

Taste of two cities

Notre Dame cathedral exhibition staged in iconic London abbey

WORLD, PAGE 6



Dementia can be predicted 15 years before symptoms

CHINA, PAGE 4



Unique perspective

Curiosity about insects grows into passion for exploring nature's gifts

LIFE, PAGE 14

# CHINA DAILY

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## Temporary home



Palestinians cook meals on Saturday in front of makeshift tents as families who had to leave their homes take shelter in Rafah, the southernmost town in the Gaza Strip. ABED ZAGOUT VIA GETTY IMAGES See more, page 7

## Housing sector expected to see mild pickup

Stronger policy support, eased restrictions set to invigorate real estate market transactions

By CHENG YU  
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Following a series of supportive measures from housing and financial authorities, China's property market is expected to see a mild pickup in major cities after the Spring Festival holiday, which extended from Feb 10 to Saturday, industry experts said on Sunday.

Their comments came as major State-owned banks and a number of local governments launched intensive policies before and during the holiday to support the real estate sector.

The Bank of Communications said it had placed 1,442 property projects on a list eligible for financing assistance as of Feb 13, and had already disbursed loans to some developers. The Agricultural Bank of China said on Feb 11 that it had provided financing for more than 2,700 real estate projects.

Such moves were also part of broader efforts by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development and the National Financial Regulatory Administration to launch a city-centered financing coordination mechanism to support the real estate sector in late January. Under the mechanism, a "white list" has been drawn up to meet the reasonable financing demands of developers nationwide.

Lu Wenxi, chief analyst at Centaline Property, said the intensive bailout policies released before the Spring Festival holiday sent a clear and strong signal from authorities to stabilize the property market.

"Such efforts are expected to become an insurance pill for the property market after the Spring Festival holiday. Once market expectation is realized, confidence will further recover," Lu said.

Guo Xinyu, an analyst at China Index Academy, said: "In addition, a slew of fine-tuned home purchasing policies from different provinces and cities are expected to boost market activity after the holiday. It is possible that major cities will see a mild sales pickup in spring."

Since January, some Chinese cities have responded proactively to

the authorities' call for supportive measures to the real estate market and have adjusted purchasing policies for commercial housing.

"The policy revisions in top-tier cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou may also inspire similar actions in first- and key second-tier cities," Guo added.

For instance, Guangzhou, Guangdong province, eased residential property purchase measures on Jan 27. The purchase restriction on residential property with an area of over 120 square meters in restricted zones has been removed.

Yan Yuejin, research director at the E-House Research Institute, a housing market consultancy, said:

"The significance of easing purchase restrictions on large housing in Guangzhou is not limited to one city. Over the past two years, many residents in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area have wanted to buy houses in Guangzhou, which is expected to invigorate market transactions to a large extent."

Starting on Feb 7, the minimum ratio of down payment for first homes in Hainan province will be adjusted from 25 percent to 20 percent, which is expected to further stimulate sales of commercial housing in the province.

Data released by the Hainan Bureau of Statistics showed that the sales area of commercial housing in the province hit over 8.99 million square meters in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 39.7 percent.

He Miannan, chief analyst for the real estate industry at Everbright Securities, said that as China's property market is experiencing major changes on the supply and demand sides, it has been a trend for first-tier cities to proactively increase local support for home purchases, and for second-tier cities to relax restrictions on commercial housing purchases.

However, Cao Xute, an analyst at Shanghai-based Shengang Securities, said that compared with the two major pickups in 2021 and 2023, there is still a lack of market confidence in the first quarter of 2024.

## Gaza conflict shows value of China-proposed initiatives

Israel has a long history of isolating the Gaza Strip, a political action that constitutes a plain violation of international humanitarian law.

More than 27,000 Palestinians had been killed and over 66,600 others had been injured in Israel's onslaught on the Palestinian enclave as of Feb 5. About 85 percent of the people in Gaza have been displaced, while all the population in Gaza is food-insecure, according to the United Nations. Hundreds of thousands of residents are living without shelter. "A child is killed on average every 10 minutes in the Gaza Strip," World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told the United Nations Security Council in November.

South African lawyers, in an 84-page submission to the International Court of Justice, presented evidence of the daily killing of civilians, accusing Israel of committing the "crime of genocide" against the Palestinians. South

WORLD WATCH  
By Kostas Gouliamos

Africa accused Israel of failing to prevent "genocide", as well as failing to prosecute Israeli officials who encouraged what South Africa alleged were acts of genocide.

Although it stopped short of calling for an immediate cease-fire in the Gaza Strip, the court ruled that "Israel must, in accordance with its obligations under the Genocide Convention, in relation to Palestinians in Gaza, take all measures within its power to prevent the commission of acts under Article 2 of the Genocide Convention".

Overall, what was announced on Jan 26 is not the final point from the International Court of Justice on whether or not Israel's actions in Gaza amounted to "genocide" against the Palestinians. The final decision is not expected for at least a year. However, based on what was announced, the court accepts

that there is a reasonable risk to the Palestinians.

Although the decision could, for instance, pave the way for sanctions against Israel and discourage foreign countries from selling weapons systems to Israel, the international court could certainly have been harsher toward Israel by ordering a halt to Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu repudiated the court's decision as "outrageous". In any case, the decision demonstrates that Israel is not above the law.

Based on the everlasting occupation of Palestine, Israel and its Western allies are intensifying their bargaining for what comes next in Gaza and all the Palestinian territories. In stark contrast to the Palestinian people's right to a free homeland, Israel and its Western allies are promoting a protectorate status in which Israel will be "free" to intervene whenever and however it wants. In particular, they appear increasingly to speak in general terms of a

"two-state solution", without any reference to the relevant UN resolutions to end the Israeli occupation and recognition of a truly independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with the return of all refugees.

It is worth mentioning that in the extensive reports of Western news agencies and networks on the subject, there is no mention of the plan to implement the dozens of UN resolutions on the Palestinian issue, nor of course those that refer to the 1967 borders, to a state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to the need for the return of Palestinian refugees.

The China-proposed Global Security Initiative is needed more than ever, since the global outlook for 2024 is relatively bleak. The uncertainties due to regional conflicts and the possibility of the war in the Middle East expanding are generating a growing divergence between the Global North and the Global South.

See *Initiatives*, page 3

## THOUSANDS FLOCK TO BEIJING'S REJUVENATED TEMPLE FAIRS

From shadow plays to acrobatic feats, traditional art forms are finding new admirers

By CHEN NAN  
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A strong sense of nostalgia permeated the temple fairs held across Beijing during the Spring Festival holiday this year. Children were seen sitting on the shoulders of their fathers, mothers pushed baby strollers, and long lines of people waited to buy treats from food stalls.

After a four-year hiatus due to the pandemic, the fairs — which are an integral part of the festival — reopened in Beijing this year.

Major temple fairs such as those at Ditan, Longtanhu and Daguan-yuan parks attracted large crowds

during the weeklong holiday. Over 2.6 million people went to such fairs in Beijing from Feb 10 to 13, according to media reports. Due to the strong attendance and positive feedback from tourists, the fairs, scheduled to run from Feb 10 to 14, were extended to Feb 16.

Lu Baogang, 59, has been performing shadow plays at the city's Spring Festival temple fairs for 40 years.

See *Fairs*, page 2

## Nation vows to serve as world's stabilizing force

By ZHANG YUNBI  
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Inside

Editorial, page 11

Foreign Minister Wang Yi's wide-ranging policy speech at the 60th Munich Security Conference highlighted China's role as a "stabilizing force", which demonstrates the consistency and credibility of the country's foreign policy, analysts said.

Amid escalating geopolitical conflicts and sluggish world economic recovery, China's latest diplomatic efforts and policy statements help shore up expectations for upholding multilateralism, revitalizing China-European Union cooperation, and averting a return to the Cold War mentality, according to observers.

In his speech on Saturday at the conference's "China in the World" session, Wang focused on advancing cooperation with major countries and economies as well as the vast number of Global South nations, and he addressed hot spot issues such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

In addition, he warned against the fallout and backfiring that would be brought about by disen-

gaging from China or seeking economic decoupling.

When highlighting "the urgent need of coordination among major countries to deal with turbulence in the world", Wang named the United States, Russia and the European Union.

On relations with the US, Wang said Beijing will firmly guard its legitimate rights and interests, oppose unreasonable suppression, work with Washington to carry out the consensus of the two heads of state, and advance the nations' relations along the right track.

The stable growth of China-Russia ties serves the common interest of both sides and "has a positive impact on the strategic stability of the Asia-Pacific and the globe", he said.

Regarding ties with the EU, Wang said the two sides "should rule out geopolitical and ideological disturbance and continue defining one another as partners rather than rivals".



Foreign Minister Wang Yi delivers the keynote speech on Saturday during the "China in the World" session at the Munich Security Conference in Germany. REN PENGFEI / XINHUA

When talking about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Wang said China calls for a faster pace in establishing an independent State of Palestine, and he emphasized the need to convene a larger and more

effective international peace conference. He also underlined Beijing's consistent support for peace talks to resolve the Ukraine crisis.

See *Speech*, page 3

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# PAGE TWO

## Fairs: Folk arts and crafts flourish

From page 1

Lu is a member of the Beijing Shadow Show Troupe, which staged four daily shows at Daguan Yuan Park from Feb 10 to 16.

Shadow play, also known as shadow puppetry, is a traditional Chinese art form that combines music, storytelling and puppets. It began to take shape in the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24), and reached its peak in the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties.

During a performance, puppeteers manipulate colorful silhouette figures made from leather or paper, by using rods. The figures create the illusion of moving images on a translucent cloth screen illuminated from behind.

"There is a saying about art troupes performing Chinese traditional art forms," Lu said. "If we didn't have any performances at temple fairs, which mark the beginning of a new year, it will be a difficult year. That's why temple fairs are very important for us performers."

### Out of the shadows

Lu recently retired as head of the troupe, which was founded in 1957, and is dedicated to preserving and popularizing the art form.

He recalls vividly when their show was canceled due to the pandemic. "We had already set up the stage and our first show was due to open the next morning when we were told that the temple fair was canceled due to the pandemic," said Lu. "After four years, we are finally able to present shows at temple fairs again."

Born and raised in a Beijing hutong, Lu is the fifth generation of his family involved in shadow plays. When he was 15 years old, his father died of a heart attack. Sadly, his father had been appointed director of the troupe days before he passed away. As the only son, Lu dropped out of school and started working with the troupe.

