovation in intrinsic function to innovation in derived functionality," Song said.

"For example, our Chinese New Year paintings traditionally served the purpose of bringing good luck during Spring Festival. Now, they serve additional functions, such as being used for art collections," he added.

The second trend features innovation from the public, which can be applied to various aspects of life, Song said.

The other two trends are a shift in innovation from the product itself to the entire production process, and integration of the internet, digitalization and virtual reality, he said.

"While preserving intangible cultural heritage, it is also crucial to understand the perceptions of the communities and groups who are the custodians of this heritage," Song said.

"This is an ongoing and dynamic balance. If we can prioritize people's desire for a better life and cater to their needs, we consider such changes to be appropriate."

**From page 1**

Liu, who is in her 60s, said: "Only one side of these traditional products is woven with patterns, while the other side is left rough. It took me six to seven years to master the technique of presenting distinctive Tuja elements on both sides to my complete satisfaction."

Named a national inheritor of the craft in 2007, Liu said, "Handwork is involved throughout the process, and to produce designs that are more delicate than others, I use one shuttle line, instead of two."

This is just one example of the innovative techniques Liu has used throughout her more than five decades of working with this traditional craft, which she started to practice with her grandmother.

In 1986, Liu launched a Tuja brocade business with her sisters.

"At that time, many people were struggling to make a living, and I wanted to use my skills to help them improve their lives," Liu said.

She added that she also wanted to promote the brocade, which has helped preserve traditional culture, especially as the Tuja ethnic group does not have its own form of writing.

After launching the business, Liu became acutely aware of the popularity of products featuring traditional designs made from materials such as silk and wool.

She made a point of collecting ancient designs by trekking deep into the mountains that are home to Tuja villagers. "I tried to restore the old and discarded brocade items I bought," Liu said.

As traditional thick Tuja brocade is often used as bedding by members of this group, Liu opts for silk, to achieve a lighter touch. She also uses the brocade to make handbags, and for paintings, which have proved popular with travelers.

With the continuous development of the local culture and tourism industry, Miao'ertan is welcoming more visitors. After talking to a number of people, Liu sensed the way in which the local brocade industry needed to develop, and took it to a high-end customized market.

On the 60th anniversary of the founding of Xiangxi Tuja and Miao autonomous prefecture in 2017, she led seven apprentices and spent nine months weaving a huge Tuja brocade featuring classic designs such as flowers, birds, heavenly beings, and auspicious symbols. The item is on display at the Xiangxi Intangible Cultural Heritage Museum.

Liu has also woven portraits of her customers into brocade items, which have sold well.

"We need to create high-quality, high-end products to preserve the good things in life. Only in this way can we enhance confidence in ethnic culture and achieve social and economic benefits," she said.

**Fresh designs**

In Beijing for the past decade or so, Su Dayou, 41, has breathed new life into traditional designs and decorations with his distinctive artistic presentations.



Su has breathed new life into ancient vessel designs.



Tibetan incense has proved popular with shoppers.



Fashion accessories made with traditional techniques.



Tuja brocade woven by Liu Dai'e. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## Flying Tigers' legacy being left in 'good hands'

Veteran pilot, 103, meets with student, 13, and says world needs 'young generation's energy'

By LIA ZHU in Las Vegas  
lizhu@chinadailyusa.com

It was a rare and heartwarming sight when 103-year-old Flying Tigers veteran Harry Moyer and a 13-year-old boy, Zane Richie, sat face-to-face and delved into the heroics of United States pilots who fought alongside the Chinese more than 80 years ago.

"What do you think about the Flying Tigers?" Moyer, who fought throughout World War II, asked gently.

"They're pretty cool," the seventh-grader replied, brimming with enthusiasm. "I tell my mom and dad, and most of my friends, about them."

"Atta boy!" Moyer shot back. "That's what we have to do. You have to tell everybody. It's up to you guys now."

The centenarian, impressed by what he called the "energy and output" of young people like Richie, was visiting Jack Lund Schofield Middle School in Las Vegas, which was named for another Flying Tigers pilot.

Moyer, a legendary pilot who took to the skies until he was 100, received a warm welcome at Schofield. When the principal announced their guest — an original Flying Tigers pilot — the hall erupted in applause.

Months before, Moyer had visited two middle schools in the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region and Yunnan province, two areas significant to the Flying Tigers' history, and this left him deeply touched.

"Flying Tiger means so much more than just a name," Moyer said. "A great friendship was forged then, a bond created between our two peoples at a terrible time in China's history. It's just wonderful this continues all this time."

The Flying Tigers were a group of US volunteer pilots who, starting in 1941, fought courageously alongside the Chinese during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45). After the group was disbanded in 1942, members who wanted to be were absorbed into the US 10th Air Force and became the nucleus of the China Air Task Force, which in 1943 became the 14th Air Force.

Moyer, who also was a fighter pilot for the 14th Air Force, had fought in the Mediterranean before arriving in Chengdu, Sichuan province.

At Schofield Middle School, every student knows about the school's namesake, a bomber pilot for the 14th Air Force who became an educator after the war.

“

Flying Tiger means so much more than just a name. A great friendship was forged then, a bond created between our two peoples at a terrible time in China's history.”

Harry Moyer, 103-year-old Flying Tigers veteran

"I knew about (the Flying Tigers) the first day I entered the school," said Amia Aromin, a student council member. She understood the significance — the Flying Tigers connect their school to a middle school in China.

"I think it's really interesting to keep the schools in contact through the Flying Tigers and keep the symbol alive and give it to future generations," she said while helping to show the guests around.

For Samantha Lopez, another student council member, missing a few classes to help with the tour was worth it.

She also helped prepare a gift for the Chinese school — an artwork crafted with bottles and paper. In return, they received a painting from China — a tiger with wings, bearing the inscription "Long live China-US friendship". The painting is now on display in the school's cafeteria.

"I don't know how often we'll see each other, but that connection is very nice," Lopez said.

The connection might become closer soon. The Chinese government is inviting more US students to visit China, and 20 students from Schofield might embark on a journey to meet their Chinese friends.

"Haven't heard much about China, but I'm sure it's amazing," Lopez said. "I'd love to try the food and learn more about their culture."

Principal Terri Knepp confirmed that communication with the Chinese school is ongoing, with agreements having been made for student exchanges.

Moyer said, "We want that young generation's energy to spread out throughout the world."

With the number of surviving Flying Tigers veterans dwindling, he added: "We need a new generation now to carry that story forward. And it looks like it's in good hands."



Flying Tigers veteran Harry Moyer (second from right) visits the Badaling section of the Great Wall in Beijing on Oct 29. He was part of a delegation from the Sino-American Aviation Heritage Foundation. The foundation has long been involved in promoting the Flying Tigers' story in both China and the United States. REN CHAO / XINHUA



## Clearing a path

Armed police personnel and airport staff clear snow from the apron area of Tianhe International Airport in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province, on Sunday. Freezing rain and snow have battered the city since Thursday and adverse weather conditions are expected to last for days. CHEN XIAODONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Experts praise China's efforts to ensure food security

By LI LEI  
lilei@chinadaily.com.cn

China's increased grain output and stable food prices in recent years, a result of the country's policy arrangements and decadelong preparations, stand out brightly against the bleak scenario of rising hunger and malnutrition worldwide, food policy experts said.

"China must have done something very right," said Kevin Chen, senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute in the United States' Washington, when asked to comment on recent Chinese data showing a bumper harvest despite adverse factors.

He said the country's adoption of technologies and flexible use of policy tools have incentivized food production and helped build a food supply system that is resilient to the turmoil unfolding in the global food supply system.

The nation's overall grain output was a record 695 million metric tons last year, a year-on-year increase of about 1 percent, despite heavy rains, floods and droughts in multiple regions across the country, according to figures from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

"To ensure absolute security, food supply was listed as one of the two redline requirements for rural-related work by central authorities in the annual No 1 Central Document, which was released to the public on Saturday. An indicator of government priorities, the document said that this year's focus will be on improving farmland productivity while keeping the growing area stable. It set a grain yield target of

above 650 million tons for this year.

Speaking at a news conference last month, Chen Bangxun, who oversees the ministry's development and planning division, said the country's per capita grain stockpiles stood at more than 490 kilograms, far exceeding the international food security benchmark of 400 kg.

The country's food inventory-to-consumption ratio was also far higher than the safety level of 17 to 18 percent set by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, he said.

Globally, however, a range of factors including extreme weather events, increasing protectionism, regional conflicts and a drought-induced export ban by India, pushed rice prices to a 15-year high.

In contrast, China's food prices remained stable in 2023, with the domestic rice procurement price in September just 0.7 percent higher than in January.

Johan Swinnen, the director-general of the International Food Policy Research Institute, said the world had witnessed an undoing of improvements in food supply since 2015.

"If you look at, for example, the period from 1985 till 2015, there have been very significant improvements in the world in terms of hunger and malnutrition. And so, food security improved, and poverty went down, etcetera," he said.

Then, around 2015, "everything stopped and now it's going the other way around."

"That is really very, very worrying," he said.

Swinnen said that climate

change was part of the reason. But regional conflicts played an outsized role in fueling homelessness and hunger.

"Before 2015, for almost 20 years, there were about 40 million people in the world who had to leave their homes. That's a lot of people. But that has gone up within seven years or so to 100 million," he said.

Swinnen praised China's recent efforts to wean itself off reliance on food imports by boosting domestic production, and said that an international food price hike around 2008 had served as a wake-up call for countries that used to be comfortable being dependent on food produced overseas.

"The price hike triggered a lot of concern in many countries," he said. "In China, it really woke up the government. There is no guarantee that we're going to have food at low prices all the time."

Officials said last month that China's grain imports rose 11.7 percent year-on-year in 2023.

According to the General Administration of Customs, soybeans accounted for more than 60 percent of grain imports last year, and officials said that high demand for soybean meal, a byproduct of soybean oil extraction, by animal feed producers was a major contributor.

Agricultural authorities said they are working to revamp animal feed formulas to use the protein-rich raw material more efficiently.

China has long relied on imported soybeans in order to create more growing areas for wheat and rice and to ensure the absolute security of staple food provisions.

More recently, central authori-

ties have worked to bolster domestic soybean supply to shield the country — the world's largest food importer by volume — from external factors ranging from trade protectionism to logistics woes caused by regional conflicts.

Deng Xiaogang, a vice-minister of agriculture and rural affairs, said recently that the planting area for soybeans touched 10.4 million hectares last year, with a record yield of 20.84 million tons.

He and his colleagues assured the public that the country's food supply was sufficient.

The No 1 Central Document also vowed that efforts will be made to continue subsidizing soybean growers and support the development of higher-yield and oil-rich soybean varieties. Insurances will be promoted to shield soybean farmers from low procurement prices.

Kevin Chen from the International Food Policy Research Institute said that China's strategy of increased dependence on soybean imports to make way for staple food production had worked quite well in recent decades, and its adoption of a technology-driven approach to bolster more self-sufficiency in recent years will provide a boon not only for China but also for the entire world.

"China is so big. If we want to have global food security, we want to make sure China's food is secure," he said.



Online  
See more  
by scanning  
the code.

## Energy: Nation crucial to global ecological transition

From page 1

In China, the race to renewables is accelerating further, hinting at the emergence of a new industrial model. In 2023, China's growth was fueled by clean technologies, which accounted for 40 percent of last year's GDP expansion.

Chinese investment in clean energy has reached \$890 billion, a sum close to the GDP of Switzerland or Turkey.

Beijing is investing in energy, economic resilience and strategic autonomy.

As China's climate negotiators recently pointed out, the target agreed to at COP28 of tripling global renewable energy capacity is a big plus for China's new energy industry. It is also likely that China will step up its efforts to finance and develop clean energy projects abroad.

Massive investment in production capacity and exports of clean technologies mean that China is crucial to the success of the ecological transition in the rest of the world, creating export markets, affordable products and economies of scale.

**China's advantageous rise raises the question of how to link inescapable climate strategies with national industrial growth in Europe and the United States.**

Globally, China's unprecedented boom in clean energy production has driven down prices: The cost of solar panels has fallen a further 42 percent year-on-year, a dramatic drop even compared with the historical annual average of around 17 percent, while battery prices have fallen more than 50 percent.

The significance of this cost-effectiveness to the global transition is clear. China is changing the world's industrial scenarios. Most of the additional solar deployment in the International Energy Agency's

revised projections will be in China.

The pace of China's great green march is set by the ambitious social and economic transformation plan that Beijing has drawn up, along the lines of the European Green Deal.

But as elections approach, some European politicians are getting cold feet and backtracking on the Green Deal, while the Chinese are implementing it.

Italy, for example, is paying dearly for its dependence on fossil fuels, with a loss of industrial competitiveness and an increased strategic dependence on other countries.

China's advantageous rise raises the question of how to link inescapable climate strategies with national industrial growth in Europe and the United States. This also raises the question of "cooperative competition" in markets.

The specter of Chinese overcapacity should not lead to unnecessary and destructive trade wars. It should lead to enhanced collaboration via a division of international labor according to agreed upon rules, and industry

and technology standards that guarantee a level playing field for global eco-industry.

The Italy-Africa summit late last month indicated a new page for energy plans for Africa. Already, many African countries are asking why they should be tied to a fossil colonialism instead of embracing the economy of the future.

Teresa Ribera, Spain's minister for ecological transition, said recently that by opposing the Green Deal, conservative parties are fueling the populist vote. She is right. They are also condemning themselves to irrelevance. With some notable exceptions like Ribera, European politics are shortsighted.

Addressing climate change requires a global shift toward a new model combining economic and environmental efficiency, and a just transition will be the fruit of worldwide cooperation.

The author is a partner and board member of management advisory company Brainscapital. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Visit: President's high regard, strong support for people's livelihoods hailed

From page 1

Since he was first elected as general secretary of the CPC Central Committee in November 2012, Xi has made it a regular practice to visit families ahead of the Lunar New Year, especially rural households and groups with difficulties.

Between 2013 and 2022, Xi visited rural families in Gansu, Shaanxi, Jiangxi, Hebei, Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou and Shanxi provinces and the Inner Mongolia autonomous region before the Lunar New Year, underscoring the Party's unwavering commitment to boosting rural development.

Families that have been affected by natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods are another priority for Xi when choosing the destinations for his trips ahead of the Lunar New Year.

In Shanxi, he visited the home of a family that had been hit by floods in 2021 and learned about their living

conditions. In 2018, he visited Yingxiu, a township in Wenchuan county of Sichuan, which was the epicenter of a major earthquake that killed tens of thousands in 2008.

Ma Liang, a professor of public administration at Renmin University of China, said Xi's visits to disaster-hit families before Spring Festival

showed the strong level of support from the top leadership when the families needed it the most.

The trip to Tianjin again reflected the president's high regard for the people and their well-being, he said.

"It also sent a message to Party and government officials that they must care for the people, make

every effort to solve their livelihood issues, and truly put the people at the center during the most important holiday of the year," he said.

Zhang Yu contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at  
xwwei@chinadaily.com.cn

## CHINA



Left: Older performers dance at an event held by the Beijing Folk Custom Museum to celebrate the Double Ninth Festival in Beijing on Oct 23. CHENG GONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Right: Seniors play a game at an elderly care center in Yunhe county, Zhejiang province, on Nov 10. XU YU / XINHUA

## Basic nationwide elderly care service system a step closer

Ministry of Civil Affairs tasked with developing policies for aging population. **Wang Xiaoyu** reports.

Institutional reforms related to elderly care work and progress toward the establishment of a basic elderly care service system across China were highlights for the sector last year.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs, which assumed responsibility for most elderly care work from the National Health Commission in March, has completed the setting up of a new bureau, and local administrations are making progress in restructuring.

National and regional lists for basic elderly care services were formulated last year, and campaigns were launched to increase catering services for the elderly and care for those having financial difficulty. The number of elderly care facilities in China also kept climbing.

According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics on Jan 17, China's elderly population — those age 60 or older — grew to 297 million by the end of last year, making up 21.1 percent of the total population, compared with 19.8 percent by late 2022.

China's total population also dropped for a second consecutive year, by around 2.1 million, due to factors such as low fertility levels, fewer women of childbearing age and delays in marriage.

Yuan Xin, a professor at Nankai University's School of Economics and vice-president of the China Population Association, said the downward trend in total population, coupled with an older demographic profile, will be fundamental features of China in the future and will drive the country toward a deeply aging society.

"It is important to plan ahead in aspects of social and economic resources and policies to deal with the challenge," he said.

Du Peng, head of the gerontology research institute at the Renmin University of China, said in a Global Times article in late 2022 that the central leadership had called for the implementation of a national strategy to actively respond to population aging and had released detailed blueprints.

The next key step was carrying out measures at the grassroots level and making them accessible to the elderly and those in need, he added.

"For the most vulnerable groups, governments should increase subsidies to ensure they can be covered, while some elderly could enjoy both government-subsidized services and market-oriented services," he said.

Yuan said China's elderly population first exceeded 10 percent of the total in 2000 and has been growing rapidly in recent years.

"By the middle of this century, the elderly population is predicted to peak at 520 million, taking up 40 percent of the total population," he said. "As people born during times of low fertility will enter old age during the latter half of this century, the number will fall to around 360 million, but the aging trend will continue to deepen and likely approach 50 percent."

Yuan said the working-age population — defined as those age 15 to 59 — would fall from around 870



From top: Workers greet residents at a community elderly care center in Beijing on Oct 23. LI XIN / XINHUA A volunteer gives a haircut to a woman in Hebei province. YAN ZHIGUO / XINHUA A patient undergoes rehabilitation under the guidance of a doctor in Hebei on Dec 27. JIN LIANGKUI / XINHUA

million at present to 650 million by around 2050.

However, he added, the trend would not necessarily result in a labor shortage because artificial intelligence, robots and other scientific advances could take the place of human labor in a modern digital society, and competition in the employment market would remain intense with a growing number of graduates from colleges and technical schools.

Yuan said relatively younger seniors in their 60s will account for

nearly half of all elderly in the next three decades, creating a window of opportunity for China to implement retirement age reforms and increase elderly people's participation in society.

He also noted challenges in providing elderly care and sustaining the pension fund with a ballooning elderly population, longer life expectancies and expectations for higher-quality elderly care services.

During last year's two sessions — the annual meetings of the nation's top legislative and political advisory

bodies — the State Council, China's Cabinet, said that some functions of the National Health Commission would be transferred to the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

It said the ministry would be put in charge of drafting policies and measures to address the aging issue and coordinating their implementation.

The commission will continue to devise policies related to the integration of medical care and elderly care and take charge of work related to the physical and mental health of the elderly.

The ministry said at a meeting in January that an elderly affairs bureau had been established within the ministry, and local civil affairs authorities would be required to set up such departments this year.

Meanwhile, China has accelerated the building of elderly care systems, with a national list of basic elderly care services released in May.

"Some regions have raised additional requirements and innovations based on the national version of the list," said Yu Jianliang, an official at the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

He added that central finances had been allocated to the building of related infrastructure in communities, and localities had been mobilized to give special care to seniors facing harsh conditions.