After learning last year that temple fairs were to restart in Beijing, Lu was excited at the news and decided to reinterpret a classic story. Titled *Fan Lihua*, the play tells the story of Fan, a legendary female general during the Tang Dynasty.

According to Lu, *Fan Lihua* is an old show from the troupe's repertoire. When Lu decided to perform his own adaptation of *Fan Lihua*, he invited a young composer, Bai Qutong, to do the music for the 50-minute show.

Bai used over 10 traditional Chinese musical instruments to write music for *Fan Lihua*, such as the *sanzian* (a three-stringed lute), the *shu* (a four-stringed fiddle) and instruments from the *ruan* (plucked instrument) family. She also used flutes and percussion instruments, which are widely featured in Peking Opera.

"I came to the temple fair at Daguan Yuan Park on Feb 10, the first day of Lunar New Year, and I was overwhelmed by the huge crowds," said Bai, a Beijing native aged in her 20s. "The show fitted the atmosphere of Spring Festival, with a story about a female hero and joyful, energetic music."

Lu was pleased the show crossed

different generations.

"This year, people came to our stage and stayed for the whole show," he said. "Our show is new and fun for kids. People haven't had the experience of a temple fair for a long time and they wanted to enjoy every minute," said Lu.

The troupe also staged other shows, including an adaptation of the classic Chinese novel *Journey to the West*.

Drawing on his own childhood,

Lu remembers the thrill of going to temple fairs with his parents and four older sisters after partaking in Chinese New Year traditions, such as making dumplings and staying up all night on New Year's Eve.

"It was very cold and often snowy. Going to a temple fair was one of the most exciting things to do for children since we could

hiatus, the museum put folk art performances online.

However, while it was a good compromise it did not match the immediacy of watching a live performance, Zhu said. "When you are watching a show live you feel like you are a part of the story. The feeling is stronger during Spring Festival."

For the upcoming Lantern Festival, which marks the end of Spring Festival and falls on Feb 24, Dongyue Temple will continue its fair. Visitors can enjoy viewing colorful lanterns and eating treats such as *yuanxiao*, glutinous rice balls with sweet fillings.

### Tradition survives

Tian Xueming, a folk artist born and raised in Beijing, launched an indoor temple fair in the capital during Spring Festival this year.

Every day, hundreds of people visited his indoor fair, which covers about 3,000 square meters in a building in Deshengmen area. He hopes to make the venue a permanent destination for tourists, offering folk art performances every day.

Tian, 60, has worked at Beijing temple fairs since 1996 and performs magic tricks in addition to *qigong* and *tai chi*. He learned martial arts when he was a child, and despite his father's objections pursued a career as a folk artist.

"I was amazed by folk art when I went to temple fairs with my parents and my older brother as a kid. I didn't want to leave until the performers called it a day," said Tian.

Traditional temple fairs are where people pray for good luck for the new year and have fun with their families, he added. "As a performer, I love seeing children riding on their parents' shoulders, holding a windmill toy in one hand and a *tanghulu* (candied haws on a stick) in another hand."

In 1989, Tian enrolled at a performing arts school to learn Hebei Bangzi, a traditional Chinese opera. Two years later he began training in more folk arts, such as magic tricks, lion dances and *bian lian*, a face-changing show.

In 2000, Tian founded a school to keep those folk arts alive. He worries that such skills and traditions are fading away as the younger generation has more entertainment options.

"Today, life is much better than when I was a child. We have phones to call our families in a different city or even a different country. We don't need to wait for Lunar New Year to buy new clothes or eat food we want, such as dumplings. However, the core of Spring Festival is the same; it is about family and memories," said Tian.



Left: Tian Xueming, a folk artist, does magic tricks at a temple fair in Beijing's Deshengmen area. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY  
Right: Lu Baogang performs a shadow play at the capital's Daguan Yuan temple fair. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A martial arts performance at the Taoist Dongyue Temple fair. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



An performer walks on stilts at the Taoist Dongyue Temple fair in Beijing. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

have lots of snacks, candies and new toys," he said.

### Acrobatic skills

Major temple fairs held during the holidays also highlighted Beijing's history and culture. Changdian temple fair held around Hepingmen and Hufangqiao streets, dates back over 400 years, according to the Beijing government. As one of the biggest and oldest temple fairs in the capital, it attracts a large number of people with stalls selling old books, antiques, traditional Chinese paintings and calligraphy.

The fair is located near Tianqiao commercial area, a former hub for folk art and small businesses. Today, folk artists still gather at Changdian temple fair to display their skills, such as *xiangsheng*, or crosstalk, a comedic act that is performed as a dialogue between two performers or as a solo monologue, *pingshu*, a form of storytelling, and martial arts.

Zhu Yi is head of the publicity department of the Beijing Folklore Museum located at the Taoist Dongyue Temple in Chaoyang district. The museum organizes the Beijing Folk Art Festival, which is in its 13th year and part of the temple's fair. It saw strong attendances this year.

"The number of people (coming

to the temple fair) broke records attracting over 10,000 visitors every day," said Zhu.

Apart from lion and dragon dances, the fair this year also featured *zhongfan*, a flagpole balancing act with amazing acrobatic feats. Acrobats throw and balance bamboo poles 10-meters long and weighing about 50 kilograms, using their hands, backs, jaws and foreheads. The poles have large flags decorated with images of clouds and dragons attached to them.

*Zhongfan* originated in the Tang and Song dynasties and was traditionally the major attraction at temple fairs, Zhu said.

In 2007, the museum helped revive interest in the art form by organizing a skills competition, which included *zhongfan*, for acrobatic troupes in Beijing. Thirteen teams displaying expertise in lion dancing, *zhongfan* and *gaoqiao*, or walking on stilts, stood out from the competition. They were organized into a performance troupe by the museum.

"During this year's temple fair, we took those folk artists to perform not only at Dongyue Temple but also at four different spots near the temple," Zhu said. "They attracted a large number of admirers as they paraded for about two kilometers along streets while showcasing their skills."

During the pandemic-induced



Visitors to the Taoist Dongyue Temple fair in Chaoyang district enjoy folk performances including *zhongfan*, a flagpole balancing act with amazing acrobatic feats, and lion and dragon dances. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## Impressive display

A C919, China's first domestically produced large passenger aircraft, conducts a trial flight in Singapore on Sunday in preparation for the Singapore Airshow 2024, which opens on Tuesday at the Changi Exhibition Centre.

EDGAR SU / VIA AP



## New faces set to lead China-US climate ties

Two sides may need 'transitional period' for future collaborations

By HOU LIQIANG

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As special climate envoys of China and the United States, Xie Zhenhua and John Kerry have spent years on opposite sides of negotiation tables.

They are rivals, but also bosom friends.

During the COP28 climate change conference late last year, Xie, 74, took his 8-year-old grandson to a private gathering for Kerry's 80th birthday.

"We are good friends. Why? Because we share a common idea," Xie told a news conference during the annual UN event, which was held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

"That is being committed to protecting the environment and addressing climate change. We think this is a great cause because it benefits future generations."

The remarkable friendship that Xie and Kerry forged not only helped bridge rifts between their governments, but also defined the global climate stage, experts said.

However, the two veterans are retiring from climate diplomacy. Shortly after China announced on Jan 12 that Xie, who began steering China's climate diplomacy in 2007, had retired from his role, Kerry told media that he was also to leave climate diplomacy.

Liu Zhenmin, a former vice-minister of foreign affairs, has been appointed Xie's successor. US President Joe Biden will tap John Podesta, a Democratic Party political strategist and energy expert, to replace Kerry. The Washington Post reported late last month.

Experts said China and the US may need a "transitional period" to adapt to bilateral climate diplomacy without Xie and Kerry, but that would not cause big trouble for long-term climate cooperation.

## Significant contributions

Wang Yi, vice-chair of China's National Expert Panel on Climate Change, said the competitive and cooperative engagement between Xie and Kerry occurred against the backdrop of the Paris Agreement, which changed the paradigm of global climate diplomacy.



Liu Zhenmin

John Podesta

The accord adopted a bottom-up structure to set emission targets for different parties. The change made strong leadership especially important in global climate negotiations, which involve almost 200 parties, he said.

China, as a representative of developing nations, and the US, which represents developed countries, had, without doubt, forged the most important bilateral relationship for multilateral action on tackling global climate change, Wang said.

"Xie and Kerry were pushed to the foreground in this special era," he said.

Li Zheng, president of the Institute of Climate Change and Sustainable Development at Tsinghua University, said Xie and Kerry made historic contributions to the world by ensuring China and the US exercised climate leadership.

President Xi Jinping and former US president Barack Obama laid the foundations of international support for the Paris Agreement, which was adopted in 2015, by making a joint public announcement on climate change in Beijing in late 2014.

Xie, then deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission, and Kerry, then US secretary of state, played an important role in bringing about the announcement by their heads of state, Li said, adding that they were also behind five other China-US joint announcements and one joint declaration on climate change.

He said they also contributed a lot to safeguarding multilateralism under the Paris treaty and the accord's authority.

"When parties were at their wits' end trying to reach a consensus (at COP26 in 2021) in Glasgow, for example, China and the US

released a joint declaration ... thanks to the efforts of Xie and Kerry," Li said, adding the joint declaration turned the situation around and helped ensure the success of COP26.

Dimitri de Boer, regional director for Asia at the environmental law organization ClientEarth, said that together with the other parties in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Xie and Kerry had "laid the groundwork for strong global climate action, which is now extremely urgent".

Most recently, they came to an ambitious agreement in California in November for both sides to triple renewable energy capacity by 2030. That had, in turn, been adopted as a global target at COP28, he said.

## Broader impact

De Boer said their close personal relationship had allowed the US and China to continue an informal climate dialogue despite geopolitical tensions.

"Their relationship has not only helped to bring the formal US-China climate dialogue back on track, I believe it has even contributed to some progress in broader US-China relations," he said.

Most important, they had shown that joint climate action could be a force for improved trust, he said.

Rajendra Shende, who in 2007 was coordinating lead author for a report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change when it shared the Nobel Peace Prize with former US vice-president Al Gore, said the legacies left by Xie and Kerry were in the form of lessons learned.

One of the lessons was that bilateral rapport should be able to show tangible results that benefit not only two countries but the whole world.

"Climate change is a global issue, not bilateral," he said. "But bilateral ties can trigger global benefits."

Wang of the National Expert Panel on Climate Change said Xie and Kerry were competent climate diplomats with strong, comprehensive leadership skills and political wisdom.

Both of them wanted to "move even further forward," he said, with

Kerry pushing China to set even more ambitious climate targets, and Xie hoping that China could follow its own path in tackling climate change while also striving to ensure developing nations got more support.

Their retirements will certainly have an impact, and China and the US may have to go through a transitional period in their climate diplomacy, Wang said.

But that won't matter much in the long run, because the two countries generally still hope to have better communication with each other, and that would provide a solid foundation for climate cooperation.

Li of the Institute of Climate Change and Sustainable Development at Tsinghua University said Xie and Kerry had formed a very good working relationship that followed a rule that Xie defined as the "comfort principle", which was to take care of the core interests of the other side and not to breach its bottom line.

"Such rapport in a relationship means that they can have more in-depth, thorough and frank exchanges," he said. "And it's easier for them to strike a balance and reach goals."

Li said their successors will need some time for mutual adaptation, but he is optimistic about the future of China-US climate cooperation.

Both China and the US need to promote green innovation and forge ahead with a green, low-carbon transition to cope with the challenges brought by climate change," he said. There is demand for cooperation from the national level to the local level in both countries and also among their enterprises, Li said.

"Tackling climate change concerns the global public good," he said. "The two sides also have the demand. I think these provide a good foundation for China-US climate cooperation."

Both Wang and Li said they believed Xie and Kerry would continue to play roles in meeting the global climate challenge.

Xie said at COP28 that he and Kerry would not leave the climate community and would "continue to make a contribution".

While Xie was absent from the World Economic Forum annual meeting in January, he entrusted Wang to discuss some issues with Kerry in Davos.

"Xie asked me to communicate with Kerry on the issue of illegal deforestation, a problem they are both concerned about, and discuss with him how they will conduct research on long-term strategic cooperation in the field of tackling climate change," Wang said.

## Steps to attract more Chinese visitors urged

By BELINDA ROBINSON

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Industry insiders have called for favorable policies to attract Chinese visitors as several cities in the United States and Europe have witnessed a decline in the number of tourists visiting from China in the past few years, resulting in loss of revenue for the tourism industry in those places.

Speaking to China Daily, Tori Emerson Barnes, executive vice-president of the US Travel Association, a nonprofit organization representing the travel industry, said that China used to be one of the fastest-growing markets for the travel industry in the US, with "Chinese visitors spending more on average than visitors from any other market".

According to an analysis by the association, tourist inflow from China to the US last year stood at only 30 percent of 2019 levels, while the overall overseas travel recovery stood at 73 percent. The US saw 1.8 million fewer visitors from China in 2023 compared with 2019, resulting in an estimated loss of \$9 billion in potential travel spending, according to the association.

Chinese tourists are much loved by international businesses as they are among the biggest spenders when they travel.

Statistics show that Chinese travelers represented the highest average spend per visitor, with each Chinese visitor spending an average of \$11,849 in 2019, said the National Travel & Tourism Office, the agency within the US Department of Commerce that monitors tourism.

In New York City, about 8 percent of 14 million visitors in 2019 were from China, according to the New York City Tourism and Conventions Office. Around 390,000 were estimated to have visited from China last year.

The pattern is also being repeated in other countries.

Two million Chinese tourists visited France in 2019, generating more than 3.5 billion euros (\$3.8 billion) in revenue, according to French newspaper Le Monde. However, in 2023, the figure fell to 1 billion euros.

"Chinese tourists are mainly welcomed by operators specializing in Chinese or Asian customers. Due to the absence of Chinese visitors, they starved for three years, which is extremely long, extremely hard," Jean-Pierre Mas, president of Les Entreprises du Voyage, an association that brings together 1,674 companies representing 85 percent of travel agencies in France, told Xinhua News Agency.

Travelers from China spent more than 2 billion pounds (\$2.5 billion) a year in the United Kingdom before the pandemic. But the UK is currently missing out on 750 million pounds a year in spending by Chinese tourists, according to the Association of International Retail.

In 2021, the UK abolished VAT-free shopping for tourists. That made overseas visitors head to Italy and Spain and other destinations instead of the UK.

Speaking to The Telegraph, London, Paul Barnes, CEO of AIR, said, "If you want your economy to do well out of the international visitor sector, you really should be appealing to the Chinese, and the one thing that appeals to the Chinese is shopping."

"As Chinese travel patterns shift in favor of more regional, shorter-haul trips, the UK must reduce barriers to growth and compete more aggressively to welcome visitors from critical source markets like China," he added.

Agencies and Xinhua contributed to this story.

## Initiatives: Guidelines offered for peace, stability

From page 1

Additionally, the continuation of the conflict in Ukraine is fostering an international environment of instability.

Within this context, the China-proposed interrelated initiatives — the Global Security Initiative,

the Global Development Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative — have gained a special political weight as they offer guidelines for maintaining world peace and stability, and simultaneously building a global community of shared future.

The author is a former rector of European University Cyprus, an ordinary member of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, and director of the Chinese Studies Center established in Cyprus by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and European University Cyprus. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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## Speech: Disengaging for sake of 'de-risking' would be 'historic mistake'

From page 1

From Friday through the weekend, Wang also embarked on bilateral talks on the conference's sidelines, including meetings with Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and the foreign ministers of France, Argentina, Canada, Poland, Mongolia and Ukraine.

After his meeting with Wang on

Saturday, Josep Borrell, the European Union's high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, said on social media that China "is an important partner to address the most pressing security challenges".

Cui Hongjian, a professor at Beijing Foreign Studies University's Academy of Regional and Global Governance, noted that this year's Munich conference has seen its agenda dominated by topics such as

"de-risking", supply and production chains and scrutiny of foreign investment, and some Western countries are still advancing their plans to "de-risk" with regard to China.

"As Chinese officials and scholars take part in the discussions, they can help Europe better grasp its role in economic cooperation and better understand where the real risks come from," Cui said.

China remains committed to eco-

nomical globalization and development through multilateral cooperation initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, he added.

In his speech, Wang also said that China remains committed to greater opening-up to the rest of the world and offering more convenience to foreigners coming to the country for business, travel or education.

China will shorten the "negative list" for foreign investment and

provide a more market-oriented, rule-of-law and internationalized business environment for enterprises from all over the world, Wang added.

It would be a "historic mistake" to disengage from China in the name of "de-risking", he said, adding that "there is no possibility of reversing the general trend of economic globalization, and nations should make globalization more inclusive and beneficial for all.

China "sticks to providing more public goods to the world within its capacity", works earnestly to boost unity and collaboration among the developing Global South, and looks to further boost the influence of developing countries in global affairs, he said.

Liu Zuokui, deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of European Studies, said various parties should fully respect one other's security concerns, especially those of developing countries, and work to shape and improve a just and reasonable international order.

## CHINA

## Hainan steps up efforts to help tourists go home

By CHEN BOWEN in Haikou  
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The mass congestion tourists experienced when they left the island province of Hainan at the end of the eight-day Spring Festival holiday attracted widespread attention.

In response to the surge in demand, the provincial government ramped up the number of flights and ferries, and also improved overall services to accommodate the influx of passengers.

As of Saturday, tickets to major domestic destination cities were largely sold out, with only expensive tickets available, such as those for business class.

A traveler surnamed Zhao and her 7-year-old son planned to return to their hometown in Jilin province from Haikou on Friday. However, the price of an air ticket from Haikou to Changchun soared to over 10,000 yuan (\$1,390) on Thursday to Saturday. So they decided to cross the Qiongzhou Strait from Haikou's Xiuying Port via ferry at 9:30 am on Saturday.

Upon their arrival at Hai'an Port in Xuwen county, Guangdong province, they took a bus to Zhanjiang West Railway Station, and then arrived at Guangzhou South Railway Station at 11:25 pm.

Their journey continued on Sunday, and they faced spending 41 hours in trains, including regular and high-speed trains to reach



Passengers complete check-in procedures at Haikou Meilan International Airport in Hainan province on Sunday. YUAN JINGZHI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Changbai Mountain, their destination, on Monday. "Our unconventional travel has extended time and added multiple transfer challenges, but it can save us a lot of money," Zhao said.

In response to the growing number of travelers, airports and airlines have been working hard to boost their transport capacity.

From Sunday to Saturday, the three major airports in Hainan — Haikou Meilan International Airport, Sanya Phoenix International Airport and Qionghai Boao Airport — saw 194 flights added, which led to the addition of 32,965 seats, according to data provided by Hainan Airport Group on Saturday.

The demand for leaving the island via ferry also remains high, with the reservation rate for passenger cars approaching 100 percent, Li Zhongbiao, deputy secretary-general of the Haikou city government, told a news con-

ference on Sunday afternoon.

From Tuesday to Saturday, the island's ferry transport reached a peak of over 20,000 vehicles a day. By noon on Sunday, 17,200 off-island cars had been booked, with around 7,900 having already been transported off the island, and roughly 9,300 scheduled to leave throughout the day.

From Feb 5, Haikou's Xinhai Port introduced a new ferry service at 4:30 pm each day for new energy vehicles departing the island. Each ferry can transport up to 18 new energy vehicles.

But to sidestep the arduous task of purchasing tickets and queuing up for long hours to cross the strait, some new energy vehicle owners have resorted to leaving their cars in Hainan with plans to pick them up or arrange for trailers to transport them after the holiday, the Lan-jinger.com news website reported.

The authorities have advised

passenger car owners to travel during off-peak times and offered additional options for passengers to leave via trains or ferries, with their vehicles to be transported by rail or land and subsequently ferried across the Strait.

Hainan, a hot travel destination, witnessed a 48.8 percent year-on-year surge in Spring Festival tourists, according to the Hainan Provincial Department of Culture, Radio, Film, Television, Publications and Sports.

Nearly 2.3 billion trips were made nationwide during the eight-day Spring Festival holiday, which ended on Saturday, with multiple record highs set, the Ministry of Transport said on Sunday. From Feb 10 to Saturday, 2.29 billion trips were made across the country, including 99.46 million passenger trips on trains.

Luo Wangshu contributed to this story.

## Scientists find way to predict dementia

Research identifies blood biomarkers to detect disorder 15 years in advance

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
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Using a massive databank and artificial intelligence, Shanghai scientists have discovered biomarkers in plasma that can predict dementia 15 years before symptoms begin.

The scientists said that their research results may play a major role in early intervention for healthy adults who are at high risk of developing the disorder.