By the end of last year, the ministry said that about 235,000 home-based elderly care beds had been set up and 418,000 seniors had received door-to-door elderly care services at home. Nearly 1.5 million households with seniors had seen their homes upgraded to be more elderly-friendly.

The number of elderly care facilities nationwide topped 400,000, with 8.2 million beds, by the end of September. The ministry said 41,000 were elderly care homes, with the remainder community facilities.

Wu Yuxian, a 94-year-old resident of Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, was used to picking up meals by herself at a nearby public canteen. But out of safety concerns, the local community and her neighbors

began ordering dishes online for her and delivering meals to her doorstep in recent years.

"I read a lot of newspapers every day and feel that my life is very fulfilling," she said during a recent interview with China National Radio. "I prefer staying in my home rather than going into a care home because in my neighborhood, I can still see a lot of young people around."

At the Beishan neighborhood where Wu lives, there are about 10,260 people age 60 and older, accounting for 30 percent of residents.

As part of efforts to develop a basic system for elderly care services, Hangzhou's city government called in August for each major neighborhood to build a community center capable of offering elderly care services by 2025.

Hu Xiaodong, an official in the Beishan neighborhood, said it had transformed a public facility into an elderly care service provider where seniors with disabilities can be admitted to beds and given access to professional care, while seniors like Wu who prefer to spend the rest of their lives at home can enjoy daily services such as meal deliveries and medical care.

The neighborhood authorities have also equipped the homes of 22 seniors — primarily those who live alone — with emergency push buttons and surveillance cameras. Staff will check footage twice a day to facilitate a prompt response to incidents.

Wu welcomed the renovation. "My home has also been renovated to incorporate elderly-friendly features," she said. "Now, I am able to sit down while taking a shower, and there is a handle and an alert device by my side when going to the restroom."

On top of ensuring the safety of the elderly and that their basic needs are being met, Hu said that it is important to improve rehabilitation and medical care services targeting the elderly.

"This year, we are planning to cooperate with a third-party organization to build a neighborhood-level rehabilitation and care station," he said.

In Southwest China's Chongqing, elderly-friendly renovations have not only been implemented at homes, but also the public facilities where the elderly tend to gather and hang out.

A courtyard in its Nan'an district has been fitted with slip-resistant tiles, and handles have been added to benches and chairs. New tables for table tennis — a sport favored by many elderly for its relatively low intensity — have also been installed.

The ministry said more efforts will be made this year to mobilize society to invest in and improve elderly care service systems.

On Jan 15, the State Council unveiled a series of measures to promote the "silver economy", calling on the public and private sectors to make investments and innovations in products and services for seniors.

Contact the writer at wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

## Expert urges efforts to bridge digital gap

By WANG XIAOYU

A top family planning expert recently called for the development of digital devices and applications tailored to the elderly, as well as steps to increase their digital engagement and literacy.

Wang Pei'an, former Party chief of the China Family Planning Association, said that while rapid digitalization would help alleviate a labor shortage and enable seniors to get involved in social activities through the internet, many older people were confronted with a digital divide.

"Eliminating the digital gap would not only help foster an elderly-friendly environment, but also give rise to new development opportunities in human capital, digital literacy, rural vitalization and the digital economy," he said late last year in an article in Healthy China Observation, a magazine run by the National Health Commission.

Wang, also vice-president of the Committee on Population, Resources and Environment of the 13th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said that close to 50 percent of elderly people are faced with a digital divide that brings inconvenience to their daily lives or hampers their connections to society.

Citing data released by the China Internet Network Information Center, Wang said that around 128 million elderly, or nearly half of all seniors in China, did not use the internet in the second half of 2022.

"The majority of non-netizens live in rural areas, so it is particularly important to help rural elderly bridge the digital gap," he said.

Wang added that a lack of knowledge about computers and the internet and low education levels were the primary factors constraining their ability to get online.

"A survey also shows that nearly 30 percent of elderly rural residents said they did not dare to use smartphones for fear of troubling others, being swindled or other safety reasons," he said.

Wang said that the digital divide would result in an array of issues in the daily lives of the elderly, such as being rejected when trying to pay cash at supermarkets, failing to secure hospital appointments or being unable to grab a taxi in inclement weather.

"The digital divide could also harm social participation and the mental health of seniors," Wang said. "Overall, the more functions that seniors can make use of online, the more positive effects could be felt by them."

Wang added that helping the elderly bridge the digital gap would motivate them to consume more and save less.

"In the age of the digital economy, the quantity of purchases made by the elderly cannot be underestimated," he said. "Given the aging trend in China, tapping into their online consumption potential could help bolster China's economic development."

Wang said intensified efforts are needed to develop devices and mobile applications that cater to elderly people's demands, such as simple, clear and streamlined apps for chatting, watching videos, listing to music and making payments.

"It is also important to foster a willingness to make changes, adjust to and engage in the digital age among the elderly, especially those living in the countryside," he said.

Improving the overall digital literacy of the elderly through community schools and activities would also be significant, as about one in 10 seniors in China have never gone to school.

Wang also suggested mobilizing social organizations, enterprises and volunteer teams to help the elderly engage in the digital sector, especially recruiting seniors who are familiar with digital devices into volunteer teams to help their peers.

## CHINA

## Team solves Swinhoe's storm petrel mystery

Chinese researchers find out more about bird's foraging habits

By CHEN LIANG  
chenliang@chinadaily.com.cn

"High above the silvery ocean winds are gathering the storm clouds, and between the clouds and ocean proudly wheels the Stormy Petrel, like a streak of sable lightning."

Many Chinese people know the line from *The Song of the Stormy Petrel*, by Russian writer Maxim Gorky (1868-1936), because it has been in the textbooks of Chinese junior high school students for many years.

However, few of us have seen a storm petrel with our own eyes — even though it is a group of nearly 30 species of seabirds in two families that are widely distributed around the world, and some of the species, including Swinhoe's storm petrel, live around China's coastal areas.

A small seabird with a size similar to that of a starling or shrike, the Swinhoe's storm petrel (*Hydrobates monorhis*) breeds on small islands in the Northwest Pacific, including the Russian Far East, the Korean Peninsula, China and Japan. It has long been considered a mysterious bird because it spends a lot of time out on the open sea and usually returns to land under the cover of darkness.

Technological limitations, such as the weight of tracking equipment and low spatial resolution, have also hindered people's ability to research the species.

But thanks to a pioneering study conducted by Professor Liu Yang's team from the School of Ecology at Sun Yat-sen University in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, in collaboration with the Qingdao Bird Watching Society, more has been learned about the bird.

Published in the January issue of *Avian Research*, an open access, peer-reviewed journal that publishes articles covering all aspects of ornithology, the study, titled "Diverse foraging strategies of breeding Swinhoe's storm petrel in the productive marginal sea of the Northwest Pacific," sheds light on the bird's intricate foraging behaviors.

The research has revealed that during their breeding season, Swinhoe's storm petrels fly as far as 348 kilometers from their colo-



**Clockwise from top:** Members of the research team try to find breeding Swinhoe's storm petrels on Dagong Island near Qingdao, Shandong province. A Swinhoe's storm petrel sits near its nest on Dagong Island. Cheng Yachang (left) from Sun Yat-sen University in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, fixes a tracking device on a storm petrel on the island. PHOTOS BY XUE LIN AND LIAO ZHIKAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

nies out to sea to forage for food in the open sea, said Liu, the paper's corresponding coauthor.

Members of the team and the Qingdao Bird Watching Society

conducted their research on Dagong Island, which is near Qingdao, Shandong province, in the Yellow Sea.

They fixed small satellite track-

ing devices on Swinhoe's storm petrels breeding on the island between May and late October and analyzed data they received from the devices.

They found that the storm petrels showed a preference for shallow coastal waters, with short foraging trips being the predominant pattern.

"For parents that have eggs to brood or chicks to feed, they quickly grab some food nearby, which is a fairly reasonable strategy," said Cheng Yachang, the lead author of the paper, who is a postdoctoral researcher in Liu's team.

"We found two distinct foraging strategies. They took longer trips heading southeast and shorter trips southwest. Each strategy was linked to varying environmental factors such as water depth, distance from the coast and sea surface temperature."

The researchers also found that some of the birds were flexible in their foraging strategies. For example, those with longer wings were more inclined to take longer foraging trips.

"Other physical attributes such as body weight, bill length, and wing width showed no correlation with foraging strategies," Liu said. "It was a surprise for us."

The findings emphasize the influence of environmental factors and individual characteristics on the foraging decisions of Swinhoe's storm petrels in a productive oceanic ecosystem.

"The foraging strategies observed among the storm-petrels breeding on Dagong Island show the species' adaptation to the environmental conditions of the Yellow Sea, aligning with the region's high marine productivity," Liu said.

Contrary to initial expectations, the study did not find any significant effects from offshore wind conditions or marine primary productivity, which is measured by using the chlorophyll-a concentration observed by remote sensing satellites, a well-used indicator for evaluating nutrition levels in the open sea.

Instead, it hints at the presence of specific but as yet unidentified resources in the open sea, such as particular fauna within the Yellow Sea Cold Water Mass, which may play a crucial role in attracting foraging seabirds.

"The study's findings not only enhance our understanding of the bird's behaviors," Liu said. "It also underscores the importance of continued research and efforts to protect these enigmatic seabirds and the delicate ecosystems they inhabit."

## Dunhuang moves to boost education travel market

LANZHOU — Educational travel has emerged as a favorable choice across China for inquisitive minds seeking to embark on journeys of knowledge and exploration during their breaks, and one destination that stands out is Dunhuang, a city in Northwest China's Gansu province.

"I love delving into Chinese history and often read about Dunhuang's past and its mural stories. This time, I couldn't wait to see it in person," said Chen Tianli, a primary school student from Lanzhou, the provincial capital.

At the start of this winter break, Chen and more than 300 students from various places in Gansu set out on an educational trip to Dunhuang, home to the Mogao Grottoes, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Eager for a rich and immersive learning experience, the students were greeted with a variety of courses designed to broaden their horizons and create lasting educational memories.

"Dunhuang has a profound history. Participating in educational travel not only helps to expand my knowledge but also provides an enjoyable break from busy study

Participating in educational travel not only helps to expand my knowledge but also provides an enjoyable break from busy study schedules."

Wang Jingwu, a high school student from Linxia, Gansu province

schedules," said Wang Jingwu, a high school sophomore from Linxia. Dunhuang began developing its tourism industry in the late 1970s. Today, the growing cultural demands of young people have brought more opportunities to the city. Experiential learning activities began in 2022 in Dunhuang, according to Feng Yingchao, director of the city's culture, sports and radio and television bureau.

"Through these programs, we

expect to offer rich holiday experiences to students nationwide," Feng said.

Courses have been designed for students to learn about the history of the Dunhuang murals, race on the sands of Mingsha Mountain and participate in scientific experiments at Dunhuang Solar Expo Park.

To further fuel the educational travel market, local authorities have also helped ease access to tourist attractions, hotels and travel agencies by taking measures such as providing free tickets and offering guided tours for students.

"We hope to fully leverage the role of artistic and cultural education through educational trips, allowing students to experience traditional Chinese culture, enriching their spiritual lives and enhancing cultural confidence," said Tang Wenjing, deputy general manager of the Dunhuang Culture and Tourism Group.

Zhao Yao, head of the Gansu Liangchang Culture and Education Co, said: "Since 2023, educational travel has undergone a rapid expansion, with courses blending education, experience and entertainment gaining popularity among parents and students. Children are offered a broader view of the world through these unique experiences."

XINHUA



**From left:** Members of an educational tour group visit the Dunhuang Museum in Dunhuang, Gansu province, on Jan 19. Students on an educational tour practice calligraphy in a craft studio in the Mogao Grottoes scenic area on Jan 17. PHOTOS BY ZHANG XIAOLIANG / XINHUA

## Lifelong passion for painting persists

XI'AN — As a young woman, Chen Xiaoling clung to her passion for painting, even during her most miserable moments.

"When can I paint freely on the canvas without having to worry about my life?" she asked herself hundreds of times while she was selling eggs, making bricks or collecting garbage to earn a living in a village in Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

Decades later, Chen, now 64, sat in her study against the backdrop of a Chinese landscape she painted. She said she is satisfied with how far she has come. "I have been in love with painting since childhood," she said. "The love has nothing to do with my age or my profession."

Chen said her interest in art was embedded in her genes. "My grandfather was a carpenter and good at painting, while my granny and aunt were both paper-cutting experts," she said. "And my two elder brothers both learned art at school!"

When she was a child, her second brother used to spread white lime on the slope of a canal and let her "draw" on it using her feet.

In the following years, she would face some of the biggest struggles of her life. In addition to farming, she used to transport coal, sell wool and eggs and even collect trash to make money. While eight months pregnant, she even trekked on a mountainous road for more than 15 kilometers to find a kind of apple that she could grow.

But her tough life would not stop her from seizing every opportunity she had to paint.

Chen got married on a rainy day in 1983. The home she shared with her husband, who was from an impoverished family, had rooms that were fairly bare, without much decoration. On a wall in her bedroom, she spent three days completing a painting that depicted people traveling



Chen Xiaoling paints at her home in Xi'an, Shaanxi province. SUN ZHENGHAO / XINHUA

through mountains and streams.

She finally had enough time to paint at the age of 53 after she bought a new apartment and her children moved away with their spouses. She called herself a layman back then.

"I have never received any systematic training," Chen said. To learn how to paint, she frequented art exhibitions and enrolled in painting courses both at a seniors university and online.

Once she saw a portrait inside a restaurant and went to have a look. "The waitress kept talking about their dishes to me. To silence her, I asked for a bowl of noodles," she recalled. The noodles cost her 28 yuan (\$4), which she thought was quite expensive. But she saw it as a "tuition fee" to learn painting.

Two things she has never hesitated to spend money on are painting tools and courses. She has spent more than 2,000 yuan to buy rice paper, and more than 10,000 yuan on paintings she liked.

Chen has completed more than 30 long scrolls with paintings depicting how farmers' lives have improved over the past few decades since the

country started its reform and opening-up policy.

Surprised villagers would approach her while she painted.

They used to ask her, "Can you fill up your stomach with paintings?" Chen said: "But after they saw my paintings, they began to understand. Whether they are in cities or in the countryside, people admire those who have real talent!"

On the occasions of funerals and weddings, she was always invited to write or paint something for the families.

"She also likes giving paintings to others as presents, saying that art ignites people's lives," said her husband, Xu Keyong.

In her spare time, Chen taught in kindergartens and formed an art society. Inspired by her, other women picked up brushes, including retiree Fu Weiwei.

"Thanks to Xiaoling, I am now enjoying a richer senior life," she said. "Xiaoling encouraged us to be brave enough to chase our dreams, and not to be bound by age or profession."

XINHUA

## WORLD

# Australians call for fair stance on world stage

Canberra urged to strike a balance in ties with China, US to preserve peace

By LIU JIANQIAO

liujianqiao@chinadaily.com.cn

Fifty influential Australians have urged their country to strike a balance in its relations with China and the United States to prevent the escalation of great-power competition and secure lasting peace.

The 50, including former political party leaders, foreign ministers, state premiers, academics and writers, issued a statement on Wednesday calling on Canberra to engage in "activist middle-power diplomacy". This approach aims to reduce tensions and promote mutually beneficial trade between Australia's top ally, the US, and its largest trading partner, China.

Chen Hong, director of the Australian Studies Center at East China Normal University in Shanghai, said the statement reflects the foresight and insight of influential Australians who recognize the importance of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region.

"The world has been marred by uncertainties and disturbances in recent years, with the US exacerbating disputes and frictions in various regions," he said.

He highlighted the significance of the Sino-US San Francisco summit held in November because it established a platform for dialogue and resolving sensitive issues in bilateral relations. The statement by the 50 Australians aims to use this opportunity to push for detente in Sino-US relations and maintain peace and stability in the region.

One of those who signed the statement, Bob Carr, a former Australian foreign minister and former premier of New South Wales, told the national broadcaster the Australian Broadcasting Corporation that collaboration between China and the US should be expanded and adversarial competition reduced.

The US has been taking measures to maintain its dominance in the Asia-Pacific and views China's rise as a threat to its position, he said. He also referred to a warning by the late former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger that the deteriorating Sino-US relationship poses dangers to the whole world.

Uncertainties regarding the US stance toward China are increasing as the presidential election in November approaches, Chen said. Some politicians in the US and other countries may engage in anti-China rhetoric for

political purposes, he said.

"Recent anti-China sentiment in the US may be echoed by some right-wing Australian politicians, in the context that there is a federal election in Australia next year. That's why these prominent Australians are sending out this warning at this critical time."

This concern is also mirrored by Carr, who said "there is a challenge with the hawks in Australia."

The 50 Australians understand that the US government's hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region does not align with Australia's interests, Chen said.

## Strategic independence

Li Jianjun, director of the Australian Studies Center at Beijing Foreign Studies University, said the statement by the 50 reflects some Australians' desire for their country to maintain strategic independence.

"Carr and another former foreign minister, Gareth Evans, have called for Australia's foreign policy to be more independent and have been critical of its overreliance on the US, especially of (the trilateral alliance) AUKUS," Li said. "They argue that this alliance could lead Australia into the danger of war, which is not in its national interests."

Chen said: "The signatories are urging the Australian government to handle regional issues prudently and reduce nuclear risks, demonstrating their opposition to Australia becoming a strategic victim of US geopolitical rivalries."

Since Anthony Albanese became Australia's Prime Minister in May 2022 the country has adopted a new approach toward China, pushing to improve bilateral relations. The 50 signatories hope to appeal to the government to continue this positive momentum, rather than reverting to the confrontational path pursued by the previous administration, Chen said.

"The Australian government needs to heed rational voices like the 50 signatories and make informed choices. Australia must cease blindly following the US hegemonic strategies that only harm its relationship with China. Instead it needs to strive to build a mutually beneficial relationship with China that serves Australia's interests."

Chen and Li said Australia can help ease tensions between China and the US. However, it is unclear how the Australian government will respond to the statement, they said.

# Emergency declared as Chilean wildfires kill at least 51

VINA DEL MAR, Chile — Wildfires blazing across Chile have killed at least 51 people, leaving bodies in the streets and homes gutted, with flames continuing to spread on Sunday and the toll expected to rise.

President Gabriel Boric decreed a state of emergency in the central and southern parts of the country "due to catastrophe", as dry conditions and temperatures soaring to 40 C exacerbated the crisis.

Dense gray smoke blanketed the city of Vina del Mar of the Valparaíso tourist region, along central Chile's coastline, forcing residents to flee.

Rosana Avendano, 63, a kitchen assistant, was away from home when the fire began to sweep through El Olivar, an area of Vina del Mar, where she lives with her husband.

"It was terrible because I couldn't get (to my house)," Avendano told Agence France-Press.

She feared the worst for hours, she said, but eventually was able to contact her spouse.

The death toll rose to 51 on Saturday as firefighters battled to control the flames. The forensic medical service had previously reported 45 deaths, but "there are six more people who died in healthcare facilities", the interior ministry said.

Boric said the number of victims would increase, pledging government support to help people get back on their feet.

Authorities imposed a curfew beginning at 9 pm on Saturday to allow emergency supplies, especially fuel, into the affected areas.

New evacuation orders were issued, but it was unclear exactly how many people had been told to leave.

Earlier on Saturday the Interior Minister Carolina Toha said there



A local resident walks past houses and cars destroyed by a forest fire in Vina del Mar, Chile, on Saturday. Thousands of homes were burned and at least 51 were killed in the disaster. LUCAS AGUAYO ARAOS VIA GETTY IMAGES

had been 92 fires by noon, with 43,000 hectares burned across the country. Firefighters were still battling 29 of the blazes by the afternoon, and 40 had been brought under control.

In the hills around Vina del Mar, it was clear that entire blocks of houses had been burned out overnight from Friday to Saturday, as thousands of people who had evacuated returned to find their homes destroyed.

Some of the dead were seen lying

on the road, covered by sheets.

The area, apart from being a popular destination during summer months, is important for the country's wine, agricultural and logging industries.

The fires are being driven by a summer heat wave and drought affecting southern South America caused by the El Nino weather phenomenon, as scientists warn that a warming planet has increased the risk of natural disas-

ters such as intense heat and fires.

As Chile and Colombia battled rising temperatures, the heat wave was also threatening to sweep over Paraguay and Brazil.

In Argentina brigades from several provinces have been fighting a fire that has consumed more than 3,000 hectares in Los Alerces National Park, famed for its beauty and biodiversity, since Jan 25.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

# Nationalist O'Neill becomes first minister of Northern Ireland

LONDON — The Northern Ireland Assembly, the Stormont, was officially restored on Saturday in Belfast after a two-year hiatus, with Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neill appointed as Northern Ireland's first minister.

O'Neill said in her speech that the day "opens the door to the future".

The power-sharing model of government in Northern Ireland was introduced in the 1990s as a way of ending decades of violence as part of the Good Friday Agreement. It requires the representation of both nationalist and unionist parties in any government.

O'Neill's nomination was seen as a highly symbolic moment for nationalists.

"This is a historic day which represents a new dawn," O'Neill said.

"That such a day would ever come would have been unimaginable to my parents and grandparents' generation... A more democratic, more equal society has been created making this a better place for everyone."

O'Neill will share power with deputy first minister Emma Little-Pengelly from the Democratic Unionist Party, or DUP. The two will be equals, but O'Neill, whose party



Michelle O'Neill, Sinn Fein's vice-president, walks through Stormont Parliament Buildings in Belfast on Saturday. She was appointed as Northern Ireland's first minister that day. PETER MORRISON / AP

captured more seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly in the 2022 elections, will hold the more prestigious title.

Neither side can govern without agreement from the other. Government business ground to a halt over the past two years after the DUP walked out to protest trade issues related to Brexit.

The developments came after the DUP ended a two-year boycott of the region's power-sharing government early last week. The DUP and the government of the United Kingdom struck a deal to remove routine checks on goods moving from Great Britain to Northern Ireland. The deal was subsequently approved by the UK parliament.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

# South Africa tourism gets BRICS boost

By NDUMISO MLILO in Johannesburg  
For China Daily

The number of tourists visiting South Africa increased by nearly half last year, boosted by new favorable visa policies and increased arrivals from BRICS countries, the country's tourism ministry said last week.

South Africa received 8.5 million international tourists last year, a 49 percent increase compared with the previous year, South Africa's Minister of Tourism Patricia de Lille said.

Africa accounted for 6.4 million visitors, or 75 percent of all arrivals, while about 200,000 people from Asia arrived in South Africa, which is a 69 percent increase from 2022, she said.

"This recovery can be attributed to consistent efforts to showcase South Africa as a welcoming, responsible tourism destination, highlighting experiences that align with intrepid, green economy conscious travelers," de Lille said.

The country also received a surging number of tourists from Kenya. Effective from Jan 1, 2023, South Africa



Local revelers and visiting holidaymakers brave inclement weather to take to the water at Umhlanga Pier in Durban, a major South African tourist attraction. RAJESH JANTILAL / AFP

allowed Kenyans to visit the country visa-free for up to 90 days within a calendar year. This contributed to the surge in the overall number of international tourists, de Lille said.

South Africa was the BRICS chair last year and hosted the 15th BRICS Summit, attracting a number of tourists from the five BRICS countries. There was a 44 percent increase in Indian tourists visiting the country last year with about 80,000 arrivals, South Africa's tourism ministry said.

A new member of the BRICS family, more than 6,500 tourists from the United Arab Emirates visited South Africa, a surge of 110

percent compared to 2022 figures.

The number of Chinese tourists in South Africa increased by 205 percent last year. De Lille said efforts are being made to improve South Africa's visa processing and enable more Chinese visitors.

Tshifhiwa Tshivhengwa, CEO of the Tourism Business Council of South Africa, said: "We are recovering as a country from COVID-19 and this could be as a result of the appealing destination marketing we have been doing."

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

# IMF: China's economic recovery on target

By YIFAN XU in Washington  
yifanxu@chinadailyusa.com

The International Monetary Fund said China's economic activity has recovered broadly in line with the authorities' growth target of around 5 percent. It projected China's GDP growth to be 4.6 percent this year, an upward revision of 0.4 percentage points from the IMF's forecast in the October 2023 World Economic Outlook, or WEO.

On the projected 4.6 percent growth, Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Institute for China-America Studies, said it is "reasonable" but "slightly on the lower side" in his estimation.

"I expect the final number to come in closer to 5 percent on the back of greater public sector investment, which would also be near the government's growth target," Gupta told China Daily.

China will grow because it enjoys robust private-sector growth engines, such as in the electric vehicles, environmental goods, advanced manufacturing, and platform economy sectors, he said. "This is evident in the healthy private fixed asset, minus property, investment numbers, which are

surging at a double-digit pace and cushioning the blow from the contraction in real estate investment."

"Longer-term, this also bodes well for the sustainability of macroeconomic growth once the shakeout in the property sector restores residential fixed investment growth to an equilibrium more in tune with fundamentals. The shakeout could be a protracted one, though. This is especially so given that economic growth in the advanced economies is expected to soften this year."

The executive directors welcomed China's strong post-pandemic recovery while noting that the adjustment in the property market and strains in local government public finance will continue to weigh on private investment and consumer confidence, according to the IMF report published on Friday.

## Efforts welcomed

The directors welcomed the authorities' efforts to contain risks from the property market and underscored the need for additional measures in a comprehensive, well-sequenced strategy to facilitate a smooth transition of the property sector to a new

equilibrium, the report said.

They highlighted China's role in advancing multilateral economic cooperation and welcomed its support for sovereign debt restructuring in low-income and vulnerable countries and tackling the global climate crisis.

Zhang Zhengxin, IMF executive director for China, issued a statement dealing with some of the concerns as part of the review.

Zhang said the IMF's forecast for the real estate market was "too pessimistic" to some extent. The property sector, he said, had been "stabilizing and recovering, and its downward impact on the economy will continue to reduce gradually."

China "has always fully complied with our agreements and commitments to the IMF on data disclosure and provision", he said.

On China's trade with others, Gary Hufbauer, a senior fellow at Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington, said that as long as China remains a reliable supplier, this trade will expand.

"China has the advantage of offering high-quality components and finished goods at reasonable prices," Hufbauer told China Daily.

## WORLDUS

## Celebrating 45 years of education exchange

Efforts by Deng Xiaoping, Jimmy Carter recalled as pivotal for diplomacy

By MINGMEILI in New York  
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

It was 45 years ago when then-US President Jimmy Carter received a call at the White House from his science adviser, asking if he would be open to 5,000 Chinese students studying in the United States. Carter replied that he would welcome 10,000.

The call by Edward Prescott to Carter was on behalf of Chinese Vice-Premier Deng Xiaoping.

On Jan 29, 1979, Deng, the initiator of China's reform and opening-up policy, began a nine-day visit to the United States.

He was welcomed at the White House by Carter, and when the Chinese national flag was raised, 52 Chinese students were standing on American soil witnessing the historic moment alongside Deng. One month later, the US sent eight students to Beijing.

Deng sent the Chinese students to the US to study even before the diplomatic relationship between the two countries was officially announced on Jan 1, 1979.

On Jan 31, 1979, Deng received an honorary doctor of law degree from Temple University in Philadelphia, at Blair House, the "president's guest house", in Washington.

On Wednesday night, the consul general of the Chinese consulate in New York, reflecting on the past and anticipating the future, commemorated the 45th anniversary of Temple awarding the degree to Deng.

Ambassador Huang Ping said that Temple has been the front-runner in

educational cooperation with China.

President Xi Jinping invited 50,000 American youths to China in November, as the country is starting a so-called Y-E-S scholarship, which stands for "Youth Envoy Scholarship" that encourages students to apply to visit and study in China in the near future.

The degree to Deng was conferred by Temple University President Marvin Wachman. It was the sole academic degree that Deng received in his lifetime.

Wachman referred to Temple University as the "People's University of Philadelphia" and said it was an honor to award the degree to the leader of the People's Republic of China.

"We are hopeful that the immediate years ahead will see a continuing, fruitful exchange of people and ideas between our two countries," Wachman said.

"This is not only a personal honor, but an expression of friendship and respect from the people of the United States to the people of China," Deng said after accepting the degree. "We will pay special attention to strengthening our economic, cultural and scientific, technological exchanges with the United States."

Temple's president also said that the university and Deng shared many common values.

He said that Temple University has tried to provide not only the opportunity to learn, but also to practice what is learned, which aligned with what Deng urged, "to seek truth from facts" and "to make practice the sole criterion truth".

Deng invited the president of Temple to Beijing, who made the trip 18 months later in June 1980, which was not common for people other than foreign diplomats.

The Beasley School of Law at Temple, well known for its strong trial advocacy program, launched a master of laws program at the



Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping is awarded an honorary doctor of law degree from Temple University by university President Marvin Wachman (right) at Blair House, Washington DC, on Jan 31, 1979. Harry Bailey Jr (left) university marshal, placed the cowl over Deng, Mann-chiang Niu, professor of biology at Temple (standing behind Deng) was his interpreter. COURTESY OF TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

China University of Politics and Law in Beijing as the result of high-level exchanges. In 1999, it became the first legal education program to be approved by the Ministry of Education and the Office of the State Council Academic Degrees Committee.

The Beijing Master of Laws program has partnered with Tsinghua University, one of China's leading universities, and has been operating successfully there. As of 2023, there were more than 900 program graduates throughout China who are now working in the legal system or at big-name law firms.

"It was an incredibly exciting opportunity. I didn't know anything about China. The students were very excited to learn American-style trial skills," Eleanor Myers, a professor who taught in China in the summers of 2007 and 2009, told China Daily.

"It was an opportunity for a lot of faculty members in the United States

to learn something about a completely new legal system and from their students," she said. "Several of us who are always interested in expanding research opportunities and expanding our understanding wanted to go for the sense of what we would learn from going to China, and also a sense of adventure."

"I really started to think about America in a different way; you get a different perspective on your own culture," she said.

"And the students, some of whom were practicing lawyers and judges, were just lately taken with the concepts of how this was happening, which was so different than what they were experiencing. I would ask students questions like, 'Well, in China, does this happen?'" she said. Her husband, Johnny Myers, also taught in the program.

Eleanor Myers said that the biggest difference between Chinese students

and other countries' students is that Chinese students work so much harder.

"They're studying law in a foreign language. They worked hours and hours and hours to read that material. They couldn't always speak everything that they knew, because their reading and writing was actually more sophisticated than their school, but they worked so hard and really wanted to excel and learn," she said.

Li Jiaxin, a 32-year-old lawyer at top Chinese law firm Jincheng Tongda & Neal, who is also a current student of the program in Beijing, told China Daily: "During the first half of my time in China, I could better balance my work and studies. Then, in the latter half, I can actually come and experience the student life in the United States."

"Some activities between schools or existing collaborations, from a student's perspective, such exchange programs can help us gain a more authentic and clear understanding of the current situation," she said. "It allows us to form our own judgments. While there might be some news online, the ability to objectively reflect on the societal situation and the relationship between China and the United States requires our own judgment. So, these experiences can cultivate our ability to think independently and provide us with an opportunity to truly see and deeply understand the facts, enhancing our understanding of these matters."

Temple University has built partnerships with more than 60 universities in China. As a leading example, more US universities also are expanding their networks on the Chinese mainland and deepening educational exchange between Chinese and foreign students. Temple University is also adding another degree program in business in China.

"It's a tremendous number and really speaks to our joint efforts

together," said Gregory Mandel, senior vice-president, provost and professor of law at Temple. "We want all blossoms to fill the earth, and it's a beautiful illusion in praise of having students around the globe. As educators, we take great pride in developing connections and building those relationships."

"I've always been impressed by Deng Xiaoping," he said. "I'm deeply proud of our legacy in China. We were at the forefront, as you just heard of, and see no American educational connections and engagement. Our strong collaborations in China remain a fundamental part of our university mission, it is often, I find, by experiencing. We understand more, have more insights."

John Smagula, the assistant dean of Temple University Law School, who studied at Nanjing University when he was a junior in college, told China Daily: "We're already starting to think, well, we want to do a study tour, so we can maybe arrange 50 to 100 Temple students, junior staff and junior faculty to get together."

"Chinese students coming [to the US] is only half of that. We need to have Americans going [to China] to see. And as a university, we play an important role in that area."

"We have a history and a commitment to collaborations in China. This is something that's been established for 45 years and it runs in our universities' DNA. It gives us a historical mission," he said.

He said that education can reduce the distance between China and the US: "People-to-people in higher educational exchange is a fundamental part of diplomatic relations, and any student who studies in China is a diplomat."

"Closing the gap through conversations, friendships, people-to-people exchange — that will have an impact, a bottom-up impact," he said. "I'm an example of that."

## The Met museum celebrates Year of the Dragon

By MINGMEILI in New York

The beat of drums echoed off the museum's walls as dragon dancers entered in procession. A golden dragon gracefully wove and twirled through the halls of the Metropolitan Museum of Art to celebrate the Year of the Dragon.

That was the scene Saturday as the largest museum in the United States celebrated the Chinese New Year with visitors from around the world, featuring traditional Asian cultural experiences through hands-on workshops, including woodblock printing, lucky lantern decorating, and paper dragon folding.

Attendees also enjoyed traditional performances and demonstrations such as Chinese glove puppetry and calligraphy, poetry readings and Asian jazz performances.

"We're very pleased to start and kick it off with a dragon dance. We used to have lions, but I felt that since the dragon is such an auspicious animal in the zodiac, as well as being connected to Chinese culture and even to the world, it was really important for us to have the dragon dance this year," Heidi Holder, the chair of education at the Met, told China Daily.

She said that this year's celebration, which is the sixth for the Lunar New Year at the Met, is more extensive than in the past. The Met had 18,000 participants in 2023, and Holder anticipates 20,000 visitors this year.

Holder said one special thing about this year's celebration is that the Met is working with the Chinese Consulate General in New York and invited woodblock makers from the Zhejiang Cultural Conventional Center in China to demonstrate Chinese traditional woodblock printing.

"During the Chinese New Year season, we take down the old New Year paintings from the past year and put up new ones, anticipating a wonderful year ahead," Huang Jiecheng, the representative inheritor of the national intangible cultural heritage project Hangzhou Woodblock printing told China Daily.

He demonstrated a painting of "the god of fortune" and showed it to workshop participants. "Woodblock printing encompasses two of our Four Great Inventions — papermaking and printing, and it has nearly 1,400 years of history since the Sui Dynasty," he said.

"This is a deeply rooted cultural



Young visitors apply ink to woodblock to experience traditional Chinese culture at the Metropolitan Museum of Art's Lunar New Year celebration on Saturday in New York. MINGMEILI / CHINA DAILY

"I find it very vibrant and exciting. I'd like to understand more of the meanings behind the different symbols and different holidays."

Julie, visitor to the Met museum Lunar New Year event

tradition in China. We are glad seeing so many children participate, which provides them with an opportunity to engage and understand traditional Chinese culture from a young age, instilling in them the concept of learning from traditional heritage," he said. "Some of China's excellent traditional skills and crafts play a crucial role in paving the way for cultural exchange between East and West. It serves as a window to understand China."

Huang said that before the pandemic, "we hosted many American

students from Chicago to experience woodblock printing in Hangzhou. I believe there will be many opportunities for such mutual exchanges in the future," he said.

Jacob Wolfard, 14, told China Daily: "I knew what the Chinese New Year was, but I had never really gone to anything until this morning," adding that the woodblock printing "is very fun, it's very cool, and we are going to see the Chinese calligraphy later."

"I'm excited about that there is so much culture here, and we just wanted to learn about it," Jacob's mom, Krystal Wolfard, told China Daily. Wolfard said she was new to the city, and it was her first time celebrating Chinese New Year in such a way.

Julie, who was with her daughter Tabi, told China Daily: "It's beautiful, and it's so intricate. I love the different textures that come out through the wood. I also saw the video of the wood for carving and going into making the block. I actually touched the woodblock and put the paint on it, getting engaged with the art."

"There is a lot for me to learn.

I find it very vibrant and exciting. I'd like to understand more of the meanings behind the different symbols and different holidays. We need to keep building relationships, engaging in each other's culture, don't let the political and economic divisions keep us from enjoying each other's culture," she said.

"This is a very exciting opportunity to work with living artists to preserve culture. This is very much a family day. For little kids, they may not remember it, but they would know that they would see master craftsmen from China who would show them how to do woodwork," Holder, who is also the New Year celebration spokeswoman, told China Daily. "So it's a very sort of transformative experience."

"A big part of this celebration is about cultural understanding. Cultural exchange is a part of the bread and butter. It's the fabric of the document as is a lot of what the Met does," she said.

"If we can have one wish for the new year — improving cultural understanding, peace and prosperity," she said.

## Hundreds rally in Texas as border row heats up

QUEMADO, Texas — In trucks, vans and recreational vehicles, hundreds of people converged on Saturday in southern Texas to vent ire on illegal immigration and show support for former president Donald Trump at a rally that blended border politics with religious rhetoric.

Scrawled on the side of one of the vehicles reaching Quemado — population 162 — were the words "Join the God Fight".

The convoy gathered in the tiny town along the Rio Grande river, which forms the natural border between the United States and Mexico, as debate swirls again about how to address record-high migrant crossings.

At the rally, vendors sold shirts, flags and hats promoting Trump, a Republican, while conservative speakers touted conservative Christian values and criticized the border policies of Democratic President Joe Biden.

"Folks, this is serious stuff, this is evil stuff," Representative Keith Self said of Biden's policies. "We are in a spiritual battle for the survival of our republic."

Immigration has become a potent political issue in the run-up to Nov 5 elections that will likely pit Biden against Trump, reprising the 2020 contest, as the former on Saturday won the South Carolina Democratic primary, the first official primary of the party, with returns showing him swamping two other candidates,

according to research company Edison Research in New Jersey.

Biden on Saturday afternoon discussed border challenges with Mexico's President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and committed to continuing "joint efforts to counter transnational criminal organizations involved in the illicit trafficking of drugs, guns, and people," the White House said.