A paper about the research conducted by teams from Fudan University's Institute of Science and Technology for Brain-inspired Intelligence and the university's Huashan Hospital was published in Nature Aging on Feb 13.

An editorial published in Nature on the same day said the researchers' work was "a step towards [the development of] a tool that scientists have been in search of for decades: blood tests that can detect Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia at a very early, pre-symptomatic stage".

It is often difficult to diagnose brain disorders, doctors said. Lumbar punctures are invasive, and examinations of brain images are expensive. In contrast, blood tests are convenient, non-invasive and cost-effective, said Cheng Wei, a co-author of the paper and a researcher with the institute.

Fudan University scientists said they are hopeful that blood testing to predict the likelihood of dementia can be applied in clinical settings within six months. The early detection of the disorder opens a door to early intervention, offering the potential to slow down or even halt its progression.

According to the World Health Organization, dementia affects over 55 million people worldwide, and that figure is expected to continue to rise. Dementia progresses slowly, from an asymptomatic stage to a fully expressed clinical syndrome, over the course of a decade or more.

"By the time patients begin show-

ing cognitive behavioral problems, the disorder may have already progressed to the middle or late stages, and the best intervention time will have been missed," said Feng Jianfeng, a computational biologist at the Fudan University institute and another co-author of the paper.

The researchers employed the help of the massive United Kingdom Biobank cohort, which enrolled more than 52,600 healthy adults and had a median follow-up period of 14 years. Among them, 1,417 people were diagnosed with all-cause dementia, 691 with Alzheimer's disease and 285 with vascular dementia.

For each participant, 1,463 proteins in plasma associated with cardio-metabolism, inflammation, neurology and oncology were tested, and researchers used survival association analysis and machine learning algorithms to perform modeling analysis.

They discovered significant associations of three proteins — GFAP, NEFL, and GDF15 — with the risk of those three types of dementia. They also found that the protein LTBP2 plays a role in the onset of the disorder.

These biomarkers, as well as conventional risk factors of age, gender, education level and genetics, were used to facilitate the high accuracy of the predictive model, exceeding 90 percent.

"Our study provides a great example of how AI can facilitate a research paradigm that fosters interdisciplinary collaboration," Feng said. "Employing machine learning, we extracted and optimized the combinations using a large-scale dataset and established a protein-based dementia prediction model with high accuracy."

The team will now focus on conducting data collection and cross-validation among populations at risk of dementia in China. It will tailor the dementia risk prediction model to fit the characteristics of the Chinese population by gathering relevant data.

## TWO SESSIONS

**Editor's Note:** As the nation prepares for the two sessions — the annual meetings of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's biggest annual political event — China Daily is publishing a series of stories on how national legislators and political advisers perform their duties. Some of the stories will also look at major issues that are expected to be discussed at the forthcoming sessions.

## Yunnan seeks more support to curb water pollution

By HOU LIQIANG  
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The delegation from Yunnan province to the National People's Congress plans to call on the central government to strengthen its support of the province, a key source region for watercourses in Southwest China and Southeast Asia, to help it gain better control over its water pollution issues.

The suggestion the delegation plans to submit to the country's top legislature highlights Yunnan's special role in ensuring the security of waters in China and beyond, as well as the challenges the province faces with the governance of its water resources.

Yunnan is the source region or the key upstream area for six major domestic and international rivers — the Yangtze, Pearl, Lancang, Nujiang, Honghe and Irrawaddy — it said.

Known as the Mekong River in Southeast Asia, the Lancang is a vital waterway that stretches across China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam.

Originating in Qinghai province, the river flows through Yunnan

into Myanmar. The suggestion said Yunnan has seen significant progress in improving its water environment and has thus made great contributions to the development of downstream regions in China and Southeast Asian countries.

In 2021, the proportion of surface water of fairly good quality in the province reached 89.6 percent, compared to the national average of 84.9 percent, it said.

China has a five-tier quality system for surface water, with Grade I being the best. The quality of surface water is determined to be fairly good if it reaches Grade III.

The province saw its proportion of fairly good-quality water climb further to 90.5 percent in 2022, according to the Yunnan Department of Environment and Ecology.

The suggestion said the quality of all the water that flows out of Yunnan in the six river basins reached Grade II in 2021.

"Due to landforms and inadequate environmental infrastructure, however, the water quality in some areas and river basins in the province remains poor," it said. "With a large proportion of moni-

toring sections still reporting water quality below Grade V, the province is facing huge difficulties in tackling water pollution."

Many water resources in Yunnan are concentrated in gorges that are not accessible to nearby areas, it said.

The problem is especially prominent in central Yunnan. The amount of water resources per capita in the area is only 700 cubic meters.

According to the United Nations, an area is experiencing water stress when annual water supplies drop below 1,700 cu m per person.

The suggestion said two-thirds of Yunnan's population and one-third of its farmland are located in small plains scattered among mountainous areas, which cover only 6 percent of the area under its jurisdiction.

This has resulted in serious water pollution in some small plains, it added. No more than 60 percent of domestic wastewater is collected for disposal in urban areas in Yunnan, and only 38 percent in rural areas.

Limited land resources in the

province have also made building infrastructure for water pollution control challenging. While riparian buffers, which are areas along shorelines where development is restricted or prohibited, and artificial wetlands are widely used in central and eastern China for water pollution treatment, there is essentially no land available in Yunnan to develop them.

"Yunnan urgently needs support from the central government," the suggestion said.

The central government allocates special funding for water pollution control every year. The funds, however, do not cover programs concerning agricultural pollution control and urban domestic sewage treatment in counties with key ecological functions, the suggestion said.

It called on the central government to take conditions in Yunnan into full consideration and extend the coverage of the funding to such programs in the province.

Support is also needed in the province's efforts to cope with severe pollution in watercourses in urban areas during the flood season and in highland lakes, it added.

## FROM THE FRONTLINE

## Winter tourism bookings boom in Changchun

By YAN DONGJIE and LIU MINGTAI in Changchun

While Harbin, capital of Northeast China's Heilongjiang province, has been the country's most popular destination for ice and snow tourism this winter, neighboring Jilin province has also welcomed more tourists and seen revenue from tourism grow.

As the Spring Festival holiday approached, Changchun, Jilin's provincial capital, saw holiday bookings surge.

More than two weeks before the start of the holiday, online travel platform Trip.com Group said hotel bookings were up more than 1,000 percent compared to the same period last year, and ticket bookings were up 727 percent.

According to data from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Jilin received more than 6 million domestic tourists during the New Year holiday period in January, over four times more than during the same period a year earlier, while tourism revenue was more than six times higher at 5.3 billion yuan (\$737 million). Growth rates for both were well above the national average and better than those seen in other northeastern provinces.

On Feb 4, five days before Spring Festival, Zhang Renzhe and his family from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, arrived at the Tian Ding Mountain Tourist Resort on the eastern outskirts of Changchun, where they stayed in a farmhouse with a traditional kang — a heated brick bed — and enjoyed their first

northern-style Spring Festival.

"The most anticipated part of the trip was the Lunar New Year's Eve fireworks show and the pig slaughtering feast," Zhang said. "When I inquired over the phone, the resort said we could have an authentic northeastern pig slaughtering feast in the courtyard, set off firecrackers, build snowmen — my children were very excited when they heard this, so we immediately booked our trip."

Cai Huiyu, a spokeswoman for the resort, said that in order to ensure the long-term development of the tourism industry, Changchun's city government had collaborated with local businesses in recent years to make long-term plans for the development of ice and snow attractions, ski resorts, ecological parks, hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, entertain-

ment venues, supporting infrastructure such as airports and roads, and annual events like aviation shows and theme park activities.

"For the sake of economic development, the people of our hometown are united," she said. "During the New Year holiday, the number of tourists was so large that the service staff couldn't keep up."

"All the office employees of our company voluntarily came to the restaurant in the morning to help out. It was quite impressive to see 'waiters' in suits carrying dishes and washing dishes everywhere. I believe this sincerity will also impress the tourists."

Jilin Provincial Construction Group began building the tourism project, which includes Ice and Snow New World and ski resorts, in

2019, and they have gone on to become must-visit destinations for tourists.

Tourists from southern provinces visiting the northeast tend to choose Changchun as their destination or transfer point, and many deposit their luggage at Ice and Snow New World's reception hall.

From Feb 11 to Thursday, 141,000 visitors were received — an average of more than 28,000 a day.

A total of 428,000 cubic meters of ice were used in the 156-hectare ice and snow theme park, most of which was taken from rivers and lakes such as Tianding River and Jinhui Lake. More than 70,000 cubic meters were stored in an ice cellar the previous winter.

"Usually, in December, the lakes in Changchun are not completely frozen," Cai said.

"In order to open the park earlier to welcome tourists, the craftsmen first carve the ice stored in the ice

cellar from the previous year."

Sculptures at Ice and Snow New World include everything from the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac to miniature buildings and historical figures. Visitors are amazed by the skill of the ice and snow sculptors, many of whom trained as construction workers.

"In the northeast, because of the low temperatures in autumn and winter, construction sites shut down," Cai said. "In the past, construction workers had no work in the winter. Now, after training, they can become ice and snow construction craftsmen, or they can also help out in restaurants, ski resorts and so on, significantly increasing their family's annual income."

Han Junhong contributed to this story.

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## Sweet celebration



Children in festive attire share sugar-coated hawthorns, or bingtang hulu in Chinese, at a traditional new year celebration in Qingdao, Shandong province, on Sunday. WANG HAIBIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## CHINA

## Youth breathe new life into ancient art form

Tongliang's promotion of its proud dragon dance heritage paying off

By TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI  
in Chongqing

Cai Mingcan, a 47-year-old artist in Chongqing, Southwest China, who has been preserving and modernizing Tongliang dragon dance for 30 years, is glad to see it gaining popularity, especially among the young.

"As the heirs of the dragon, all Chinese love the creature, and we shoulder a responsibility to pass on the dragon culture," he said.

Tongliang, a district in Chongqing, claims to be the home of the country's best dragon dance performance, a nationally listed intangible cultural heritage.

One of the best practitioners in the area is the National Tongliang Dragon Dance Troupe, which was honored as such by the Chinese Dragon and Lion Dance Sports Association in 1999.

Cai, the only professional artist among a handful of municipal-level Tongliang dragon dance inheritors, became coach of the troupe in 2012.

In 2021, the national troupe was integrated into the Tongliang Dragon Art Troupe, which was established that year, and Cai became the art troupe's deputy director and coach.