The "Take Our Border Back" protest began with a vehicle convoy from Virginia that rolled into Quemado on Friday night.

Eagle Pass, about 30 kilometers from Quemado, has become the epicenter of a prickly conflict between Texas Governor Greg Abbott, a Republican, and the Biden administration.

Anna Gabriela Derbez, a 56-year-old Eagle Pass resident at Saturday's rally, said immigration was one of several issues that were part of "a fight of good versus evil".

"We're for immigration," said Derbez, whose grandparents came to the US from Mexico.

Abbott and 14 other Republican governors planned to hold a news conference in the city on Sunday to defend the approach.

"That river today is a disaster zone," Jessie Fuentes, who owns a kayak rental business near Rio Grande, said. "It is becoming a military base."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS  
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com

readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

Follow us on:

twitter.com/chinadaily

facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

These materials are distributed by China Daily Distribution Corp. on behalf of China Daily Beijing, China. Additional information is on file with the Department of Justice, Washington, DC.

WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108

529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

## SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900

San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

## SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

## HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

## CANADA | TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0749-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA,

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York,

NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Vol. 38 - No.1232

## BUSINESS

JOIN THE CONVERSATION; FOLLOW US ON TWITTER · CHINA DAILY

## Demand for joy, fun spawns niche biz online

E-shops ride recovery to deliver creative products, services to young consumers

By LIU YUKUN  
liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

There is mind candy in town going for a song, growing in popularity — and promising to make the business of self-improvement books, motivational audios and videos, pep talks, counseling sessions, confidence-building events ... appear passe.

Innovative digitalization is redefining how things that can generate emotional comfort get monetized, spawning a booming new business segment.

For just 0.5 yuan (\$0.07) or even less, consumers in China can now snap up "Einstein's Brain" on e-commerce platforms like Taobao, which is advertised to boost one's intelligence after the purchase.

The product page on Taobao flaunts the scientist's iconic photographs, complete with his chevron mustache and frizzy gray hair.

Mind you, no tangible product is traded. Nor is any virtual service like, say, counseling or therapy offered online in most instances. But hundreds of thousands of buyers are spending tiny bits of money, enriching creative sellers.

It works like this: consumers, especially young people, buy these "products" typically in the lead up to potentially stressful times like academic examinations, job interviews or weddings. The force driving such purchases is a belief that the product will bring good luck, fortune or relief.

It soon went viral on social media platforms and became a meme among youngsters, offering buyers a high entertainment value as buyers often use it to joke with each other.

The act of "buying" Einstein's Brain appears to make the buyers breathe easy, magically creating a notion of mental ease in place of anxiety. It is the digital equivalent of tossing some coins in a fountain, or blowing out a birthday candle, and making a wish.

Professional psychologists and psychotherapists may cry foul or sound a note of caution. Digital-minded entrepreneurs, however, call it harmless creative business.

Last year, Einstein's Brain made it to the annual Top 10 list of most popular products on Chinese e-commerce platform Taobao. In the comments section, consumers exchange good-natured e-banter. A question like "Does the product really make you smarter?" could elicit a tongue-in-cheek response: "Yes, and it's a bit painful when your brain grows."

Asked why he bought Einstein's Brain, Zhu Chen, a high school student in Beijing, said: "It's worth spending 0.3-0.5 yuan to buy peace of mind before exams. It's like going to a temple for a bit of comfort. The only difference is that I can take a screenshot of the online purchase, share it with friends, and become the butt of their jokes, all in good fun. For me, spending a tiny amount of money on this makes no difference, given that I spend much,



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

much more on video games."

A variety of playful virtual products offer solace or amusement to consumers such as Zhu. For instance, sellers of "breakup intervention messages" inundate certain friends or relatives of buyers with persuasive texts to help them navigate troubled relationships.

"Businesses are getting more creative to target the post-2000 generation. Young buyers are eager to prioritize their emotional well-being and spend money on things that make them happy," said Chen Jue, a member of Taobao's virtual business team.

Taobao introduced the virtual product category last year. "Riding the wave of virtual products like

Einstein's Brain, 'emotional goods' are making the leap from digital to physical," she said.

By "physical", Chen gave an example of "Einstein's Blanket". Since Chinese pronunciation of blanket is homophonous with the last syllable in "Einstein", blanket sellers claim their "product" boosts IQ. Predictably, there are takers. In the week of Jan 9-16, online searches for Einstein's Blanket surged by 856 percent week-on-week.

Wei Xiang, a researcher at the National Academy of Economic Strategy, affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said the surging popularity of such products reflects an improving perception of the economy marked by a

steadily dropping unemployment rate and falling inflation levels.

Consumers beset by life's challenges, who hitherto preferred tangible goods, now also spend on services and products that can generate positive emotions, especially if they are cost-effective, Wei said.

"These items embody popular memes. Those running small e-shops on Taobao demonstrate a heightened awareness of cultural shifts," said Hong Yong, a researcher at the e-commerce branch of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

"Thanks to the advancements in e-commerce infrastructure and supply chains, they can capitalize on trending topics, translating them

into viable businesses at a comparatively modest expense."

According to Hong, the rapid development of e-commerce, including social e-commerce, in China enables young and creative businesspeople to found innovative online businesses.

Zhang Jianxi is one such businessman. Born in 2002 amid the Taobao-spawned entrepreneurial boom, he developed a presence on Taobao. Zhang said he conjured Einstein's Brain out of a friend's joke. "You need something to smarten you up."

The whimsical venture not only tickled the funny bone of many a consumer but raked in 70,000 orders in its debut year of 2019. Over the past five years, it hit a peak of 120,000 orders during the

intense college entrance exam period. Buyers ranged from high schoolers to scholars of prestigious universities.

Zhang has vivid memories of the early days of his venture. "For a fraction of a yuan, you could buy Einstein's Brain, to comfort or amuse yourself before big occasions. It was a wallet-friendly way for young folk to catch a breather in their hectic lives. Later, it went viral and became a trend among fun-loving youngsters."

But it was not Einstein's Brain that sparked the trend. Before that, Zhang launched a virtual frog called the "Qixi Toad" around the theme of Qixi Festival, also known as Chinese Valentine's Day. That soon morphed into the "Solitude Toad" on his Taobao shop, poking fun at singles among his friends. Needless to say, it proved hugely popular.

Next came virtual mosquitoes that brought in over a million orders, earning his store the coveted "Taobao Million+" status. Virtual mosquitoes bombard designated social media accounts with immense messages as a form of digital prank on friends.

Zhang said deep insights into the post-2000 generation's preferences, values and aspirations can help create products that resonate with them.

Like Zhang, Jarvis (not his real name but that of the butler of the character of Tony Stark in the movie *Iron Man*), a 24-year-old collegian, forayed into this business about a year ago, but took a different approach.

Leveraging his background in broadcasting, Jarvis joined a novel online counseling business called Shu Dong, which is Chinese for tree holes. A "tree hole" refers to emotion-based companionship and comforting services centered around empathetic listening.

Those who pay for these services are free to shed tears, vent, confess or freely unleash a torrent of emotions. Although Jarvis is not a trained psychologist nor a licensed psychotherapist, Shu Dong's clients spend money to express their innermost feelings, resort to heartfelt sobs or let out pent-up anger — a digital, paid-for, new-age confessional, if you will.

Jarvis said a successful month, business-wise, could notch up a revenue of up to 50,000 yuan, which would make him one of the top performers online.

Born and raised in Henan province, Jarvis never studied or traveled overseas. Around 80 percent of his clients are Chinese living abroad; and 80 percent of them are female.

He said most of his clients hold stable jobs with decent incomes. "One common factor is, most of them have a history of living alone since their teenage years. The connection with family is mainly for money. They are used to bearing life's burdens alone."

"Family issues, relationship issues and work-related stresses affect their lives. Many of them have sought psychotherapy. They said they additionally seek my services because I act like a genuine friend who makes them feel more relaxed."

Jarvis charges 200-300 yuan per hour, but his fee is negotiable. This approach, he said, gives him the satisfaction that he is rendering genuine help to those in need.

## Mental health market is evolving, potentially big

## REPORTER'S LOG

By Liu Yukun

According to VBData, an online data analysis platform specializing in the healthcare sector, China's mental health sector saw 84 financing deals since 2020 with over 10 rounds marking the first half of 2023. In the past three years, over 50 startups in the sector received investment. I am not at all surprised.

Let me explain why. I have to rewind to 2022 first and start there.

As I stared, transfixed, at a livestream of someone trimming a donkey's hooves for two hours, I suspected I may not be in my best

possible mental state. I mean, who would watch such stuff for two hours? As I realized later on, there are many who care for such content.

Anyway, let me continue my story. Fresh off maternity leave, the abrupt hormonal changes had left me grappling with postpartum blues. What compounded my woes around that time was the demise of my dear grandpa who basically raised me. The mourning period exacerbated my sense of loss and the attendant pain. I'd find myself in tears every day. Although the tears subsided later on, so did my ability to find joy.

A serendipitous discovery on a social media platform led me to an unlikely source of comfort — livestreams showcasing the traditional craft of donkey hoof trimming, an

unexpected yet effective form of content that can bust stress.

Donkey hoof trimming is an age-old practice that focuses on aligning the donkey's hooves and legs to guarantee optimal traction. Overlooking this task can lead to elongated hoof shells, causing loss of strength in legs, discomfort and hoof deformities, underscoring the crucial need for regular trimming.

From there, my fascination snowballed into watching videos of old carpet cleaning and soap cutting. My husband said my newfound interest was odd, but I wasn't the only one who found such videos relaxing.

On Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok), videos with the hashtag #donkeyhooftrimming garnered nearly a billion views. You read it right. A billion views, no less.

Livestreams related to this trend exploded in popularity, with viewers generously tipping thousands of yuan in virtual gifts to the hosts, creating a competitive leaderboard based on the gift count.

Yet my husband was still concerned and suggested I seek professional help, maybe go see a psychologist. So, I tried to make appointments at nearby hospitals for two consecutive weeks. But the attempts proved frustrating, as slots were almost always fully booked.

The daily ritual of nervously refreshing my phone at 4 pm to secure newly released appointments only intensified my stress.

I turned to mobile apps that deal with mental health issues: Yixinli, Jiandan Xinli and Eclipse. I found myself in a realm where tech

giants, insurance companies and psychology PhDs-turned-entrepreneurs held sway. Yet, despite these illustrious backers, the screen-mediated communication felt suboptimal.

Dark moods may bedevil many a mind, but investors seem to have a distinct perspective of the situation.

Zhao Hao, head of Golden Crown International Cultural Development, a counseling and training company that specializes in psychological profiling and parenting techniques, said China's mental health market expanded rapidly in recent years, but there remains a considerable gap compared to more mature markets.

Between 2021 and 2022, US venture capitalists invested in almost 150 startups in the mental health sector. In early 2023, they pumped in more dollars into another 30 startups in the sector. The past three years witnessed a total investment of over \$10 billion in the US

mental health sector, according to VBData.

What's more, five mental health enterprises, including PsyBio Therapeutics and Greenbrook TMS, were listed on Nasdaq in the first half of 2023.

Zhao said China's mental health market, by contrast, is still nascent, in the sense of being organized like in advanced economies. This suggests there is immense room for increasing public awareness so people with mental health issues would be more willing to seek professional consulting services. To that end, private clinics should enhance the training and selection of qualified counselors.

Zhao further said China's mental health market currently grapples with many challenges. The need for related services is large but service quality is uneven, with many counselors entering the field with minimal training, resulting in subpar user experiences.

# BUSINESS



Tourists take a picture with a post office in a desert camp in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region on June 17, 2021. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Letters carry heartfelt love from the Tengger Desert

Entrepreneur repurposes abandoned post office to spread care, plant trees

By LIU YUKUN  
liuyukun@chinadaily.com.cn

In the vast Tengger Desert, an unexpected structure greets the eye: a 15-square-meter green house — a post office, accessible only after a challenging 10-kilometer trek through the sands from the nearest road.

It is easy to lose one's way in this desolate area, situated in China's fourth-largest desert.

Despite its sparse human presence, a 37-year-old entrepreneur leads her team through the desert every week to collect mail from the post office and plant trees in the surrounding oasis. This routine has persisted for three years.

"Customers place orders from my Taobao store — sending postcards or adopting a tree. The reasons behind the letters and tree adoptions are diverse — from planting a tree for a beloved pet to dedicating one to a virtual idol from the world of anime. Some even plant trees in memory of a departed friend, hoping their life will continue in the form of a tree," said Gao Tangtang,

founder of Ningxia Wind's Will Culture and Creative Co Ltd.

"Rather than calling it a post office, I prefer to call it a 'Worry-Relief Emporium'. I want to use this approach to make more people feel (a sense of) healing and warmth, regardless of the difficulties they encounter in life," she said.

Gao conceived this entrepreneurial idea in 2017.

"At that time, I happened to be traveling in the desert and felt a unique natural force. In the desert, even the most significant worries seem trivial. I wanted to share this powerful experience with more people."

On one such trip, Gao stumbled upon an abandoned post office. Local herders told her that it had served as a vital link between them and the outside world 36 years ago.

In 2021, Gao left her marketing job, obtained permission from China Post, and reconstructed the post office. During Chinese Arbor Day that year, she introduced the "Adopting a Tree in the Desert" service and launched it on Taobao.

Customers can place orders at her store, asking her to write and send

postcards through the desert post office for 28.8 yuan (\$4), or plant a tree in the nearby oasis for 199 yuan. Tree adopters can remotely view photo updates through a mini-program on WeChat.

In May, a young mother battling cancer reached out to Gao, expressing her desire to adopt a tree. Having just undergone radiation therapy and uncertain about how long she could be with her one-year-old baby, she requested Gao to send the postcard and a photo of the tree to her child after 10 years.

She said it would be amazing if she could still read the card and see pictures of the tree along with her child after a decade.

"When I heard about this heartfelt request, as a mother myself, I couldn't hold back tears. This mother wants to extend the dimension of love in such an ordinary, yet profound way. This also made me, as a mother, feel that what I am doing is valuable," Gao said.

Tao Mengran, a Beijing-based officer and a recent customer of Gao's store, made her order with a belief that a tree symbolizes eternity in this rapidly changing world.

She sees the idea of having a tree in a desert as special enough to commemorate college friendship on the

day she and her close friends graduate.

"It's like having a special and long-standing connection with friends who may seldom see each other after starting to work," Tao said.

Over the past year, Gao has sent over 20,000 letters from the depths of the desert and planted 10,000 trees in the vicinity of the post office. Her company has expanded from a solo venture to a team of over a dozen individuals.

Gao admits that merely planting trees and sending postcards do not generate substantial profits for her store.

"On a good month, it's about 50,000 yuan in total revenue, and on average, it's around 10,000 to 20,000 yuan. After factoring in labor and other costs, there's not much left. Recently, I introduced a service on the mini-program for adopters to view the trees, adding more financial pressure.

"I want to continue doing this business, which inevitably requires us to have a profitable channel in addition to passion. Currently, we are launching a series of cultural and creative products priced around several dozen yuan. Fans who support us often place orders. We are exploring more business models," Gao said.

## Industrial progress sees surge in high-tech job opportunities

BEIJING — China's progress in technological innovation and industrial upgrading is catalyzing a boom in job opportunities in emerging sectors such as smart manufacturing, artificial intelligence and big data, highlighting the country's burgeoning demand for skilled high-tech professionals.

Data from employment services provider Liepin showed that job postings requiring expertise in artificial intelligence generated content (AIGC) increased 179 percent during the first 10 months of 2023, compared with the same period the year prior.

As sectors including AIGC, large-scale AI models, new energy vehicles (NEVs) and smart manufacturing evolve into the latest investment hot spots, employers are scrambling to hire professionals with the mastery of machine learning, natural language processing and battery engineering, said Liepin's Vice-President Ba Ran.

Chinese automaker BYD exemplifies this trend at its Zhengzhou plant, located in Central China's Henan province, where the company's latest NEV model is produced.

According to data from BYD, the workforce composition at the Zhengzhou facility has a ratio of 1.35:1 between frontline manual workers and skilled workers.

The tech-intensive facility currently has about 33,000 employees, and the workforce is expected to double when the facility reaches full production capacity, said BYD's Zhengzhou branch.

"Our demand for skilled professionals has grown substantially over the years. Experts in system architecture, software engineering and AI are the most sought-after," said Wang Zhen, human resources manager of BYD.

"Professionals in intelligent technology are urgently needed, not only by NEV manufacturers such as ourselves, but also across all industries nowadays," Wang said.

Zeng Jingping, vice-director of the blade manufacturing division at Dongfang Turbine Co Ltd — a high-

tech firm engaged in the research, design and manufacture of large power station equipment — said that technological maintenance workers have become increasingly sought-after, including within the company's automated workshops.

"These workers must be adept at mechanical processing and computer numerical controls, while possessing basic knowledge of electrical and information technologies," Zeng said, emphasizing that such workers play a crucial role in the transformation of China's manufacturing industry.

Driven by China's technology drive, nearly 10,000 digital workshops and smart factories spanning diverse sectors have emerged nationwide.

These facilities are creating new professions and job opportunities, invigorating the country's industrial transformation and propelling innovation-driven growth.

A recent report by online recruitment platform Zhaopin also revealed that industrial automation is an increasingly popular career choice among China's younger generations.

In 2023, 25.2 percent of professionals who switched to the sector had less than three years of work experience, a significant increase from 5.9 percent the previous year.

In 2024, China will maintain employment as its top priority by increasing fiscal subsidies and tax incentives, providing greater financial assistance and reducing social insurance burdens, Yun Donglai, an official with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, recently said during a news conference.

The country will also encourage advanced manufacturing, along with the digital, eco-friendly and elderly care sectors, to play a greater role in creating jobs, while intensifying support for major employment drivers such as private, small and medium-sized companies, the official said.

XINHUA



Work is done on BYD's production line, which manufactures one car every minute on average, in its factory in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Feb 23, 2023. YUAN JINGZHI / FOR CHINA DAILY

**CHINADAILY**  
中国日报

PUBLIC INTEREST NO. 0004

## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## Prudential policies will help stabilize economy

## EAGLE EYE

By Lian Ping, Liu Tao and Ma Hong

Looking back on 2023, global inflation and economic downturn were intertwined, while monetary tightening came to an end in some developed countries. Meanwhile, anti-globalization sentiment has led to rising geopolitical risks.

All these external changes have profoundly affected the Chinese economy.

How will the world economy change in 2024?

Our outlook is as follows:

To begin with, the world economy is expected to enter the second stage after the COVID-19 pandemic, with a series of new changes and characteristics.

This year will see gradual inflation pressure. The economic growth of the United States and Europe will decline. Monetary policies in the US and Europe will shift from tightening to loosening.

Although the Red Sea crisis may affect global trade to a certain extent in the first half, we believe there might be more opportunities than challenges for China.

In 2024, more capital is expected to flow from the US to emerging markets. Those with sound economic performance, like the Chinese market, will become important beneficiaries.

Second, macroeconomic policies will intensify this year.

China will further strengthen countercyclical and cross-cyclical adjustments in terms of macroeconomic policies. The country will adopt a more stable, proactive fiscal policy to improve quality and efficiency, and maintain the necessary expenditure intensity.