The troupe of more than 50 performers — with an average age of only 21 — consists of the national team and three other teams. Eighteen members are women, and 85 percent of team members are local residents, Cai said.

The teams have performed in more than 30 countries and regions, including the United States, Britain, France, Australia, Türkiye, Japan and South Korea.

The Tongliang dragon dance has been showcased at such major events as China's National Day celebrations, the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. On New Year's Eve in 2017, it wowed audiences when it performed in New York City's Times Square in the US.

Cai said there are about 100 types of dragon dance in Tongliang. The troupe performs different types of dragon shows according to the 24 solar terms, including the bamboo dragon show in spring, the lotus dragon show in summer, the straw dragon show in autumn and the fire dragon show in winter.

Other common types include the folk dragon and competitive dragon shows.

Performances of the latter have won the troupe 78 gold medals in national dragon dance competitions since the 1980s, Cai said.

The Tongliang dragon dance dates back to the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, when people prayed for rain by worshipping the rain-bringing dragon kings, who in Chinese mythology lord over the seas and control the weather.

The ritual gradually evolved into a folk recreational activity during



Artists stage a fire dragon dance show on a square in Chongqing's Tongliang district on Jan 21. PHOTOS BY LIU CHAN / XINHUA

the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, typically during the Lantern Festival — one of the most important new year celebration events in ancient China.

"The dance has continued to thrive and even has profound meanings in the contemporary era," said Cai, adding that in Chinese culture, the mythical creature is associated with power, nobility, fertility, wisdom and auspiciousness.

"It also symbolizes an enterprising spirit, solidarity and bravery."

#### Inspired by a legend

Cai's enthusiasm and unremitting efforts to promote the art were sparked by a dragon-dance legend.

He was first introduced to the art in 1994, when he was among only three students of Tongliang's Pingtan Middle School invited to perform with the Tongliang Dragon Dance Troupe, the precursor to the national team, by Huang Tingyan.

Huang, born in Tongliang's Anju township in 1941, became a dragon dance choreographer in 1965. A renowned Sichuan opera performer, he started blending different art forms such as Sichuan opera, martial arts and other dragon dances, ultimately creating the Tongliang dragon dance in 1988.

Huang became one of the most talented dragon dance artists of his time and was honored as the national inheritor of the Tongliang dragon dance in 2008.

Under Huang's coaching, Cai's team, which consisted of three middle school students and members from a Sichuan opera troupe, won its first national dragon dance competition in May 1995.

With his passion for the art ignited,

The ultimate goal in a dragon dance is to achieve perfect harmony between human and dragon — even by imagining oneself as a dragon.

Cai Mingcan, deputy director and coach of the Tongliang Dragon Art Troupe in Chongqing



Performers rehearse a dragon dance for a gala show at the Xuantian Lake scenic area in Tongliang on Jan 21.

ed, Cai used all his spare time training and honing his performance skills with an aim to be as good as professional dancers.

Cai remembered learning a dance move in which he imitated a dragon jumping on water. He had to hold the heavy dragon in position with his limbs and head as he moved.

Continuous practice of the move led one of his legs to be covered in bruises and caused a bald spot on his head.

Cai's hard work paid off when he was appointed "second hand" of the national troupe.

There are several "hands" in a dragon dance troupe that are tasked

with controlling key parts of the dragon and guiding its movements. Cai said the second hand — which stands behind the dancer in the lead position, known as the first hand — plays a crucial role in ensuring the dragon's head and body move in unison.

"The ultimate goal in a dragon dance is to achieve perfect harmony between human and dragon — even by imagining oneself as a dragon."

To imbue the art form with a modern vibe, Cai, with his superb artistry and profound insights in the form, has reinvigorated both Tongliang dragon dance and the art of dragon-making.

For example, he has infused street dance movements in the *Dance of the Dragon*, a dynamic competitive dragon dance show. Moreover, he has replaced the dragon's scales, formerly made of satin, yarn or mesh, with sequins.

Cai is now the deputy director of the Chinese Dragon and Lion Dance Sports Association and has served as a judge and coach at multiple international competitions.

#### Carrying the torch

These days, the ancient art continues to attract young performers

"I feel privileged to be able to pass on the intangible cultural heritage," said 25-year-old Li Jing, who was born and raised in Tongliang.

Like Cai, Li developed a keen interest in the art at a young age and was chosen to join the national troupe when she was in middle school.

She decided to join the troupe in 2020 after graduating from college and was the only woman among the 12 dancers.

Li is the troupe's "dragon ball hand", the person who holds a ball on a stick that the dragons follow as they move.

She contributes both strength and grace to her troupe's performances, and said she recognizes and appreciates the history behind the dragon dancing.

"The glory of the dragon dance is inseparable from our deeply rooted dragon culture and our dedicated successors," Li said.

Tongliang continues to pay homage to its heritage as the birthplace of the Chinese dragon dance.

The district has many dragon-themed streets and sites, including White Dragon and Golden Dragon avenues, Dragon Fly Road and White Dragon Square.

She said dragon dance artists are highly respected by residents. Taxi drivers even offer troupe members free rides.

Amateur teams are also active. Each year, dragon dance competitions are held at local primary and middle schools, and multiple dance troupes perform during festivals and holidays.

Several organizations dedicated to researching and preserving the dance form have also been established.

The local government has also attached great importance to the cultural heritage. Besides providing funding, special promotional efforts have been made, and a video of the director of the local cultural and tourism commission performing a dragon dance recently went viral online.

Cai's art troupe also uses Douyin, an online video-sharing platform, to promote the dance. He said as the dance has grown in popularity, the ribbon dragon dance — a new type focusing on fitness — has drawn massive attention on the platform and beyond.

Last year, the troupe, with support from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, went on a tour in Bulgaria and performed ribbon dances.

"More than 20 ribbon dragons were snapped up by local residents after the performance," he said.

On Jan 29, 36 artists from the troupe staged a fire dragon dance show in Harbin, capital of Northeast China's Heilongjiang province. The performers use molten iron to create sparks that are supplemented by fire blasted from the dragon's mouth, creating a spectacular three-dimensional effect.

The iron is heated to 1,600 C in eight ovens arranged in a circle. Eighteen bare-chested men spray the liquid iron into the air, creating scatterings of flowerlike flames. Fireworks fly from the bodies of two golden dragons held by 20 other shirtless men as the creatures fly up and down and back and forth through seas of fire.

"Many youngsters have shown interest in learning the dragon dance," said Cai, who has taught thousands of students at home and abroad.

"I hope there will be more international cultural exchanges for the Tongliang dragon dance in the future," he said.

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## Korean culture draws visitors to village in Jilin



From left: Villagers stage a traditional Korean dance in Bailong village in Tumen, Jilin province. CHEN JUNQING / XINHUA Villagers preform a traditional Korean dance for visitors during a folk festival in Bailong on Jan 5. ZHANG BIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

village in the past, but now, their visits allow us to live a much better life," he said.

Jin, who used to make a living by working in South Korea, decided to return to Bailong and settle down in 2005 after seeing how the infra-

structure and streetscape had undergone tremendous transformations in his hometown. He also began to reconsider the value of the ancient Korean-style houses.

"The history of our village is a microcosm of the history of the

Korean ethnic people in China," he said.

Tourists now flood the village every day to take photos, marvel at the houses, savor Korean cuisine and experience the customs of the Korean ethnic group.

Last year, the village welcomed over 100,000 tourists, according to Jin. Zhang Wenli, from Sichuan province, recently visited the village with three friends.

"It's an unforgettable trip," Zhang said. "We will definitely recommend

more of our friends to visit."

Jin said the village has more plans in store for tourists.

"This year, we plan to open more culinary tours, so people can learn how to make foods such as spicy cabbage and rice cakes," he said.

The village has also set up a team to give Korean-style performances to visitors. "I can make an additional 3,000 to 4,000 yuan (\$422 to \$563) a month by performing," said Wu Zhenghua, a local resident.

Other villagers are taking advantage of the deluge of visitors by starting their own businesses.

Zhang Xiangshun, 45, opened a beauty salon in Bailong last year, mainly doing makeup for visitors on photo-shooting tours.

After graduating from university, Li Xuanzhu, 24, moved to the village to run a homestay.

"At first, my relatives and friends said that I made a 'bold' decision, but I was quite optimistic. Now, after seeing the influx of visitors, they've realized that my decision was a good one," Li said, adding that she is planning to invest more money into the ancient village.

XINHUA

## WORLD

## Xi congratulates African Union summit

Education key for continent's growth, sustainable development, leaders say

By EDITH MUTETHYA

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Chinese President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory message on Saturday to the 37th African Union summit held in Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa.

The world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century, Xi said, and the Global South represented by China and Africa is booming, which has a profound effect on the course of world history.

The AU brings African countries together to seek strength through unity and promote integration and the building of free trade areas, he said.

The bloc's accession to the Group of 20 has further enhanced Africa's representation and lifted its voice in global governance, he said, and China extends heartfelt congratulations on that.

Over the past year China-Africa relations have grown deeper, he said. As the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue was held in August, the two sides decided to support each other in exploring their modernization paths and jointly create a favorable environment for realizing their development visions, he said.

The new session of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation will be held this year, he said.

He is ready to work with leaders of African countries, with a focus on the benefits of people from both sides, to draw up a new blueprint for China-Africa collaboration and promote the joint building of a high-level China-Africa communi-

ty with a shared future, he said.

At the opening of the two-day meeting on Saturday, Ethiopia's Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said new technologies and innovative learning models could help Africa leapfrog into the future, noting that technology has taken learning beyond the classroom.

"Artificial intelligence is delivering personalized learning, tailored to children's needs by breaking down cultural and language barriers.

"Such developments will allow our youth to unleash their entrepreneurial spirit, problem-solving skills and determination to overcome challenges on Africa's development path."

Investment and financial constraints are the major challenges affecting education in Africa, Ahmed said, and the continent's financial needs are growing because of climate change and the cost of living crisis.

He called on major financial agencies to consider the realities of today's world, particularly regarding middle- and low-income countries.

Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani, president of Mauritania and president of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the AU, said the success of Africa's sustainable development hinges on substantial investment in human resources, emphasizing a comprehensive, high-quality education that embraces science and technology.