The nominal target of the budget deficit rate may be maintained at around 3 percent, while the final actual deficit rate is likely to reach or exceed 3.8 percent.

The country is likely to issue 1.5 trillion yuan (\$208.5 billion) of special refinancing bonds used for repaying local debt.

Monetary policy will be flexible, appropriate, precise and effective.

The medium-term lending facility has room to fall by 10-20 basis points and the loan prime ratio will also be lowered accordingly. The reduction in deposit rates may be slightly larger than that of lending rates.

Third, the infrastructure and manufacturing sectors are expected to stabilize investment in 2024.

Infrastructure investment will play a strong supporting role for stabilizing economic growth this year. There is considerable room for development of traditional infrastructure projects in the central and western regions and "new infrastructure" projects in the eastern regions.

Manufacturing investment will become another stabilizer of economic growth.



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

growth. The demand for investment in technological transformation may continue to increase while high-tech manufacturing may remain strong.

Private investment may gradually pick up, while financial support may strengthen. As external demand picks up and drives manufacturing investment to maintain steady and rapid growth, infrastructure investment and manufacturing investment are expected to grow by 8 percent and 7 percent, respectively.

Fixed-asset investment may grow by 5 percent and the contribution rate of investment to the GDP may rise to about 40 percent.

**Normal consumption**

Fourth, consumption is expected to return to normal.

Consumption will continue to maintain a recovery trend of steady and rapid growth this year, but its

contribution rate will decline. Driven by positive factors, including improvement in employment, rising residents' income, stabilization of real estate, rapid growth of service consumption, rising prices of consumer goods driven by a recovery of the CPI and PPI, and further consumption-promoting policies, it is expected that the retail sales of social consumer goods will grow by 5.5 percent in 2024.

However, as the contribution rates of both investment and exports rise, the contribution rate of final consumption expenditure to GDP may fall to about 60 percent. But it will still be significantly higher than the average level of the past decade by about 5 percentage points.

Fifth, the real estate market will gradually stabilize.

In 2024, real estate policies will continue to be supportive, which may promote the gradual release of

residents' demand for home purchases, including some reasonable financing demands of private real estate enterprises.

It is expected that key indicators such as real estate sales, housing prices and investment may first decline before rising.

The annual residential area may fall by 5 percent, and the price of new homes may remain stable. Investment in the real estate sector may fall by 6 percent year-on-year, narrowing from the decline in 2023.

Sixth, exports are expected to bounce back.

In 2024, the export growth rate is likely to rise, while the decline in imports is expected to narrow. The contribution rate of net exports to economic growth will turn from negative to positive.

Although the recovery of external demand is limited, the advantages of the entire industrial chain, the

upgrade of commodity structure and the strategy of diversifying trade partners will make China's exports highly resilient this year.

However, factors such as geopolitical conflicts and relocation of the manufacturing sector may still exert a certain drag on exports, but the Red Sea crisis may have opportunities for China's exports.

It is expected that exports will grow by 0.5 percent and imports by 1 percent in 2024, and the contribution of net exports to GDP is expected to return to positive levels.

Seventh, commodity prices will recover.

In 2024, the country's GDP growth rate is likely to reach about 5 percent. Under active expansionary macro policies, consumption and capital may boost GDP by 3.6 and 1.4 percentage points, respectively.

The growth rate of commodity price is likely to be faster in the first

and third quarters than in the second and fourth quarters. It is expected that the CPI will rise by 1.3 percent year-on-year in 2024, with food prices stabilizing and rising service industry prices being the main driving forces. The PPI may see 1 percent year-on-year growth this year.

Eighth, financial risks are expected to be mitigated and controllable in 2024.

There will be greater pressure to prevent and control real estate risks. During the year, the interest expenses of real estate companies may account for more than 15 percent of the total funds. More financial instruments are needed to mitigate and reduce the financial risks of real estate companies.

Under a backdrop of weakening debt repayment pressure, guaranteed borrowing scale, and reducing financing costs, local government debt problems are expected to improve during the year.

However, the financial market is showing signs of systemic risks. The current periodic declines in the RMB exchange rate, stock market and bond market are causing asset prices to shrink accordingly. Market liquidity risks have increased sharply, and investor confidence has been further dampened.

Ninth, the RMB exchange rate will rise in 2024.

There might be changes between China and the US in terms of monetary policy, growth path, price level and international balance of payments, all of which will further promote the weakening of the US dollar and the strengthening of the RMB.

In the second half of 2024, the RMB will maintain an appreciation and stabilizing trend, and the exchange rate may move further upward before the end of the year.

Finally, macroeconomic policies will become more targeted and coordinated in 2024.

China's economy will continue to recover and achieve steady progress and improvement. However, there are still problems at the micro level such as unstable expectations, insufficient confidence and weak demand.

In order to further accelerate economic growth and increase macroeconomic policy control, it is recommended to appropriately increase the level of government debt, further enrich the tools and means of monetary policy, take multiple measures to promote consumption, and increase financial support for real estate enterprises.

More efforts should also be made to maintain the stability of the RMB exchange rate and avoid launching contractionary and inhibitory policies related to financial market liquidity, and actively explore financial support for technological innovation and the construction of a modernized industrial system.

Lian Ping is a council member of the China Chief Economist Forum and head of the Guanghai Chief Industry Research Institute. Liu Tao is deputy head and Ma Hong is a researcher of the institute.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## China well poised for high-quality development

## MAIN STREET

By Wang Xiaosong

Over the past few years, developed nations have been spreading misinformation about China's economic development and have referred to the country as a "source of risk", which is absolutely untrue and could mislead the public. Endowed with a super-sized domestic market and the world's most complete industrial chain, China has made remarkable achievements in terms of high-quality development and is well poised to further boost its economy.

**Economic performance 2023**

Since the beginning of last year, despite the sluggish global recovery, the Chinese economy has continued to show resilience, with several indicators rising steadily. The country's GDP increased by 5.2 percent in 2023, a rate higher than most other major economies.

In November, output of China's

equipment manufacturing industry and high-tech manufacturing sector above a designated size grew 9.8 percent and 6.2 percent year-on-year, respectively. Meanwhile, the country has actively promoted industrial transformation and upgrading, with the production of new energy vehicles and solar cells increasing 35.6 percent and 44.5 percent, respectively. Committed to constructing a sophisticated 5G network, China had successfully built nearly 3.4 million 5G base stations as of the end of December.

When it comes to foreign trade, although China's single-month year-on-year import and export growth slowed from June to September, it still plays a significant role in global industrial and supply chains. In the first 11 months, general trade contributed to 64.8 percent of China's total imports and exports, up one percentage point year-on-year, which means the country's trade structure has been greatly improved.

China is also stepping up efforts to look for more trading partners. Its imports and exports with countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative increased 2.8

percent last year. It has facilitated the export of high-tech products as well, which not only contributes to the development of upstream and downstream industries, but also helps foster new drivers for foreign trade. Exports of electrical and mechanical products, for example, increased 2.8 percent.

Moreover, some foreign companies have shifted investment out of China since last year. Rather than signaling an economic recession as some Western countries claim, what is happening in China actually proves that the country has made progress in industrial optimization and technology upgrading.

Actual use of foreign capital in high-tech manufacturing sectors, including electronic communication and medical devices, increased 1.8 percent. In addition, over the past five years, China's rate of return on foreign direct investment has reached 9.1 percent, highest in the world. Many foreign business associations, including the American Chamber of Commerce in China, said the Chinese market is no longer an "option" but an "imperative" for foreign investors.

Several authoritative organiza-

**Endowed with a super-sized domestic market and the world's most complete industrial chain, China has made remarkable achievements in terms of high-quality development and is well poised to further boost its economy.**

tions, such as the International Monetary Fund, have fully recognized the economic achievements made by China. According to the IMF, China is expected to have been responsible for one-third of global economic growth last year.

**New growth drivers**

Having entered a transition period, China is currently facing some cyclical and structural issues in economic development, including insufficient effective demand, operational problems encountered by

some enterprises and various types of risks. To foster new economic growth drivers and counter misinformation spread by developed economies, the country needs to make more efforts in three areas.

First, China should focus on scientific and technological innovation. The Central Economic Work Conference held in December emphasized this. China will continue to advance the high-quality development of key manufacturing industries and improve both the resilience and safety of industrial and supply chains. In addition, committed to promoting "new industrialization" in all respects, the country will accelerate development of the digital economy and artificial intelligence technologies.

Second, China should take steps to boost domestic demand. It needs to stimulate consumption and increase investment with high returns, fostering a virtuous cycle in which consumption and investment are mutually reinforcing.

The country must continue to promote consumption recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and shape new consumption patterns, with a focus on increasing incomes of both urban and rural residents, as well as expanding middle-income groups. In addition, to create a better investment and financing mechanism,

China will promote cooperation between the government and social capital, and encourage social capital to participate more in the construction of "new infrastructure".

Third, reforms in key sectors need to be further advanced. China has made significant achievements throughout the 40-plus years of reform and opening-up. However, it is now faced with the challenge that the reforms are entering a "deep water area", which requires the country to break away from some traditional systems hindering further economic development.

China will strengthen the reform of State-owned enterprises while empowering the development of private enterprises, aiming to build a unified national market. It will also strive to fundamentally solve the structural problems of economic development by planning and launching a new round of reform in both fiscal and tax systems.

The writer is a professor at the School of Economics, the Renmin University of China, and main member of the China Macroeconomy Forum, a Beijing-based think tank.

The article was first published on the Chinese Social Sciences Net. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Imperative those involved exercise restraint lest the Middle East powder keg explodes

Following days of warnings, on Friday the United States launched a massive barrage of air strikes on dozens of sites in Iraq and Syria allegedly used by Iran-backed militias and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

This was in retaliation for the drone attack on the Tower 22 US base in Jordan that killed three US service members and injured dozens more.

President Joe Biden said earlier, this was only the start of a "tiered response". And it was only part of the opening salvo. Shortly before the assault, Washington announced a fresh wave of sanctions against Iran's cyber operations as well as ballistic missile and drone procurement programs. A number of entities and individuals were targeted. The US also reportedly conducted "cyber operations" on Friday against Iranian targets. On Saturday, US warships and US and British fighter jets struck dozens of Houthi targets in Yemen.

The Friday attacks, in Biden's own words, were meant to "let all those who might seek to do us harm know this: If you harm an American, we will respond". The strikes against targets in Yemen were also seen as a message to Iran that Washington holds the latter responsible for the recent militia attacks against US interests in the region.

The message was loud and clear. But so were the counter-messages. Iran "will not start a war, but if a country, if a cruel force, wants to bully us, the Islamic Republic of Iran will give a strong response", said Ira-

nian President Ebrahim Raisi on Friday, prior to the US attacks. A Houthi official was quoted as saying on Saturday that their "military operations against Israel will continue", the "American-British aggression against Yemen will not go unanswered, and we will meet escalation with escalation".

The White House doesn't want escalation. At least not now, not in the Middle East. It is obviously already preoccupied with concerns elsewhere. That was why all the strikes, from Iraq to Syria to Yemen, have steered clear of targets in and of Iran.

Nor does Iran. Teheran has so far distanced itself from the attacks, insisting those militias are not taking orders from it in carrying out the attacks.

The decision-makers in Washington know very well a knockout blow, as some hard-liners proposed, is unlikely to be viable. But something must be done, Biden's bid for reelection demands it. US voters need to be told he is the one they can count on when it comes to safeguarding US interests. After all the missiles, however, at the end of the day, they should also recall the bloody lessons from the past decades in the Middle East: that force is the least effective answer to the troubles in the region.

Further escalation of the situation in the Middle East is in no party's interest. All involved should consider the potential ramifications of a wider conflict in the already volatile region so they realize how imperative it is that they take practical steps to reduce tensions.

## Manila's brinkmanship risks overstepping mark

The Philippines' reneging on its recently reached agreement with China that the two sides should properly manage their maritime disputes shows that Manila has no sincerity in saying it seeks to resolve the disputes through negotiations with Beijing.

Having claimed it wanted to create favorable conditions for the sound and stable development of China-Philippines relations and expressed its willingness to enhance dialogue with the Chinese side to ease tensions, Manila wasted little time in giving the lie to its words with its actions in the South China Sea.

Soon after the Philippines' foreign minister made those remarks, the Philippines made a great show of airdropping supplies to the troops occupying its beached-on-the-reef warship at China's Ren'ai Reef and sent people to break into the reef tray of Huangyan Island. Now, the Philippines is emulating the United States and trying to create a "small circle" against China so as to increase pressure on China in the South China Sea under the pretext of "security issues". It is hard to escape the conclusion that the Joe Biden administration is the puppet master behind these moves, which give extra bite to the United States' "Indo-Pacific" strategy.

During his recent visit to Vietnam, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr claimed to be "disturbed" by China's actions — a remark echoing the deep concern expressed by the US president at China's actions in the South China Sea, which he alleg-

edly are "dangerous and unlawful" — and the Philippine and Vietnamese governments reportedly signed two memorandums of understanding, agreeing to set up a communication hotline and establish a joint coast guard committee.

Yet it is the Philippines' actions that are infringements on China's territorial integrity and which constitute dangerous provocations. It is even more outrageous that such provocations should happen just days after the Philippines agreed to work with China to resolve their marine disputes peacefully and shore up stability in the waters.

Manila is being naive if it thinks it can pin its hopes on the backing of the US for its smash-and-grab attempts. For the US, the Philippines is just a handy piece to play in its game to contain China.

Given that the world is already afflicted with serious conflicts, the Philippines should realize its reckless brinkmanship of constantly raising tensions in the South China Sea could easily lead to a head-on conflict in the waters. In such a worst-case scenario, the Philippines is unlikely to fare well.

China has so far exercised considerable restraint as it is still intent on settling the maritime disputes in the South China Sea through negotiation and consultation. Despite all the provocations, China remains committed to making the South China Sea a sea of peace, cooperation and friendship. But this should not be mistaken by Manila as China lacking the resolve to protect its core interests.

## Two priority tasks highlight rural work challenges

The No. 1 central document for the year that the central government released on Saturday focuses on rural development. It provides indicators of the priorities for the rural work.

The document outlines six major undertakings for the year aimed at comprehensively promoting rural vitalization. They are ensuring national food security, forestalling any large-scale relapse into poverty, improving the development of rural industries, strengthening rural construction, enhancing rural governance, and strengthening the leadership of the Communist Party of China on rural work.

Although most of the six tasks have been stressed over the past few years, the first two carry a greater sense of urgency this year given the widely felt uncertainties and risks associated with the country's external and internal development environment.

Apart from the grave impacts of extreme weather events and global warming on the country's food security, China has to take into account the systemic influences of geopolitical tensions, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the Middle East crisis. Not to mention the possible impacts of some countries' weaponizing of normal trade in a bid to hinder China importing food from the world market.

China's population accounts for 17.9 percent of that of the world, while the arable land in the country accounts for only 7 percent of the world's total. Although it has generally realized self-reliance in basic foods after years of struggle, the balance is precariously delicate. The country has been the world's largest food importer for years in a bid to

enhance the nation's nutritional conditions.

That's why, apart from diversifying its import sources for food, the country is obliged to further explore the potential of agricultural technology and scientific management to improve the efficiency of its food production. It needs to increase input to promote breakthroughs in agricultural science and technology, optimize the organization of rural production structures and strengthen oversight of farmland protection and reduce food waste.

Notably, after extreme poverty was eliminated in its vast countryside in 2020, avoiding a large-scale return to poverty has been singled out as a key task of rural work, second only to ensuring food security. That demonstrates the grave situation in that regard as a result of the downward pressure on the economy. Those that had been lifted out of poverty in the previous few years, particularly those living on incomes from temporary urban jobs, are also those most vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the economy.

The number of jobs for migrant workers are in a decline due to both the overall macroeconomic conditions and the automation of manufacturing. So local governments should guide those looking for jobs to earn their living from their agricultural know-how, the boom in digital economy, and the green transition of rural life. To that end, as the document stressed, more should be done to bridge the urban-rural gap in public services, improve the mechanism for diverse investment in rural vitalization and expand the rural talent pool. In the process, the farmers' rights and interests must be strictly protected.

## Song Chen



## Opinion Line

## Increase in fiscal revenue result of and boost to solid recovery

In 2023, the national fiscal revenue exceeded 21 trillion yuan (\$2.92 trillion), an increase of 6.4 percent from the previous year. The country's economic growth last year, 5.2 percent year-on-year, laid a solid base for that. That explains why the fiscal revenue of the 31 provincial-level regions all achieved positive growth last year.

The most important factor is the implementation of large-scale value-added tax rebates in 2022 that has lowered the tax base for last year. In 2023, the Chinese government's tax revenue was 18,113 billion yuan, an increase of 8.7 percent year-on-year, among which the value-added tax was 6,933.2 billion yuan, up 42.3 percent year-on-year.

In 2023, the national general public budget expenditure was 27.46 trillion yuan, up 5.4 percent from that of 2022, which reflects

the enhanced effectiveness of the proactive fiscal policy that provides strong support for government finances at different levels.

An additional 1 trillion yuan of government bonds was issued in the fourth quarter to support post-disaster recovery and reconstruction and enhance disaster prevention, reduction and relief capabilities. That some of the bonds are actually to be used this year creates more room for a proactive fiscal policy in 2024.

The scale of new tax cuts and rebates and fee reductions and deferrals across the country throughout 2023 exceeded 2.2 trillion yuan. That effectively eased the financial burden of enterprises.

The scale of special bonds reached 3.8 trillion yuan in 2023. These special tools proved important for the country to make breakthroughs in some key areas.

Local debt risks were also effectively prevented by resolving existing debts and curbing the increase in new debt.

Ensuring people's basic livelihoods, wages and public services has always been the priority of government expenditure. In 2023, the central fiscal transfer payment was further increased, reaching 10.29 trillion yuan, and was tilted towards the needy regions to help them make ends meet in the three fields.

In 2024, China will continue to implement a proactive fiscal policy, appropriately intensify its efforts to improve the quality and efficiency of growth, and carry out a new round of fiscal and taxation system reform. To this end, fiscal policy support and financial guarantees must be strengthened to promote the smooth circulation of the national economy.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## Job creation bedrock for economic growth

Data recently released by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security shows that 12.44 million new jobs were created in China last year.

China attaches great importance to employment, and is doing everything possible to stabilize the employment situation. Since 2020, despite increasing uncertainties in economic operations, the country has still added more than 11 million new jobs every year. Statistics show that from 2020 to 2022, the number of new jobs created each year was 11.86 million, 12.69 million and 12.06 million respectively. It should be said that steady employment has contributed tremendously to stabilizing growth.

However, it must be noted that

the current employment pressure is still great, and the structural employment contradictions of "difficulty in recruiting" and "difficulty in finding a job" are still prominent in some industries.

On the supply side, China's total labor supply remains at a high level. The number of college graduates nationwide in 2024 is expected to reach 11.79 million, a year-on-year increase of 210,000. That means despite the nation's low birth rate these years, the total labor supply these years is still ample. It will take several years before the country faces a real labor shortage.