Education serves as the cornerstone for sustainable development, acting as a crucial catalyst for security, stability and the cultivation of skills that pave a pivotal role in breaking the cycle of unemployment,



The outgoing chairman of the African Union and President of the Comoros Azali Assoumani (center left) congratulates the newly elected chairman of the AU and President of Mauritania Mohamed Ould Cheikh Ghazouani at the 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the Heads of State and Government of the African Union in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on Saturday. AMANUEL SILESHI / AFP

poverty and fragility, Ghazouani said.

The loss of Africa's youth, who constitute about 62 percent of the total population, is synonymous with the loss of the continent, he said, and an educated youth is a lost opportunity.

"Witnessing millions of young Africans lacking basic skills, unemployed in their own countries or risking their lives on perilous migration journeys underscores the urgent need for a radical transformation of our educational systems."

Africa's education system grapples with limited access, high dropout rates and inadequate quality education and training, he said.

More than 17 percent of children in Africa are out of primary school, he said, and 75 percent of young people at the secondary level lack the essential skills.

He urged governments, civil societies and stakeholders in various fields to redouble their efforts in raising awareness and mobilizing human, technical and financial resources.

"Such initiatives will unlock and empower the creative energies of African women, fostering their effective leadership across diversity development pathways."

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula

da Silva, who is on a state visit to Ethiopia, said his country is willing to develop educational programs in Africa and promote intense exchange of teachers and researchers.

On Sunday the AU Commission said that to realize a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development, the continent needs to make significant investment in education with the aim of developing human and social capital through an education and skills revolution emphasizing innovation, science and technology.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

## Japan sees success in launch of H3 rocket

TOKYO — Japan successfully launched its new H3 flagship rocket on Saturday, putting its space program back on track after multiple setbacks, including the failure of the rocket's inaugural flight last year.

The launch also marks a second straight win for the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA, after its lunar lander, SLIM, achieved a "pinpoint" touchdown last month and made Japan the fifth country to put a spacecraft on the moon.

The next-generation H3 rocket has been mooted as a possible competitor to SpaceX's Falcon 9, and could one day be used to deliver cargo to bases on the moon.

The H3 lifted off at 9:22 am. After it successfully released a small satellite, jubilant scientists at the Tanegashima Space Center in southern Japan clapped, yelled and hugged each other.

The rocket also released a microsatellite and a dummy satellite during its flight of nearly two hours.

"The newborn H3 has just made its first cry," said JAXA project manager Masashi Okada, who has led the decade-long development of the new rocket. "I now feel a heavy load taken off my shoulders. But now is the real start for H3, and we will work to steadily improve it."

The H3 is due to replace the two-decade-old H-2A, which is retiring after two more launches. Another failed flight would have seen Japan face the prospect of losing independent access to space.

The first launch 11 months ago ended up with ground control destroying the rocket 14 minutes after liftoff when the second-stage engine failed to ignite. JAXA listed three possible electrical faults in a review published in October but could not identify the direct cause.

Five months earlier, JAXA's small rocket Epsilon had also failed to launch.

"So happy to see this incredible accomplishment in the space sector that follows on from the success of the SLIM moon landing," Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

## Reducing cost

The 63-meter H3 is designed to carry a 6.5-metric-ton payload. Over the long term the agency wants to reduce per-launch cost to as low as \$33 million — half of what an H-2A launch costs — by adopting simpler structures and automotive-grade electronics.

JAXA and primary contractor Mitsubishi Heavy Industries hope those features will help them win launch orders from global clients.

"It's taken some time for the program to get to this point, but with this launch they will be fielding inquiries from around the world," said Ko Ogasawara, a professor at the Tokyo University of Science.

The Japanese government plans to launch about 20 satellites and probes with H3 rockets by 2030 for domestic use. The H3 is scheduled to deliver a lunar explorer for the joint Japan-India LUPEX project next year as well as cargo spacecraft for the US-led Artemis moon exploration program in the future.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



A curator looks at a model of Notre Dame de Paris during a preview for the Notre Dame de Paris. The Augmented Exhibition at Westminster Abbey in London on Feb 6. VICTORIA JONES VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

## Mighty churches meet in rendezvous of the ages

By JULIAN SHEA in London

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Visitors to Westminster Abbey in London can enjoy a taste of two cities after a piece of Paris arrived there in the form of Notre Dame de Paris, The Augmented Exhibition, which runs until June 1.

The attraction, the latest stop on a tour taking the story of the Paris landmark worldwide, is being staged in the chapter house of the abbey, which was the focus of global attention for the funeral of Queen Elizabeth II and the coronation of King Charles III.

Notre Dame cathedral is due to reopen in December, when restoration work following a fire that engulfed the 861-year-old emblem of the French capital in 2019 is set to be completed.

The damage to such a global cultural jewel produced a huge outpouring of support, and while repairs have continued, an exhibition telling its tale has carried the heart of Paris to other cities.

"The night of the fire we felt how the entire world was in pain with the French people, which was surprising," said Philippe Jost, president of Rebuilding Notre Dame de Paris, the institution responsible for conserving it and restoring it.

"We knew the cathedral was known all over the world; we didn't imagine she was so loved."

Edouard Lussan, co-founder of Histovary, the company whose technology allows visitors to travel through the history of Notre Dame, said the visit is made possible

thanks to a tablet called HistoPad that works in 12 languages, including Chinese, and enables people to be transported to different points in the cathedral's life, in a 360-degree total experience.

"It's a time-traveling machine," he said. "You scan the piece of furniture to travel back to a previous time and get a surround view of what it would have been like to stand on that spot centuries ago. It uses technology to explain complex construction techniques to a mass market, simply, for all ages."

"L'Oreal (the cosmetics company) put a lot of money into the reconstruction and wanted a way to explain what was going on, so we have taken this experience to the United States twice, Shanghai, Germany, Canada, Mexico, and we'll probably go to Beijing this year, too."

## Close relationship

David Hoyle, dean of Westminster Abbey, said there was a close relationship between "two great churches in two great cities," and that he was delighted to host the exhibit.

"We've always been fascinated by one another — bits of our building look like theirs, and for years we've watched and learned from one another."

During the pandemic the abbey's visitor numbers fell from more than 1 million a year to just 50,000, but with the funeral of the queen having showcased it to a global audience of up to 4 billion people, Hoyle said he was looking forward to seeing visitors return in larger numbers, to enjoy both Westminster Abbey and Notre Dame.

## Ex-Thai PM Thaksin released on parole

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok

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Thailand's former prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra was released on parole from police hospital early on Sunday to serve his remaining six months of a jail term at home.

On his return to the country in August the Supreme Court sentenced him to eight years' imprisonment for abuse of power and conflict of interest while serving as prime minister. The sentence was later reduced to one year by a royal pardon.

Thaksin was seen wearing a neck support, a sling on his right arm and a surgical mask inside one of the cars in a convoy that left the Police General Hospital, where he received treatment and served six months of his prison sentence. He was accompanied by his two daughters, and they arrived at his residence in western Bangkok less than an hour later, The Associated Press reported.

Thaksin's lawyer confirmed the jailed billionaire's release, saying he had completed parole proceedings and had been freed.

The 74-year-old former Manchester City owner is among 930 inmates approved for parole this month, the Justice Ministry said. He is eligible for parole because he is over 70 years old and suffers from a serious illness.

After 15 years of self-imposed exile, Thaksin returned to Thailand on Aug 22. For corruption stemming from his tenure as prime minister between 2001 and 2006 he was sentenced in absentia to eight years in prison.

On the first night of his stay at Bangkok Remand Prison, corrections doctors determined that he had to be transferred to police hospital because of serious illnesses.

In a previous interview with local

media, Justice Minister Taweewee Sod-song reiterated strict adherence to the law in dealing with the case.

"The government works in accordance with the constitution and the rule of law principle."

According to criteria for special parole by the Department of Correction, parole will be granted for an individual who is over 70 years of age or is suffering from a serious medical condition and has completed one-third of his or her prison term.

The exact details of the release were unclear, but Thaksin may be subject to monitoring, possibly with an ankle tag, and restrictions on his right to travel, Agence France-Presse reported.

## Party influence

Thaksin, regarded as the patriarch of the ruling Pheu Thai party, is still widely believed to retain strong influence, with his daughter Paetongtarn Shinawatra being the party's current leader. She was also among the three prime ministerial

candidates when Pheu Thai contested the general election last year.

The Prime Minister, Srettha Thavisin, suggested on Sunday that Thaksin would not involve himself in politics but said that if and when he is ready to give advice "everyone in the government is ready to listen."

Thaksin's family welcomed him at a family mansion in Bangkok, the Thai news group The Nation reported. Thaksin's grandchildren were writing homecoming cards for him, Paetongtarn said.

No other family members would stay at the mansion with Thaksin, in accordance with Corrections Department regulations.

Days before Thaksin was released the opposition leader Chaithawat Tulathon said that Srettha and the Pheu Thai party should act carefully to prevent allegations of Thaksin's intervention in their government.

Agencies and Xinhua contributed to this story.



Former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra (right) sits in a vehicle with his daughter Paetongtarn near his residence in Bangkok after being released on parole on Sunday. WASON WANICHAKORN / AP

## 10 killed, 15 injured in Indian fireworks factory fire

NEW DELHI — Ten people were killed and 15 were injured in an explosion at a fireworks factory in southern India on Saturday, police said.

The explosion was caused by a fire inside the factory in Virudhunagar district, about 569 kilometers southwest of Chennai, capital of Tamil Nadu state, police officer Feroze Khan Abdullah said, but the cause of the fire was not immediately known.

"Ten workers died in the blast that followed a fire incident in the factory, and five of the 15 injured have been hospitalized."

The victims were working in the factory when the blast occurred in the chemical mixing room.

The fire was soon brought under control, Abdullah said.

Factory accidents are common across the country, with owners often ignoring basic safety requirements and operating without permits.

Eleven laborers were killed in India's capital New Delhi on Friday when fire ripped through a paint factory, following a blast that shook the neighborhood.

Another eight people were killed and 80 injured in central Madhya

Pradesh state this month when a blast at a fireworks factory sparked a major fire.

More than 40 people died in a blaze in a factory making school bags and shoes in Delhi in 2019.

One of India's worst fires was at a school in the northern state of Haryana in 1985, when 442 people were killed, 258 of them children.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## WORLD

## Face paint helps Gazans to face life

GAZA — Menna Hamouda, 20, a Palestinian artist in the Gaza Strip, busies herself every day painting the faces of displaced children in the central Gaza city of Deir al-Balah amid the conflict between Israel and Hamas.