On the demand side, the trend of industrial upgrading has prompted companies to pay more attention to

the adoption of new technologies to save labor costs. In particular, the wide use of digital technology and artificial intelligence has put forward higher requirements for the quality of the workforce.

The abundant supply of labor shows that country still has rich labor resources while the overall education, skills and organization levels of its workers are becoming much higher than before.

Industrial upgrading and the widespread application of new technologies demonstrate that the economic structure is adjusting in the desired direction, which prioritizes efficiency, innovation and quality, rather than scale, resources and quantity.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

## What They Say

## Safety advantage of China-Europe freight trains

The Red Sea crisis has caused container shipping costs between China and Europe to increase dramatically. As a result, demand for China-Europe freight trains has increased by 100 percent since the outbreak of the Red Sea crisis.

The China-Europe freight train is an important channel for the transportation of goods between Asia and Europe, and an important platform for advancing the Belt and Road Initiative. The rising popularity of China-Europe freight trains shows the railway's important value in stabilizing the international industry and supply chains under the impact of the geopolitical crisis in the Middle East.

According to incomplete statistics, at least 30 ships with a total gross tonnage of 1.9 million have

been attacked in the Red Sea since November. Many cargo ships now detour around the Cape of Good Hope at the southwestern tip of Africa, resulting in increased shipping days and shipping costs.

After the conflict between Russia and Ukraine broke out, the rail link suffered a downturn. But the Red Sea crisis highlights the importance of China-Europe freight trains. The operation of China-Europe freight trains has recovered to half of what it was before the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

China-Europe trains and shipping routes from China to Europe do not compete with, but complement each other. The growing popularity of China-Europe freight trains is a reminder of the need to

further smooth import and export channels and maintain global supply chains.

For example, relevant parties should speed up the construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway. The construction of the southern passage of the western route of the China-Europe freight railway line, finally kicked off last year after 25 years of suspension. Speeding up its construction to make it complementary to the railway artillery through Siberia at an early date can effectively reduce the impacts of the Red Sea crisis on international shipping routes so as to better steady the logistics between China and Europe.

— BEIJING NEWS

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

## Contact us at:

China Daily  
15 Huijin Dongjie Chaoyang District,  
Beijing 100029  
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366  
editor@chinadaily.com.cn  
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631  
ads@chinadaily.com.cn  
Subscription: +86 400-699-0203  
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn  
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK  
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK  
+44 (0) 207 398 6270  
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific  
China Daily Hong Kong  
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan  
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong  
+852 2518 5111  
editor@chinadailyhk.com  
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA  
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036  
+1 212 537 8888  
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa  
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya  
+254 (0) 20 242 8589 (Nairobi)  
editor@chinadailyafrica.com  
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com  
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

# COMMENT

China and the World Roundtable | Year of the Dragon

**Editor's note:** Spring Festival is the most important festival in China. It is also celebrated by Chinese communities around the world. Based on the Chinese zodiac, 2024 is a Year of the Dragon. The Chinese dragons symbolize strength, energy and vitality. Four experts share their views on the dragons and the Chinese New Year with China Daily.

Berlin Fang

## 'Long' live the dragon of change

In a late-night show with Conan O'Brien, Nicolas Cage said he thought he was born in the Year of the Dragon. Therefore, he had a dragon tattooed on himself. Later, he discovered that, according to the lunar calendar, he was born in the Year of the Rabbit. The dragon-turned-rabbit had an identity crisis.

The coming Lunar New Year is the Year of the Dragon. This time, Nicolas Cage is not having an identity crisis. The dragon is.

Many Chinese people worldwide, especially those fluent in English, advocate calling the Chinese dragon "long", which is a transliteration of the Chinese character *Long* and phonetically more appropriate — the pinyin is "long", though. This distinction is not entirely unreasonable, since the dragon in English and the *long* in pinyin in Chinese are two different mythical creatures.

According to the website loong.ca, the Chinese "long" has "the head of a camel or horse, the horns of a deer, the eyes of a rabbit, the ears of a cow, the neck and body of a snake, the belly of a kind of huge clam, the scales of a carp, the claws of a hawk, the palm of a tiger, and without wings". If such an image is too complex, the main thing to remember is that the Chinese dragon is a sea creature while the Western dragon seems to be a land animal, living in castles or dungeons.

Indeed, in medieval Western art and literature, dragons were often associated with evil and chaos. They were sometimes portrayed as adversaries that needed to be vanquished by the virtuous. The Chinese dragon, on the other hand, was seen as a benevolent character because it, for instance, was a harbinger of rain, bringing water to end drought. There were dragon king temples in many places in China where people would plead for relief from either droughts or floods.

I am not yet ready to join the "long" line to rebrand the dragon. This coinage is mostly a belated correction of an earlier translation error: Whoever translated the "dragon" into "long" should have used another word in Chinese, for instance, *jiao* or *jiao long*, if the idea was to distinguish between the Western and Chinese dragons. It is a little late now to change the Chinese character *long* to "loong" to avoid the negative connotations of the word "dragon". The connotations of the dragon have changed. So has the audience that is trying to make sense of the nuances of these connotations.

The word "dragon" does not always have a negative connotation. There is

some duality to the character of the dragon, just as there is some duality to each one of us. In English literature and mythos, the dragon can symbolize formidable power and strength. It also guards and protects treasures from thieves and bandits. It is alert, attentive, and dutiful.

In recent years, in popular culture, movies such as *Mulan* have injected some cuteness into the image of the dragon. In the film, Mushu the Dragon is Mulan's closest companion, a merry and cheeky little fellow voiced by Eddie Murphy. And remember, if Nicolas Cage did not love the image of the dragon, he would not have been so devastated to discover that he was born in the Year of the Rabbit.

In the English language, the dragon is also associated with a hero's journey. Knights or heroes went on epic adventures to slay the dragon to prove their bravery and worthiness. In Chinese culture, the dragon itself is on a mission and it acts on its own in situations that call for different kinds of action: When there is a flood, the dragon sucks up the water. When "the droghte of March hath perced to the roote," one would plead to the dragon to bathe every vein and every flower, as Chaucer said in his *Canterbury Tales*.



The author is a translator and columnist based in Texas.

In certain myths, dragons have the ability to change form, which may symbolize rebirth or the cyclical nature of life.

But the dragon that impresses me the most is the dragon in the *I Ching*, also known as the *Book of Changes*, an ancient Chinese divination text. The dragon in this book is in a constant state of transformation, growth, or even rebirth.

At the beginning of the book, the author talks about humanity in terms of the dragon. In the first stage, the dragon is "hidden" and advised not to act. In the second, the dragon appears out in the open, symbolizing that a nobleman is coming to the scene. In

the third, it is busy in the day and beset with worries at night. In the fourth, it flies over the abyss. In the fifth, it flies to heaven. In the sixth stage, the dragon becomes arrogant doing things it will eventually regret. In the final stage, a group of dragons is flying without a lead dragon.

To me, it is a great depiction of our lives, as we journey through anonymity, initiation, growth, persistence, accomplishment, and then to arrogance and fall (regrettable consequences), until we learn to play as a member of a team of fellow dragons.

I don't know how many of you readers were born in the Year of the Dragon or the Year of the Rabbit, but aren't we all like the dragon of *I Ching*? We want to be discovered, recognized and praised. To that end, we work hard and take great risks. One day, we make our mark like the dragon flying freely in the heaven. Hence, we should beware of pride, for it always leads to a fall. We learn, and hopefully, in the end, we fly like a dragon in the league of dragons without a lead dragon.

Happy New Year of the Dragon!

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



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Fu Haojie and Wang Bin

## Overcome Lunar New Year jitters to enjoy celebrations

In the rich tapestry of Chinese traditions, Spring Festival is not only the grandest festival but also serves as a cultural metaphor. It symbolizes family reunion, the culmination of a year's efforts, and the hope for a happy and prosperous year ahead. But in contemporary society, shifting lifestyles and changing values have somewhat transformed the meaning and celebration of Spring Festival.

In particular, for the younger generation, the once eagerly anticipated festival has evolved into a time fraught with pressure, giving rise to a phenomenon known as "New Year phobia". It has become a complex intersection of emotions for youths — nostalgia for childhood memories and warmth of family gatherings, and a reflection of the past year's momentous occasions. As they transition into adulthood, the festival brings new challenges for youths, from becoming a giver instead of a receiver of red envelopes to facing the pressure of marriage and career building from family members. Media reports show the mental stress due to societal expectations, economic pressure of gift-giving, and "Spring Festival phobia" have cast a shadow over the once joyful occasion for youths.

German-American psychologist Kurt Lewin's theory of approach-avoidance conflict provides an insight into this phenomenon. While the youth yearn for the warmth of family and the joyousness of festive gatherings, and seek a supportive and inclusive atmosphere, they may feel overwhelmed by the weight of familial expectations, fearing they cannot meet elders' expectations regarding their career and marriage. Modern media amplify anxieties related to marriage pressure, income comparisons and excessive spending, contributing to the sustained anxiety among today's youth, disrupting their comfort zone and triggering a sense of fear.

As Spring Festival nears, the internal conflict the "New Year phobia" gives rise to is gradually manifested in multiple ways. In the era of information overload and technological advancement, contemporary youths struggle to find a balance between tradition and modernity, individualism and family values, societal expectations and personal worth.

With economic growth and increased material wealth, expensive gifts and cash-heavy red envelopes have become a yardstick for measuring the strength of relationships and the depth of interpersonal relations. This invisible pressure induces anxiety among many youths, especially when conversations during Spring Festival revolve around professional positions, income and achievements, prompting them to feel they are being evaluated or judged.

Discussions on subjects such as marriage and childbirth expose the widening gap between the younger generation and their parents, making youths feel that their freedom is being encroached upon. Additionally, frequent and often superficial social interactions during the festival, particularly with older relatives, are perceived by the youth as mere formalities, further diminishing their sense of value and contributing to the "New Year phobia".

To address the "New Year phobia" phenomenon, we propose three key initiatives.

First, the youth should take the lead in shaping a new Spring Festival culture by becoming the architects of their own celebrations. Instead of rejecting the festival cognitively or avoiding it emotionally, they could try to discover and appreciate their family traditions, and participate in their celebrations. Take red envelopes as an example. They represent the blessings of the elders. Such blessings, or red envelopes, can also be given through innovative means including multimedia greetings, a QR code containing self-created paintings, letters, and videos for a heartfelt blessing. After all, a youth-driven Spring Festival will be more exciting and celebratory.

Second, modern families need to adapt to the times and create a more relaxed family atmosphere. Despite the "New Year phobia", home remains the anchor for youths; it is a sanctuary for their souls and a buffer against societal stress. By accepting reality — in terms of youths' career and income — and providing support, families can help young people better cope with future challenges. Parents can proactively explore the city where their children work, not just waiting for them to come home for the New Year. When the psychological benefits of returning home for Spring Festival outweigh potential stress, youths will naturally embrace the celebrations wholeheartedly.

And third, contemporary society should be more open and inclusive, both preserving traditional customs and celebrations and using innovative ways to celebrate Spring Festival. While thousands of years of traditions should be preserved, it's not necessary to rigidly adhere to every custom. While upholding cultural confidence, it's crucial to welcome fresh ideas from the younger generation, and respect their new approach.

By leveraging technological advancements, we can tell the story of the Chinese Lunar New Year in a universal language. By embracing Spring Festival rather than succumbing to the fear of societal pressure, youths can effectively dispel the fear of marriage pressure, familial expectations, economic stress and obligatory social expenditure. And by preventing these pressures from taking hold of the mind, the youths can gradually dissipate their anxiety. This will pave the way for the emergence of a revitalized Spring Festival culture, allowing everyone to wholeheartedly partake in the celebrations.

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

Mourad Alami

## Intercultural dimensions of Spring Festival

About 9 billion passenger trips are expected to be made during the Spring Festival travel season this year, from Jan 26 to March 5. Not for nothing is the Lunar New Year the biggest festival of China.

Spring Festival sees by far the largest internal migration of people in the world — and it takes place every year. Hundreds of millions of workers travel back to their hometown every year to celebrate Spring Festival with their family. People in most other countries have no idea how much sacrifice these workers have to make in order to secure their livelihoods. And for many, this is the only opportunity to meet their family in one year.

Many cultural practices, rituals and customs contribute to the charm and appeal of Spring Festival. As a matter of fact, the Lunar New Year is also celebrated in countries such as Vietnam, Japan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Republic of Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia, as well as by overseas Chinese across the world.

There are many legends behind Spring Festival and many versions of those legends, with the most popular being about the monster "Nian". Nian, as the legend goes, used to emerge from his den in the dark sea on the eve of every Lunar New Year to invade the village and gorge on human and livestock flesh. So before every Lunar New Year's Eve, all the villagers would flee



The author is a professor at Hainan College of Foreign Studies.

to the remote mountains to escape Nian's attack.

But before one Lunar New Year, an elderly man appeared in the village. He was offered some food by the villagers but asked to flee the village to escape Nian's jaws. But he refused to do so.

Instead, he asked an elderly woman to let him stay in her home, and requested the villagers to not flee to the mountains.

The elderly man, who knew what Nian feared, pasted red paper on all the doors and windows of the old woman's home and kept them open, instead of closing them out of fear. He also lit bright lamps in and around the house. When the monster, curious to see why so many lamps were lit in one house, approached the house, the bright red color and the dazzling lights made him tremble.

Irritated, the monster stomped to the front door. But as soon he reached there, the elderly man and some of the villagers began beating drums, tolling bells and bursting firecrackers. The radiant red color, the blinding lights and the deafening noise of the firecrackers and drums were too much for Nian to take, and he fled the place never

to return again.

The elderly man's knowledge and courage made the villagers realize that red color, bright lights and bursting firecrackers are the magic keys to scare away the monster.

Till today, the Chinese people decorate their homes with red paper cuttings and lamps, light bright lights, and burst firecrackers as a symbolic ritual to dispel misfortune, and welcome prosperity and happiness. This is a classic case of acculturation and integration of identity elements from a source culture.

The intercultural mediation process is crucial and can be seen in the physical presence of the Chinese people in other countries, either in individual capacity or through institutions such as the Confucius Institutes, Chinese cultural centers or Chinese enterprises.

Spring Festival brings out the traditional Chinese cultural elements in all the Chinese people, whether they be in China or other countries. This collective behavior is observed wherever Spring Festival is celebrated.

However, Spring Festival is subject to certain rituals, conventions and customs that are manifested during a particular time of the year. It is a time for family reunion, meeting with friends and relatives, and welcoming a new year in the hope it will bring prosperity, happiness and social harmony.

Why do we love and celebrate festivals? Celebrating festivals provides a cer-

tain kind of relief, an escape from the humdrum of everyday life, a respite from worries. It is deviation from norms. In many respects, festivals and everyday life are interdependent. A festival is unthinkable without this difference.

Spring Festival is first and foremost a celebration of the family, and even if one celebrates it alone, the family is always present. Festivals, including Spring Festival, always strengthen an individual's involvement in the family as a social group, and by extension the wider community.

Festivals are occasions for celebration, and even if the myths, legends sagas and fairy tales of ancient times are used to heighten their appeal and value, they are always geared toward a certain meaning. The greetings on New Year, a birthday or a wedding are an assurance of a fulfilling existence.

Today, festivals, especially those celebrated in the West, are no longer associated with the unity of people, or with gods as in Ancient Greece or Ancient Rome. Yet they still have a transcendental aspect. In China, the transcendental aspect is manifested primarily through showing respect to ancestors. Spring Festival injects a new life into everyday life and ushers in a new year of hope, health and harmony. May this come true this year.

Xin nian kuai le!

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

## GLOBAL VIEWS

ZOU ZHIBO

## Evolution not revolution

Fearing their loss of control over global affairs, Western countries falsely accuse China of challenging the rules-based international order

Officials of the United States keep hyping up the so-called rules-based international order and calling China out for allegedly not adhering to it. Some other Western politicians and media are following suit.

The manipulation of this narrative can cause misunderstandings and confusion of the international order, which serves the purpose of the West, especially the US. Up to now, neither officials nor scholars in the West have given a clear definition of what they mean by the "rules-based international order" and both have deliberately maintained its ambiguity. On international occasions, US officials and scholars often use international law and "rules-based international order" interchangeably, suggesting that the latter is synonymous with an international order based on international law, which is highly misleading and deceptive.

The current international order was established after World War II, with the adoption of the United Nations Charter and the establishment of the UN. Setting out the basic norms governing international relations, the UN Charter serves as the basic code of conduct and the "constitution" for international relations.

Although the US is vague about the "rules-based international order", what it implies is an international order led by the US, defined by Western values, and selected and specified by the West.

In essence, the so-called rules-based international order can be translated into the structure of power and interests that the West has imposed on the rest of the



TONG JIAHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

world: politically the West leading and the non-West subordinate, economically the West dominant and non-West dependent, culturally the West exporting and non-West receiving. In summary, it is an "international order" that is built on the US hegemony and aimed at

maintaining the dominance of Western countries.

The US aims to achieve two objectives by hyping up a "rules-based international order" in this way. On the one hand, it seeks to paint a false impression internationally that China is "challenging"

and "not adhering to" the international order, so as to jeopardize the recognition of China as a responsible major power and contain China's development. On the other hand, the US aims to resist China and other developing countries as they promote adjustments and

reforms in the international order and rules, in order to maintain its control over the development of the international order, as well as to safeguard and consolidate its alliance, including its cliques with a "small yard with high fences".

The drastic changes in the international landscape have triggered adjustments in the international order, which worries the US-led West. However, with diminishing power, they are unable to use traditional hard measures, such as military force, to maintain dominance. Instead, they are promoting the so-called rules-based international order, a political opinion-shaping strategy.

China firmly upholds the UN-centered international system and the international order underpinned by international law. The rules of this order are the international legal documents, including treaties, conventions and declarations, which are established across various fields in accordance with the principles and purposes of the UN Charter. All countries should abide by this international order based on these rules.

The existing international order upholds peace and the development of the world. Having developed within this order, China is both its beneficiary and a defender. Of course, the current order is not perfect. Constant improvements and reforms are required in response to the changing international landscape. It needs to be made more just and reasonable, especially in terms of safeguarding the legitimate rights and interests of developing countries. What China advocates is an evolution, not a revolution, of the

international order. China does not seek to change or challenge the existing order.

In recent years, China has joined international conventions in various fields, including arms control, climate change, navigation and environment protection. In contrast, the US has withdrawn from organizations and mechanisms such as the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, the Global Compact for Migration and the Global Compact for Migration. It also withdrew and rejoined the UN Human Rights Council and UNESCO.

The US has been building exclusive and confrontational groups, including the AUKUS partnership (comprising the US, the United Kingdom and Australia), the Quad (comprising the US, Japan, India and Australia), the CHIPS alliance and a technology alliance. In contrast, China is advancing open, inclusive and cooperative multilateral organizations such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The international community should engage in extensive and in-depth discussions and exchanges, so as to truly understand what the "rules-based international order" is.