About a month ago Hamouda decided to use face painting to help Gaza children overcome their fear in the conflict, after she learned that efforts to achieve a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas failed.

"It's hard for innocent children to go through such a tragic event as this war," she said. "They are constantly under pressure because of the killings and other incidents they are witnessing."

Hamouda, who was displaced from the city of Beit Lahia about four months ago to a school-turned-shelter in Deir al-Balah, said she paints about 50 children a day, free of charge. Every day she walks from one shelter to another to paint for children, using tools she had brought with her from her home in northern Gaza.

Because of Israeli attacks and the siege of the enclave, Palestinians cannot access daily necessities and recreational facilities. Hamouda said she had painted a lot of moving things to "let children believe that life will go on".

Among the most popular images she paints on children's faces are birds, olive branches, small houses and the Palestinian flag.

## Conveying message

"I want to send my message to the world that our people are looking forward to living a normal life as soon as possible. I hope all people around the world will take action and step up pressure on Israel to end its war against us in Gaza."

Israel launched a large-scale offensive against Hamas in the Gaza Strip to retaliate against the movement's surprise attack on southern Israel on Oct 7, during which about 1,200 people in Israel were killed and about 250 were taken hostage.

The Palestinian death toll from Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip has continued to rise, surpassing 28,900.

"We have never witnessed a conflict as bloody as the one in Gaza," Hamouda said. "Everyone is under Israeli attacks, and nobody can save himself from death."

Mohammed Abu Daher, a Palestinian child who was displaced after the conflict, was overjoyed when Hamouda drew an olive tree and the Palestinian flag on his face. He has not had his face painted since the conflict broke out in Gaza more than four months ago.

"I like the trees in my house and the Palestinian flag that was raised over our house in the Jabalia refugee camp," he said.

Looking at a mirror to see his face paintings, he said: "I hope the war will end soon so that we can go back to our homes and resume our normal life. I miss my friends, my puppies, my school and my relatives."

XINHUA



Palestinian artist Menna Hamouda draws with charcoal on the walls of a school in the central Gaza city of Deir al-Balah on Wednesday. MOHAMMED TALATENE / ASSOCIATED PRESS

## Ukraine and Mideast conflicts in Munich conference spotlight

By CHEN WEIHUA in Munich  
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The 60th annual Munich Security Conference ended on Sunday with participants trying to find ways to resolve the two main conflicts between Russia and Ukraine and between Israel and Palestine and to tackle the new problems facing global order and governance.

More than 900 participants, including some 50 heads of state and government and over 100 ministers, attended this year's meeting titled "Lose-Lose?" from Friday to Sunday.

This year's conference report warned that given the growing geopolitical tensions and economic uncertainty, many governments are no longer focusing on the advantages of global cooperation but are increasingly concerned that they benefit less from international cooperation than others do.

It said such a focus could give rise to lose-lose dynamics, a downward spiral that endangers cooperation and undermines the existing global order.

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said: "Today's global order is not working for everyone. ... Our world is facing existential challenges, but the global community is more fragmented and divided than at any time during the past 75 years."

He delivered a speech titled "Growing the Pie: A Global Order that Works for Everyone".

He voiced deep concern over the Ukraine and Gaza conflicts as well as the climate crisis and the risks of uncontrolled artificial intelligence.

"Multipolarity has created important opportunities for balance and justice, and for new leadership on the global stage. But the transition to multipolarity without strong global institutions can create chaos," he said.

Nana Akufo-Addo, president of Ghana, said growing the pie in itself is insufficient to deal with

“Our world is facing existential challenges, but the global community is more fragmented and divided than at any time during the past 75 years.”

United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres

the problems the world has, and an equitable distribution of the pie is critical.

"This is the heart of the discussion that all of us should have," he said.

Barbados Prime Minister Mia Mottley echoed his views. She said the Caribbean island nation and others have been constrained by the 60 percent debt to GDP rules imposed by international financial institutions while most European states have reached a rate of 90 percent.

"What this means is that countries are kept on a trajectory that does not allow us to make the investment necessary to boost education, to boost healthcare," she said.

Demand for cease-fire

While the participants were meeting inside the Hotel Bayerischer Hof, thousands of people demonstrated on Saturday afternoon in Munich city center in a peace rally against NATO. They called for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza.

One man wearing a skeleton face mask in front of the long procession held the slogan "Against the NATO war conference", a message to the meeting that is still largely dominated by the United States and its NATO allies in Europe.

Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh argued on Sunday that the history of Palestine did not start on Oct 7 and that Palestinians' suffering started in 1948. He said he opposes the killing of civilians. "Now it's the time we find a solution ... We need a recognition of the state of Palestine," he told the conference.

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said on Saturday in a panel discussion that the only pathway toward security and stability in the Middle East, including Israel, was through the establishment of a Palestinian state.

"We are focused on a cease-fire and on an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and we are focused on humanitarian access for the people of Gaza. What Israel is doing in Gaza will not make it safer, but rather will push a new generation toward extremism," he said.

His views were echoed by Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. Shoukry said the lack of will from the international community is what has been obstructing the two-state solution for decades.

"The issue of displacement, which is a violation of international humanitarian law, whether internal or external, cannot be tolerated," he said.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog on Saturday accused Hamas of causing the "dire situation". He told the conference that the return of hostages held by Hamas is the most important issue on the agenda.

Russia and Iran officials were not invited this year by the conference despite its famous "Munich Rule" — Engage and interact with each other: Don't lecture or ignore one another. Conference Chairman Christoph Heusgen said the two nations did not seem open to meaningful dialogue.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky attended the meeting on Saturday. He asked the US and other countries for more military aid and not to abandon Ukraine.

## US teachers, students celebrate China ties

A high school in Washington state is thrilled by Xi's New Year card

By LINDA DENG in Tacoma  
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Teachers and students of a high school in Tacoma, Washington, were thrilled and honored upon receiving a Chinese New Year card from President Xi Jinping and his wife Peng Liyuan.

"Getting the response from President Xi is such an awesome feeling because it shows that the relationship between the American people and the Chinese people means a lot to him. I think that's really cool and amazing," said Isalah Long, an 11th grader of Lincoln High School in Tacoma on Monday.

On Sunday, Xi and Peng replied to a Chinese New Year greeting card from teachers and students of Lincoln High School, extending their best wishes for the Year of the Dragon.

In the greeting card sent to the teachers and students, Xi and Peng invited them to visit China more often, including participating in exchange and study programs, so as to contribute to the friendship between the two peoples, especially among the young people.

"I was very surprised and excited to receive the card from President Xi and Madam Peng. It's one thing to talk about having a relationship with somebody who is so important and has such a profound impact on the world, but then to realize that we very truly have a personal relationship with them is incredibly special," said Lynn Eisenhauer, the arts facilitator of Tacoma public schools.

Eisenhauer taught the Lincoln High School choir how to sing the Chinese classic song In the Field of Hope and has accompanied Lincoln High School students on trips to China thrice since 2016.

On Jan 30, teachers and students from the school sent a New Year greeting card to Xi and Peng, and the Chinese people, extending their best wishes for happiness and health in the new year. More than 100 teachers and students signed the card.

"I was shocked. I just didn't think President Xi would go out of his way to respond to a bunch of high schoolers. But it was really nice to



Arts facilitator of Tacoma public schools Lynn Eisenhauer (left), 11th-grade student of Lincoln High School Isalah Long (center) and 12th grader Montserrat Romero-Rocha pose on Monday to say happy Chinese New Year to Chinese people. LINDA DENG / CHINA DAILY

know that he did because it shows that he really cares about continuing this relationship with us, and I was just honored," said Montserrat Romero-Rocha, a 12th-grade student at the school.

As one of the 10 Lincoln High School students who will leave for China on a 10-day trip on March 15, Romero-Rocha is excited about her plans in China.

"I'm going to bring my camera and make sure to take lots of pictures because I want to really remember the scenery, the people, and all the experiences. I also want to buy the beautiful traditional Chinese dress, hanfu," Romero-Rocha told China Daily.

Karl Hoseth, the principal of Lincoln High School who will also accompany the students to China in March, said he was thrilled to receive Xi's greetings and wants to continue this friendly relationship between the school and China.

"President Xi's extending an invitation to Lincoln (High School), to be one of the first to participate in the goal of 50,000 United States students visiting China, is exciting. It has been 33 years since my last trip to China, and I am really looking forward to seeing what China looks like in 2024. We want to be great ambassadors for the US and for our school, to learn about a country that has such incredible history and tradition," Hoseth said.

Hoseth visited Beijing in 1991 as a football player taking part in an exhibition game in China, the first of its kind then. In September 2015, Xi visited Lincoln High School

during his first state visit to the US as Chinese president and invited young Americans to visit China.

From warm-hearted meetings to ongoing correspondence, the cherished moments of Xi's engagements with students and school staff over the years have created fond memories, cultivating the seeds of friendship.

"During the past five years, whenever teachers and students sent letters or presented gifts symbolizing the friendship between the two countries to President Xi and the Chinese people, they received a reply from the president. This time, the greeting card from Xi once again reflects the continued success of the friendly relationship between Lincoln High School and China, and Xi's trust in youth to promote China-US ties. As an association dedicated to encouraging exchanges between young people and students from both countries, we feel supported and encouraged," said David Chong, president of the US-China Youth and Student Exchange Association in Washington state.

During a meeting in November, Xi and US President Joe Biden laid out a future-oriented "San Francisco vision" with a special focus on jointly promoting cultural and people-to-people exchanges. In his speech at a welcome dinner by friendly organizations in the US, Xi said that China is ready to invite 50,000 young Americans to China on exchange and study programs over the next five years to increase exchanges between the two peoples, especially between the youths.

## Cultural events bring smiles

By ZHENG WANYIN in London  
and MINGMEILI in New York

On Feb 10, the first day of the Year of the Dragon, resounding drums, gongs and shouts echoed throughout London's Burlington Arcade as dancers performed the traditional Puning Yingge folk dance to celebrate Chinese New Year.

It was the first time that the Yingge folk dance, a national intangible cultural heritage in China, had been performed in Europe.

Sixteen dancers, from Chaoshan in Guangdong province where the dance originated, traveled to London to spread wishes of good fortune.

"We don't get to see things like that here," said a spectator from Cyprus who gave her name as Lucy and was left in awe by the ancient dance, which dates to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Spring Festival celebrations are in full swing worldwide this year. Besides events hosted by local institutions, an array of delegations has flown from China to present authentic Chinese cultural feasts to foreign audiences and showcase the variety of China's timeless traditions.