*The author is deputy director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and a committee member of the National Institute for Global Strategy at the CASS. 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.*

LIN BOQIANG

## Duty of care

Developing countries are in urgent need of financial and technical climate support from developed countries

Climate change poses a huge challenge to the economic and social development of mankind, requiring the joint efforts of all countries to address it. The ideal scenario would be for countries around the world to set and meet consistent and ambitious targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ultimately achieve climate neutrality. However, due to the differences between countries in terms of economic level and historical emissions responsibility, the actual emissions reduction targets vary from country to country. In order to maximize the solidarity of countries around the world to jointly tackle climate change, the international community has listed the common but differentiated responsibilities principle as a key guideline. This principle not only clarifies the primary responsibility of developed countries, but also points out that developing countries are still at an important stage of economic development, requiring substantial climate finance and technical support. The principle has played an important role in dividing responsibility for global greenhouse gas emissions reduction and promoting cooperation between developed and developing countries.

However, in reality, climate cooperation between developed and developing countries is not always smooth, and sometimes can even be described as adversarial. One crucial reason for this is that the goals of the two categories of countries diverge. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals state that we need to eradicate poverty, protect the planet, and ensure peace and prosperity for all. As a result, for financially constrained developing countries, tackling climate change often conflicts with goals such as poverty eradication. Taking the energy transition as an example, developing countries often face high energy transition costs and have to make difficult trade-offs between economic devel-

opment and emissions reduction in order to meet energy demand growth.

Despite the challenges faced by developing countries, developed countries have been slow to fully honor their commitments to developing countries. At the recently concluded COP28, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres stressed the importance of achieving climate justice, and urged developed countries to honor their commitments in terms of climate finance and technical support to help those developing countries that are financially challenged and deeply affected by climate change. In addition, some economies have implemented unilateral climate sanctions, such as carbon tariffs, exacerbating the burden of emissions reduction on developing countries and global inequality. Such actions seriously violate the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and undermine the prospects for cooperation in global climate governance.

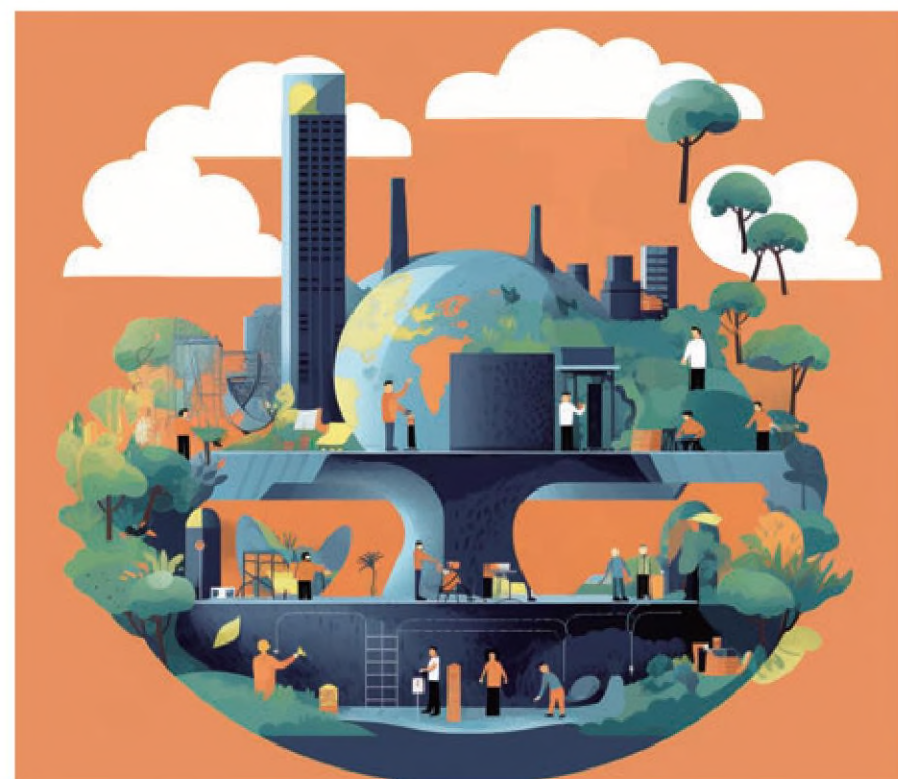
In recent years, developed countries have habitually criticized developing countries for not making sufficient overall efforts for emissions reductions and their slow energy transitions, while ignoring the actual difficulties developing countries face. Even the EU countries, which are regarded as the "models" for global low-carbon development and energy transformation, have to adjust their short-term energy transformation strategies to prioritize energy supply when facing energy crisis impacts. The UN SDGs aim to ensure access to affordable, reliable and sustainable modern energy for all, while eradicating all forms of poverty worldwide. This presents a formidable challenge for developing countries. At present, developing countries are still in the stage of rapid industrialization and urbanization, resulting in significant energy demand. Rapidly pushing the energy transition may lead to energy supply shortages and higher transition costs. This is a great chal-

lenge for some economically disadvantaged countries.

Compared with other major economies and large energy consumption nations, China, as a key developing country, has a certain representative energy transition path. Therefore, China can be an example to illustrate the difficulties in the energy transition of developing countries. First, China's total energy consumption is large, and its industrialization and urbanization have not been completed, and its energy consumption is still in a rapid growth stage. Second, China's energy consumption structure of traditional fossil energy accounts for a high proportion. Although its renewable energy has registered a growth rate of more than 20 percent in recent years, due to the small base, it is impossible for the country to achieve a rapid scale replacement of fossil fuel energy. Therefore, no matter from the growth trend of energy demand or from the energy structure dominated by fossil energy, developing countries face great challenges in the energy transformation.

Developed countries, which have a high level of development and have historically been the main source of greenhouse gas emissions, should assume leadership and responsibility in addressing climate change.

First, because of the Industrial Revolution and the extensive economic model in history, developed countries have emitted a large amount of greenhouse gases and are the main contributors to global warming. This historical responsibility makes it necessary for developed countries to increase their emissions reduction efforts and take the lead in tackling climate change. At present, with the exception of European Union countries, the overall emissions reduction targets of other advanced economies are conservative. Even some countries are not firm in their stance on the issue of climate change, and use this issue as a political and diplomatic



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

chip, with frequent policy changes.

Second, developed countries should provide green and low-carbon technologies and climate finance support to actively help developing countries achieve their low-carbon transition. In the fields of energy transition and climate adaptation, developed countries have relatively advanced technology and experience in policy formulation and management, and they can fully share resources through the establishment of cooperation mechanisms to help developing countries more effectively cope with climate change. For example, flexible compliance mechanisms, such as the Clean Development Mechanism, could continue. Through such an international transfer mechanism, developing countries can obtain financial and technical support from developed countries based on their own low cost of emissions reduction, and developed countries can also achieve emissions reduction through lower cost. Finally, developed countries should abandon

unilateral sanctions represented by carbon tariffs, which could add to the difficulties of reducing carbon reductions in developing countries, and actually defeat the purpose of carbon tariffs.

Developed economies represented by the EU, the United Kingdom and the United States have planned to implement carbon tariff policies. The EU's Carbon Border Adjusting Mechanism (CBAM) has come into force since October 2023. The EU is determined to use the CBAM to reduce the risk of carbon leakage and improve the competitiveness of its own relevant high-carbon enterprises. However, once the carbon tariff is implemented, it will have an important impact on the global trade of high-carbon products, bring additional costs to the high-carbon commodities exported by developing countries to Europe, reduce the competitiveness of relevant industries in developing countries, and increase the burden of emissions reduction and affect economic growth and poverty reduction in developing countries.

To sum up, developing countries face difficult trade-offs between achieving rapid economic growth and addressing climate change, and are in urgent need of financial and technical support from developed countries. However, in reality, developed countries have failed to shoulder their responsibilities, even tending to abandon cooperation and pursue unilateralism. Addressing climate change is the common goal and responsibility of mankind. In order to ensure sustainable development, the international community must pay attention to the complex challenges and difficulties faced by developing countries in climate action, and advocate developed countries play a more active role in global climate governance.

*The author is dean of the China Institute for Energy Policy Studies at Xiamen University. 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.*

## LIFE

FROM THE FRONTLINE

When Pumi ethnic group singer Rongbaxinna visited Cao Changshou, a famous Pumi storyteller in his 90s in Yunnan province in 2018 and 2021, she knew that the clock was ticking on preserving the traditions, cultures and languages of the 28 small ethnic groups in China, each of which has a population of just under 300,000.

As the last generation fluent in the language and culture of the Pumi ethnic group, which has about 45,000 members, Cao passed away after Rongbaxinna's last visit, with only 20 ancestral tales recorded in his mother tongue.

"The loss of the elders of these ethnic groups is heartbreaking to see; they are like living museums, who store cultural treasures in their minds. We must rescue and record these treasures before they are gone," Rongbaxinna says.

The 43-year-old was taught to sing by her grandfather, whose melodies always transported her to a dreamland in her childhood imaginings. His death rang the alarm for her to rescue disappearing traditional art forms, and she set up a national database to record the cultural heritage of these small ethnic groups.

As the initiator of the archival project for the oral traditions of ethnic groups with small populations, Rongbaxinna describes the project as a race against time as many unique, centuries-old traditions, traditions of song, dance, crafts and festivals, are already under threat, and in some cases may soon disappear.

Thanks to a pilot program launched by the National Library of China, the Yunnan Provincial Publicity Department and the Yunnan Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Center in 2018, the cultures of eight ethnic groups in Yunnan — the Jingpo, Blang, Achang, Pumi, Nu, De'ang, Derung and Jino — have been listed, and four have already been documented.

These include 97 folk songs and 58 folk tales of the Derung, which is China's smallest ethnic group, with a population of just 7,310, among whom 20 people interviewed; 104 folk songs and 58 folk tales of the Jino, with 71 people interviewed; and the 116 folk songs and 113 folk tales of the Nu, with 51 people interviewed.

Following up this pilot program, the National Library of China signed a cooperation agreement in Beijing on Jan 25 for the traditional oral archive project with provincial-level libraries in the 13 provinces and regions that are home to the 28 small ethnic groups.

"Most of these ethnic groups do not have a writing system, which has hindered the spread of their culture. They can only survive if people continue to pass their traditions on by mouth. By launching this project, we can collect and document vivid narratives, such as ancestral tales told in their native tongue with the aid of song and dance, through multimedia channels," says Huo Ruijuan, deputy director of the National Library of China.

The archives will be available for the use of scholars and the public to promote cultural diffusion and protect the nation's cultural diversity for future generations, she adds.

As oral traditions play a crucial part in keeping cultures alive, UNESCO suggests that mass media and communication tech-



# The race to record disappearing cultures

Following on from Yunnan pilot, the national library launches project to document traditions of small-population ethnic groups, **Wang Qian** reports.



**Top:** Folk artists of the De'ang ethnic group introduce their traditional instruments onstage during the Yunnan Province Pilot Project Exhibition and Performance Showcase in Beijing last month. **Above:** The big drum dance of the Jino ethnic group, a national intangible cultural heritage, at the performance showcase. **Left:** Pumi ethnic group singer Rongbaxinna shares stories behind the pilot archival program for the oral traditions of ethnic groups with a population of under 300,000 in Yunnan at the event. **Right:** Artists of the Jingpo ethnic group perform traditional song and dance.

PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



nologies can be used to preserve and even strengthen oral traditions and expressions by broadcasting recorded performances both to their communities of origin and to a wider audience.

For Pai Dang, a *tuliang* player from the Jingpo ethnic group, the passing on of the group's folk music means the survival of their way of life and the preservation of their history. *Tuliang* is a transverse wind instrument made of bamboo, with a single embouchure hole and no finger holes.

"Only a dozen people are learning to play it. I welcome anyone who wants to learn," he says, adding that, after the tradition has been passed down through the generations, he is afraid that it may disappear one day for lack of inheritors.

He knows the survival of Jingpo folk music depends on initiatives such as the oral tradition archival project.

For Rongbaxinna, it is not only a group's language or music, but also its culture, worldview, values and principles that inform future generations, and teach them about their past.

Rising to national fame in 2006 as a participant in a youth singing contest on China Central Television, Rongbaxinna knows that Pumi folk songs earned her recognition at home and abroad.

"It is the ethnic songs of Yunnan that have taken me to the national and international stage, and which have the power to transcend language barriers and connect people from different cultures and backgrounds," the singer says.

During the cooperation agreement ceremony at the National Library Arts Center late last month, folk artists from the eight ethnic groups in Yunnan performed dances and songs, including the Jino big drum dance, which was listed as a national-level intangible cultural heritage in 2008, and the *Munao Zhaiwa* (a Jingpo epic told in a mix of poetry, singing and dancing), as part of the Yunnan Province Pilot Project Exhibition and Performance Showcase. The theme was "Holding Tight in Memory".

On the stage, Dong Cunlian, a 70-year-old Derung woman, introduced the traditional art of facial tattooing. To prevent them from being carried off as slaves, the Derung traditionally tattooed the faces of their women, usually when a girl reached the age of 12 or 13. Only about 20 Derung women have facial tattoos today.

Lei Jia, who is a professor at the China Conservatory of Music, artistic director of the performance showcase and also one of the participants in the 2018 oral tradition project, says the oral traditions of ethnic groups take many forms, from folk singing and poetry to lecturing, and embody the experience and knowledge of countless generations. These traditions not only reflect ethnic groups' history, but also contain their particular understanding of the universe and nature, and form part of the country's collective memory.

"The unique cultures of ethnic groups with small populations is the common wealth of the nation, and we have the responsibility to preserve them and carry on them, and for their stories and songs be heard by more people," Lei says.

Contact the writer at [wangqian@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:wangqian@chinadaily.com.cn)

## What's on

### First attempts



Sketches are artists' attempt to roughly delineate a subject, and often help them to later complete a larger painting in the studio. But sometimes, sketches can also be viewed as stand-alone art, especially those produced by eminent artists, and they are sought after by collectors as an integral element of an artist's evolution. In *Purity*, an exhibition running through April 1, the National Art Museum of China is exhibiting 38 sketches by leading Chinese artists of the 20th century

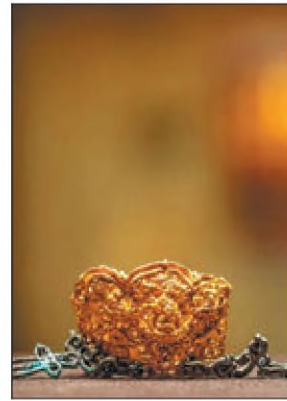
from its collection. The pieces selected demonstrate the artists' techniques and ability to quickly grasp the physical features, spirit and atmosphere of their subjects. Those featured include Wu Zuoren, Pan Yuliang, Sanyu (Chang Yu), and Jin Shangyi, whose work shaped Chinese oil painting and sculpture in the last century. Some lived in Europe for many years, receiving systematic training in Western art traditions. Among the pieces on show are a self-portrait by German artist Kathe Kollwitz, whose achievements in realistic lithography influenced many Chinese artists in the early 20th century.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays.  
1 Wusi Dajie, Dongcheng district, Beijing. 010-6400-1476.

### Glitter ware

The lifestyle of rich culture and art-

istry led by the upper classes during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) is manifested in the work that went into items of daily use and household ornaments. Nowhere is this sophistication more evident than in the gold



and silverware of the era. *Man Ting Fang* ("Scents Fill the Hall"), an exhibition which runs at the Chengdu Museum in Sichuan province until April 15, is awash in glittering examples of delicate Song gold and silver items. The objects — bowls, hairpins, bracelets, vases and earrings — were discovered in two crypts, one in Hebei province's Yixian county, and the other in Sichuan's Pengzhou. The exhibition offers a glimpse of the prosperity and cultured lives of the period, and the refined taste of the era's upper classes. Some of the objects once decorated clothes, hair and hands, and others were for use during popular pastimes, such as appreciating paintings, smelling incense, arranging flowers, and preparing tea.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays.  
1 Xiaohe Jie, Qingyang district, Chengdu, Sichuan province.  
028-6827-7011.

### Eternal colors

Yun Shouping lived during the unstable times of the late Ming (1368-1644) and early Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. He was well-versed in writing, composing poems, painting and calligraphy, but refused to serve in the Manchu court, and struggled to make a living selling art. He made a particular name for himself in the flower-and-bird genre of Chinese painting, adopting the *mogu*, or boneless style of brushwork, in which subjects are not contoured, but depicted only by color shading. The Tianjin Museum's collection includes a flower-and-bird painting album by Yun, *Drawing Nature at Ouziang Hall* (his place of residence), in which he rendered serene, detached scenes in light, tender colors. Now, this work is being shown for the first time in his hometown of Wujin district in Changzhou in



Jiangsu province, where *Dialogue Across Time and Space*, an exhibition dedicated to Yun's art, will run until Feb 26 at the Ya Jiuyuan Arts Center. Also on show are pieces by modern painters exploring the *mogu* technique. A digital show of the recurring motifs found in Yun's work further enhances the experience of the timeless beauty of the Chinese ink tradition.

9 am-5 pm, daily. 88 Huanhu Beihu, Wujin district, Changzhou, Jiangsu province. 0519-8116-7176.

CHINA DAILY

## LIFE



From left: Austrian violinist and project faculty member Martin Zalodek instructs Lin Ruifeng, 2024 YMCG Orchestra's concertmaster; conductor Yu Long (left), chairman of the Youth Music Culture the Greater Bay Area project's artistic committee, in a public talk with British conductor Daniel Harding, the project's artistic director; French double bassist and project faculty member Lorraine Campet (right) plays alongside the young musicians. PHOTOS BY LI LEWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

# Diversity of harmony

Greater Bay Area sets the stage for young classical musicians from around the world to open their ears to the playing of others, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

From Jan 20 to Feb 1, a group of virtuosi and young musicians from home and abroad gathered in the Greater Bay Area for a series of classical music events in Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, and the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The 2024 Youth Music Culture the Greater Bay Area, or YMCG, featured concerts, lectures, outdoor performances and master classes, and not only served as a platform for exchange and learning, but also brought music to the GBAs cultural landmarks.

This year, British conductor Daniel Harding began his term as the new artistic director of the annual classical music showcase, a position he will hold until 2028. The project had a faculty comprising 13 seasoned musicians from world's leading orchestras, as well as more than 80 young musicians from over 50 international music conservatories and 16 Chinese orchestras.

"One of the greatest pleasures of this project for me was being able to choose a team of people to come with me. I wanted to bring people from very different orchestras so that all together, the young musicians here would get different kinds of influences," says Harding.

"It was very easy to find faculty members of exceptional musical level because we are very lucky to have exceptional musicians all over. But I wanted to find more than that. I wanted to find people who share the same spirit, people who would know how to be patient and kind with the young musicians, but also expect a lot from them."

Each year, the young participating musicians come together to form the YMCG Orchestra, and undergo an intensive rehearsal schedule and perform both orchestral and chamber music concerts. This year, major performances included three YMCG Orchestra concerts conducted by Harding in the Xinghai Concert Hall in Guangzhou, the Shenzhen Concert Hall and the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Concert Hall.

The program included the world



premiere of *Aureate Skylines*, written by Hong Kong composer Elliot Leung specially for the event, Mozart's *Sinfonia Concertante for Violin, Viola and Orchestra in E-flat Major, K 364*, and Dvorak's *Symphony No 9 in E Minor, Op 95*.

Outdoor performances were also hosted at the urban landmarks of the Greater Bay Area, from Guangzhou's Cantonese Opera Art Museum and the Guangdong Museum, to the seaside piazza of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre.

The young musicians were selected by auditions in October, both on the spot and via video call. Three young musicians from the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra joined this year's event, among them bassoonist Zhang Cong.

At 30, the upper age limit for participants, Zhang felt this was a valuable opportunity. Despite having a performance in Shenzhen that day, to attend the event on Jan 20, he drove to Guangzhou immediately afterward.

"The rehearsals are diverse, and Benjamin Moermond, Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra's principal



Top: Harding conducts the 2024 YMCG Orchestra in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, on Jan 28. Above: Faculty members and young musicians give a performance in Guangzhou's Cantonese Opera Art Museum. PHOTOS BY LI LEWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

bassoonist, has given us a lot of guidance and advice. This includes individual coaching and instruction during woodwind section rehearsals and orchestra rehearsals," Zhang says.

"I have also been seeking his expertise on performance techniques and practical challenges that may arise while working in an orchestra, such as ways to handle specific passages, articulation tech-

niques and breath control."

The harmonious atmosphere among the young musicians was another aspect that captivated him. Despite the mix of orchestra musicians and students brought together for a short period of time, Zhang says that they all became instant friends.

"We have bonded not only at rehearsals but also in our spare time. Everyone is very dedicated and serious at rehearsals. I feel that we all have a strong sense of commitment and a shared goal, that we all want to give our best at the concerts. I think this is truly moving," Zhang says.

French double bassist Lorraine Campet, one of the faculty members this year, says that the young musicians share the same motivation and courage even when faced with hardships, and although the time was short, she observed progress within the orchestra.

"Day by day, they have improved in finding the common sounds and the way of playing together. Their ears are more open to others' playing," Campet says.

## Evolution and growth

Founded in 2017 as Youth Music Culture Guangdong, the annual event was hosted for six consecutive years until 2022 by the Department of Culture and Tourism of Guangdong Province, and organized by the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra and the Xinghai Concert Hall.

Conductor Yu Long served as the chairman of the artistic committee, and cellist Yo-Yo Ma as the artistic director.

In 2023, the event was upgraded and renamed Youth Music Culture the Greater Bay Area, with its activities extending beyond Guangdong province to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Beginning in 2024, YMCG is now co-organized by five institutions based in the Greater Bay Area — the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra, the Xinghai Concert Hall, the Shenzhen Symphony Orchestra, the Hong Kong Philharmonic Orchestra and the Macao Orchestra.

Violinist and orchestra manager Sookyung Lee was one of this year's two young musicians from the

Republic of Korea. It was her second time attending YMCG, as she first participated in the 2018 edition, after a Chinese friend told her about the event.

"I had a really memorable experience working with Yo-Yo Ma and a great faculty. At that time, about half of the curriculum was focused on classical music, but the rest also covered other music genres," Lee says.

One of the workshops that left her with a deep impression was one that involved improvisation along with traditional instruments from different countries. The workshops and the event's overall free and lively atmosphere was a refreshing experience for her.

Another motivation to apply again was learning that Daniel Harding was to serve as the artistic director. On Jan 24, he gave a public talk with Yu, in which he spoke of his own dual careers as a conductor and a pilot, which inspired Lee to keep her own dual careers.

"I've learned how to be more open-minded musically and personally. Maestro Harding said in every rehearsal that we have to learn to listen to others rather than playing alone in an orchestra. While we're playing our own notes, it's crucial for our ears to listen to what others are doing at that moment. This was an important message for me," Lee says.

Despite the diversity among the faculty members and the young musicians, Harding says the varied levels of English pose no challenge.

"When it comes to playing music, when it comes to demonstrating a musical idea, the understanding is instant. It's an old cliché that music transcends language barriers, but we know it — the emotions that we find in music remind us that the things we feel inside ourselves are felt by everybody else," Harding adds.

Contact the writer at [chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:chengyuezhu@chinadaily.com.cn)



Online  
Watch the video  
by scanning  
the code.

# Tracing thread of continuity in Chinese governance system

By WANG RU  
[wangru1@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:wangru1@chinadaily.com.cn)

The year 221 BC was very important. This was the year when Qinshihuang established a centralized, unified, multiethnic dynasty and became the first emperor in Chinese history.

He abolished the earlier hereditary vassal enfeoffment system and set up prefectures and counties across the country, which exerted a profound influence on the political systems of China over the following 2,000 years, says Xia Chuntao, director of the Institute of Modern History at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Ancient China's governance systems developed rapidly afterward, building up centuries of experience. Some scholars have paid particular attention to this field in their work.

The results of their studies have been published in *Research on Chinese Governance System in Past Dynasties*, a book highlighted by CASS as an important research

achievement in the interpretation of modern Chinese civilization, at a news conference in Beijing on Jan 18.

According to Xia, who is also the chief author of the book, this compilation is the result of a major four-year academic program which started in 2019. Altogether, 12 scholars took part to complete the work of 1.06 million words.

"This book elaborates on the practice of ancient China's political governance systems. We not only wanted to show how ancient people thought and designed systems, but also how they implemented them, what the results were, and how they made adjustments," says Xia.

Moreover, the book aims to help people get some historical experience in this field and provide reference for efforts to modernize the system and capacity for governance today, says Guo Jianhong, deputy director at the scientific research bureau of the CASS.

The book has 11 chapters, discussing issues such as "administration and supervision", "central and local governance", "people-oriented gov-



Research on Chinese Governance System in Past Dynasties is highlighted as important research progress about modern Chinese civilization by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences at a news conference in Beijing on Jan 18. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ernance and people's livelihood", "thought and culture", "rule of rite and rule of law", "border governance" and "religious governance".

According to Xia, the book covers governance systems from the Qin (221-206 BC) to Qing (1644-1911)

dynasties, which is unusual in previous studies.

Based on their studies, the contributing scholars point out the main characteristics of ancient China's governance systems: with centralization as the main system, the

ancient Chinese advocated the unity and solidarity of the country, regarded Confucianism as the guiding ideology and stressed adaptation to the times and making innovations to improve the system.

"We believe that in ancient China, given numerous challenges, such as the vast territory, diverse ethnic groups, and the need to formulate governance theories, it was crucial for the central government to have power and authority," says Xia.

"Without authority, the central government would not be able to effectively integrate resources. On the contrary, the central government could leverage the advantages of a unified system and collective efforts to accomplish major tasks, effectively promoting socioeconomic development," he adds.

According to Xia, the governance practice of ancient China faced particular difficulties. "For example, throughout history, China's population has comprised a large proportion of the global population, about 20 to 30 percent on average. It was

very difficult to support so many people with limited cultivated fields."

But China has a civilizational history of more than 5,000 years, which means Chinese people have over 5,000 years of governance experience. According to Xia, such abundant governance experience is unparalleled.

He also mentions one particular achievement of China's governance practice over such a long span of time. "In ancient China, although there were instances of social unrest due to misgovernance, there were also periods of good governance and social stability. Despite these downs, the general trend has been upward, with the country achieving continuous development and progress," says Xia.

"With our governance theories and designs, the Chinese people have made numerous inventions in this field, which have contributed to the glories of Chinese civilization and made outstanding contributions to the development of world civilization," he adds.

## CULTURE

## IMPROVING COMMUNICATION

Researchers help pioneer ways to enrich lives of people with visual impairment, **An Baijie** and **Hou Chenchen** report.

**B**lind people in China have been struggling to understand the meaning of words written in Braille because of the system's absence of tones.

For instance, Mandarin Braille lacks the ability to differentiate between the Chinese words "time" (*shíjiān* with "jiān" in the first tone) and "practice" (*shíjiān* with "jiān" in the fourth tone) due to identical pronunciations despite the differing tones.

Things have changed as China introduced the Chinese Common Braille Scheme in 2018.

After seven years of research, Zhong Jinghua, a professor at the Special Education College of Beijing Union University, devised a Chinese Braille system capable of representing the tonal aspects inherent in Mandarin.

Zhong's groundbreaking work put an end to the 70-year history of non-tonal Braille in which visually impaired individuals had to guess word meanings.

Now, tonal Braille has been integrated into primary education and Braille publishing, encompassing textbooks used in schools for the visually impaired across China.

#### Learning advantage

Named after its inventor Louis Braille in 19th century France, Braille is a tactile representation of alphabetic symbols using six dots to represent each letter.

The Braille system commonly used in English-speaking countries may not be suitable for tonal languages spoken in Asia, Africa and the Americas, where over 1.5 billion people use these languages.

China is among the countries requiring an improved Braille system distinct from the standard one. Mandarin Chinese is a tonal language, as the pitch or the tone in which the word is spoken contributes to its meaning.

Similar to many tonal languages worldwide, Mandarin conveys specific meanings but the original Braille

system fails to represent its tones.

Braille relies on pinyin, the system for writing Chinese words using the Roman alphabet. A loss of meaning takes place with the conversion from visually based graphic characters to auditory-based phonetic Braille.

Standard Braille's shortcomings may hamper visually impaired students in acquiring knowledge because the absence of tones can result in numerous ambiguities, Zhong said.

The inherent learning potential of visually impaired children is no different from that of other children, according to Zhong, but various factors may impede their learning ability and cause them to lag behind others.

In extensive reading, visually impaired individuals often rely on contextual cues to infer word meanings, but this form of inference may be inadequate in learning new knowledge.

"When students come across unfamiliar or new words, grasping their meanings becomes challenging. This leads to numerous difficulties in the learning process," Zhong said.

The traditional Braille system without tone notation was established in 1953. Since then, researchers have continually explored methods to integrate tones into Braille.

In 1988, Huang Nai, a pioneer in China's education for the visually impaired, introduced a two-cell Braille system to address the shortcomings of non-tonal Braille.

"The new system successfully implemented tone notation in two cells, but it overthrew the old Braille system. This required visually impaired individuals to learn an entirely new language, causing them to undergo the pains of Braille reform," Zhong said.

The two-cell system faced many challenges and after a five-year trial period, its use was discontinued.

"In the span of these 20 years dedicated to developing tonal Braille, we've essentially circled back to our starting point," Zhong said.

The primary challenge in incorporating tones into Braille is to strike a balance between tone accuracy and

“It is not easy to do one thing well in a short life. My whole life is wrestling with the six dots.”

Zhong Jinghua, a professor at the Special Education College of Beijing Union University



**Top:** A student from the special education college of Beijing Union University touches the six-dot Chinese Braille with tones being added in January. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

**Above two:** An athlete uses the Braille guidebook for the Beijing 2022 Paralympic Winter Games, which adopted Song Yanlin's printing technology, in March 2022. Professor Zhong Jinghua helps students read standard Braille at Beijing Union University in January.

conserving Braille cells. Any alterations to the Braille system must consider the reading habits of the visually

impaired, Zhong said.

"To add tones isn't inherently complex; by introducing an additional

six-dot Braille cell to denote tone after the initial and final consonant cells of each character, this can be achieved. However, such an approach significantly increases cell amount and drastically slows down reading speed," he said.

From 2007, Zhong started to explore ways to add tones into the Braille system without overturning the original system. In 2009, Zhong's project was launched and received national social science funding.

"Our new version should not overturn the original system. We should consider blind people's reading habits," he said.

Initially, Zhong planned to create a homophone corpus of Mandarin to annotate words in Braille. However, he later abandoned the strategy as it would pose a significant burden of memorization on visually impaired people.

To strike a balance between tone accuracy and conserving Braille cells, Zhong and his group endeavored to omit tone annotation based on tone number or syllables. But these methods did not align with the reading habits of visually impaired individuals, as revealed in their pilot study.

Recognizing the potential to omit annotations by considering the frequency of tone occurrences in the initial consonants of Chinese syllables, Zhong conducted a quantitative analysis of 10 million Mandarin Braille cells. This rigorous examination led Zhong to discover an effective method for incorporating tones into Braille in 2016.

China introduced its Chinese Common Braille Scheme in 2018 following a two-year trial period, marking an end to the 70 years of non-tonal Braille.

To gradually implement the common Braille scheme, textbooks used in schools for the visually impaired were progressively updated with the new scheme starting from the first grade. The common Braille system now encompasses all foundational education from the first to seventh grade in China.

#### Inclusive education

According to the Seventh National Population Census of China in 2020, there are more than 17 million visually impaired people in the country. Zhong said that both the government and society are increasingly focused on educating this group.

When Zhong began working in education for the visually impaired in the mid-1980s, fewer than 5 percent of children in the group were enrolled in schools. At that time, he was a math teacher at Changle Normal School in East China's Shandong province.

As China began building up its standardized special education, Changle Normal School underwent a major transformation in 1985, becoming the Changle Special Education Normal School. And Zhong became a teacher for the visually impaired.

In 1988, he participated in a sponsored training session by the Caterpillar Foundation in Qingdao, Shandong province. He and 32 other graduates became the first standardized teachers for the visually impaired. In 2003, Zhong headed to Beijing Union University and focused on Braille research.

At least 95 percent of visually impaired children now have access to schooling, based on a major program for promoting special education.

"The national social science fund prioritizes special education research projects. Moreover, when our project requires interdisciplinary support, researchers from esteemed institutions like the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Tsinghua University, and Beijing Language and Culture University generously lend their expertise," Zhong said.

Zhong said he will dedicate his life to empowering the visually impaired. After completing the tone annotation project, Zhong will focus on word segmentation of Mandarin Braille. "It is not easy to do one thing well in a short life. My whole life is wrestling with the six dots," Zhong said.

Contact the writers at [houchenchen@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:houchenchen@chinadaily.com.cn)

## Scientific innovations focus on blind people's challenges

By AN BAIJIE and HOU CHENCHEN

"Visually impaired children have to be really cautious when touching the dots of a traditional Braille book," said Song Yanlin, a professor at the Institute of Chemistry, Chinese Academy of Sciences.

While Braille can only be imprinted on specially imported paper, which costs 15 to 20 times more than regular paper, the raised dots within Braille books can easily become flattened with repeated reading. The high expense and scarcity of Braille books can hinder educational opportunities for visually impaired children.

Recognizing the urgent need for innovation in Braille printing technology, Song and his team embarked on a mission to enhance the quality and efficiency of Braille printing. Their research subsequently helped revolutionize Braille printing and improved printing accuracy at multiple levels.

The new Braille printing technology has been promoted in China to the forefront in the field of global green Braille printing.

#### Investing in innovation

A traditional Braille printer embosses dots onto a special kraft paper using metal plates, but books printed using this method may not be durable. Song suggested transforming the conventional Braille printing process to make it more accessible.

"By precisely controlling the formation of ink droplets and manipulating each droplet to create a slightly raised structure, a basic Braille dot can be represented," Song said.

The primary hurdle for Song and his team was in tackling the "coffee-ring effect," a persistent issue in the field of printing in which a liquid, like a drop of coffee, evaporates on a surface, resulting in a ring-like pattern.

Since 2006, Song and his team have concentrated on studying the coffee-ring effect in inkjet printing. They effectively managed nanoscale interface properties between the ink and substrate, averting any unexpected spreading of ink droplets.

Based on this breakthrough, they printed the smallest ink dots recorded, with each containing just a few nanoparticles. These dots were interconnected to produce the finest lines, then the sleekest surfaces.

The achievement marks a leap beyond traditional six-dot printing in Braille. With this new printing technology, Braille is not confined to text alone. It can also generate intricate graphics, aiding visually impaired students in comprehending complex mathematical concepts.

"By achieving this, blind children can also experience the beautiful curves of mathematical functions, appreciate three-dimensional topographical maps, and enjoy the pleasure brought by graphics and patterns through the touch of their fingertips," he said.

Researchers also used environmentally friendly nano-antibacterial ink on 3D materials.

"This material permeates the surface of the paper, deeply integrating with the paper fibers through capillary force. It can firmly bond with the paper surface, so Braille dots will be highly resistant to friction, ensur-



**Above:** Song Yanlin, a chemistry expert from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, delivers a lecture on Braille printing technology in May 2022. Braille venue signage using Song Yanlin's research fruits is displayed at 2022 Paralympic Winter Games venues in Beijing.

ing the durability of Braille books," Song said.

In addition to printing on paper, the new technology facilitates printing on a variety of other materials. Song crafted a specialized Rubik's Cube for the visually impaired, featuring distinct patterns on each face. The technology has the potential to be incorporated into the daily life and needs of the visually impaired, such as in the design of packaging and bags, Song said.

During a visit to the Beijing School for the Blind, Song found that a num-

ber of visually impaired children exhibited exceptional proficiency in solving Rubik's Cube puzzles, often surpassing other children in both speed and skill.

"Blind children are born without intellectual difference compared with sighted children. However, the disparity widens due to limitations in their educational opportunities," he said.

"Our goal is to bridge this gap. We aim to enrich the cultural experiences of those unable to perceive the world through their eyes."

The Braille printing technology

was adopted during the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics and Paralympics. The team printed bilingual books to include visually impaired audiences. It covered athlete guides, venue descriptions, real-time event updates, and extensive tactile maps placed around event locations.

"It marked a historic moment in the Olympics as it represents the first widespread use of inclusive materials catering to both sighted and visually impaired audiences," Song said.

#### Dedicated to help

The innovative technology has been adopted in various settings across China, with the first few batches of tactile postcards and maps specifically designed for the visually impaired introduced in museums and libraries in Nanjing and Fuzhou cities.

At the Beijing Daxing International Airport, Song and his team's research was represented through tactile signage that helped visually impaired travelers get around and significantly enhanced the airport's accessibility services.

To further improve the reading experiences of the visually impaired, Song developed multisensory printing products.

"Relying solely on touch significantly limits the information available to people with visual impairments. By integrating auditory and olfactory elements into the ink, our aim is to provide them with a comprehensive sensory experience," he said.

Utilizing the new technology, people can print a Braille book where, upon a visually impaired person touching objects like an apple or a

pear in the picture book, they can also experience the genuine scents of the corresponding fruits. The innovation is set to significantly compensate for the lack of visual input.

"We aspire to extend these benefits to blind individuals worldwide," Song said. He is actively exploring potential collaborations with international disability support organizations and Braille printing houses to share the technology and enhance the lives of visually impaired people globally.

About a decade ago, Song had an encounter with a young visually impaired girl who was singing *You are My Bright Eyes*, originally performed by a visually impaired singer named Xiao Huangqi.

"I was deeply touched by the lyrics and the girl's performance," Song said. From that moment on, he said: "I started to think how we could help improve the lives of the blind by scientific research, and I found a field that requires more attention — Braille printing."

Song said he believes that scientific research should be motivated by the needs of society. He and his team have begun experiments to develop and print high-performance, resilient cochlear implants for those with hearing disabilities, as well as innovative facial expression recognition systems for individuals unable to speak.

"It's vital to concentrate on the less noticeable areas, to attend to what others might overlook," he said.

Jiang Duo contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at [houchenchen@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:houchenchen@chinadaily.com.cn)