In London's Trafalgar Square, a Chinese New Year event on Feb 11 reached its climax when the North China-style lion dance, performed by acrobats from Sichuan, jumped up and down on a tiered platform.

Although the lion dance is a set piece at the annual Trafalgar Square Chinese New Year carnival, the more playful and gymnastic North China-style is not seen often here, according to event organizer London Chinatown Chinese Association.

Another spectacle — Tongliang

dragon dance — also unfolded at the end of the Trafalgar Square gala. An 18-meter golden dragon from Tongliang, a district of Chongqing municipality, moved in a sinuous, undulating manner for the first time in the UK.

"It's just a sea of culture. It's really exciting to see," said Isabella, a British teacher. "So, I am wearing as much as red as possible to bring myself as much luck as possible."

The Chinese delegations expressed pride in having the opportunities to promote Chinese culture overseas and contribute to deepening communications between East and West.

"Being able to perform in London is a testament to not just the charm of Chinese traditional culture, but also the enduring power of cultural exchanges," said Wu Chen, chief of the intangible cultural heritage section of the Guangdong Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism, who led the Yingge dance team.

Outside the UK, the Cultures of China, Festival of Spring art troupe, comprising renowned Chinese artists, has been touring Europe.

In Spain's capital Madrid, the Choir of the Shenzhen Dance and Opera Theater immersed audiences in Chinese folk songs, such as *Jasmine Flower* and *Hymn of Eight Horses*, on Feb 3 at the National Music Auditorium, Xinhua News Agency reported.

"I love music, so I love listening to sounds from other cultures, which are very different from ours. They are very melodious sounds," attendee Marta Gonzalez told Xinhua.

In New York, overseas Chinese and local Americans participated in Chinese New Year celebrations in their own ways, with traditional Chinese

festive customs and sharing the joy of family reunions.

The US-China Music Institute of the Bard College Conservatory of Music, in collaboration with the Central Conservatory of Music, China, presented the fifth annual Chinese New Year Concert, "The Sound of Spring" with The Orchestra Now, offering authentic Chinese contemporary symphonic music with traditional instruments.

"The Spring festival is a platform to present Chinese music," conductor Cai Jindong told China Daily.

Cai said that he can see an increasing number of people interested in Chinese music and Chinese culture, not limited to "ancient" traditional Chinese music pieces like Spring Festival Overture, but also listening to Chinese contemporary music, feeling what Chinese music is like today and understanding the culture better.

Ji Tianyuan introduced the art of Chinese puppetry to US audiences at events celebrating Chinese New Year. The traditional performances, exclusive to occasions such as the Spring Festival and temple fairs, have found their way to the streets and museums of New York.

"I noticed a crowd of spectators, and they really appreciated the craftsmanship of the puppets, their costumes and their movements. During my performances, I also wore traditional clothes, like qipao or horse-face skirt," she said. "Children particularly adore characters such as Monkey King or Ji Gong. They find them quite amusing," she added.

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## BUSINESS

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## Winter sports in China eye white-hot growth

Skiing, snowboarding boom, sparking expansion of various related business segments



By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
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An imaginative integration of fields like sports, health, business, tourism and culture is stoking the rapid growth of winter sports in China, building on the initial momentum imparted by the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics. This is leading to expansion of facilities like ski resorts, snow slopes, ice rinks, snowboarding parks and indoor venues, with supporting attractions like cable cars at such places further boosting not only the sector's pull, but revenues.

According to the General Administration of Sport of China, the total number of visitors to 19 national ski resorts in November and December alone reached 9.43 million, up a staggering 316 percent year-on-year, with revenue from related sports and other activities reaching 6.46 billion yuan (\$898 million), up 543 percent year-on-year.

Hu Wei, CEO of Nanshan Ski Resort, an established skiing venue in Beijing, said: "This snow season has seen a 5 to 10 percent increase in both visitors and revenue compared to the previous year. To accommodate the growing influx of visitors, we've expanded our fleet with eight new snow machines."

Since the 2022 Winter Olympics, there has been a noticeable surge in new participants joining winter sports, he said. "This was fueled by the enduring excitement over snow, a precious resource in a country where many people reside in the southern part that does not receive much snowfall."

To ride the rising popularity of

snow sports and grow its business, Nanshan Ski Resort has partnered with international coaches from Canada and Japan to promote freestyle snowboarding through training programs and competitions.

Hu said: "Beijing's climate is ideal for freestyle snowboarding. It rarely experiences heavy snowfall that would obscure the slopes, making it ideal for training and competitions."

Emily Li, 32, a Shanghai-based corporate strategist, would probably agree. Li said she spends nearly 60,000 yuan or more every year to experience the thrills and excitement of snow and ice sports, especially snowboarding, her new passion. Some 20,000 yuan go toward domestic ski trips, including those to resorts in and around Beijing, while the rest is her budget for international excursions. But there is more in snow sports than just thrills, she said.

Li discovered her passion for skiing a decade ago, alongside diving, surfing and tennis. She views skiing not just as recreation, but as a personal challenge. "For me, skiing is more than just a winter pastime; it's a test of my limits and a confrontation with my fears."

Despite her apprehension about falls and risks of speed, skiing provides a unique blend of exhilaration and self-discovery, she said.

Li hits the slopes three times a year, favoring destinations like Beidahu and Songhuahu resorts in Jilin province, as well as ski resorts in Japan that are known for their pristine slopes and modern amenities.

Investing time and effort in skiing yields discernible rewards, both



**Top:** Skiers have a whale of a time at the Silk Road Ski Resort in Urumchi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, on Dec 23.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

**Middle:** Skiers in skiwear carry their gear at a ski resort in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on Dec 19.

DING GENHOU / FOR CHINA DAILY

**Above:** Employees work on a snowmaking machine at a company in Zhangjiakou, Hebei province, on Nov 6, 2021.

CHEN XIAODONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

physically and socially, Li said. Skiing, she said, offers quick feedback and visible progress, while friendly competition and post-skiing camaraderie enhance the social aspect of the sport, akin to the bonding experienced during road trips and hiking adventures.

"The sense of camaraderie that comes with sharing meals and celebrations after a day on the slopes is truly fulfilling," Li remarked.

While ski boots are indispensable for Li, other elements of the gear are accessed through friends or online platforms that sell secondhand goods. Affordability is a priority for her, but so are quality and performance on which she would not compromise.

Li is among a rising number of skiers in China who spend big on ice and snow sports, and are even adopting new strategies to extract maximum mileage out of their new pastime. To beat growing crowds at venues of winter sports, some are choosing weekdays to visit, which also helps reduce costs and avoid peak traffic situations.

Wu Bin, founder and CEO of Beijing Snowpal Enterprise Management Co Ltd and author of the *China Ski Industry White Book*, said ski resort construction and expansion are presently experiencing robust momentum in China.

According to the 2022-23 edition of the book, 13 resorts — eight indoor venues and five outdoor facilities — were newly built and made operational during the previous fiscal year.

That took the total number of operational ski resorts in China to 697, including 166 that feature cable

cars. During the period, domestic ski resorts recorded 19.83 million skier visits, which, while impressive, was actually down 8 percent from 2021-22, suggesting immense room for growth in the future.

The number of individuals engaging in skiing activities also experienced a 7 percent decline, with the per capita skiing frequency dropping from 1.79 to 1.77.

Hebei province near Beijing emerged as the leading province for skiers, while indoor ski resorts gained prominence as key players in the market, according to the *China Ski Industry White Book*.

China's dominance in the indoor ski industry is evident, with half of the world's top 10 indoor ski resorts located in the country, ranked by snow area, said Wu.

Additionally, the top three indoor ski resorts, ranked by snow area, are all in China. Indoor ski resorts accounted for 7.17 percent of all operational ski resorts, contributing significantly to the total skier visits.

According to Chengdu Sunac Snow Park, one of the leading indoor ski resorts in China, the domestic policy to boost tourism has triggered the surge in both travelers and revenue of the indoor venue of winter sports in Sichuan province in Southwest China, where snow is not frequent. Chengdu is now home to 14 ice rinks and six ski resorts.

"The number and scale of mostly small and medium-sized ski resorts in China are on the rise, but quality and matching facilities are still a work in progress," said Hu of Nanshan Ski Resort.

## Cold weather brings about biz of fun, socializing

## REPORTER'S LOG

By Wang Zhuoqiong

It's not even a couple of years since Beijing hosted the 2022 Olympic Winter Games, but I can vouch that their long-term positive effects are beginning to benefit fitness-minded individuals, their social life and certain brands. This winter has certainly deepened my understanding of how sport, business, economy and society are all intertwined.

Personally, I'm not a big fan of cold, dull weather. But the rising popularity of winter sports, a legacy

of the 2022 Winter Olympics, is making me realize cold weather could also be thrilling.

I'm yet to warm to the idea of skiing on treacherous slopes, but since I find myself surrounded by friends whose enthusiasm for winter sports is growing by the day, I feel it could only be a matter of time before I change my mind.

Still, a skiing vacation sounds like an expensive proposition. Compared to other sports, specialized gear like helmets, goggles and outfits does not come cheap even when you rent it. Hiring a personal trainer for private lessons can cost a little fortune and help me no more than barely be able to stand on the snowy surface.

So, for the time being, I've decided to keep my distance from skiing

and snowboarding. But for how long? I can see already this winter has changed my social landscape. Many of my exercise buddies are super busy during weekends and holidays. No prizes for guessing: they are either skiing or snowboarding at winter resorts on Beijing's outskirts.

Some of them, ski novices until a couple of years back, even flew to renowned ski venues for advanced tours. Since winter sports are a seasonal thing, skiing and snowboarding lovers frequent these venues as many times as they could before the snow melts at the end of the winter.

For them, skiing is no longer just a sport or a pastime, but an enabler and enricher of social life. Skiers say the sport helps create a positive

atmosphere for socializing and making friends.

Lin Min, owner of the yoga club I frequent, told me her family visited ski resorts every week during the winter last year. Ditto this winter so far.

"My daughter plays tennis. But in winter, it's harder to book indoor courts. So we embraced skiing, which teaches you how to be fast and yet retain control and balance," said Lin. "Skiing helps lower body weight, which could only help when you return to other sports after winter."

Skiing complements other sports, Lin said, citing Jannik Sinner's record as a skier before he hit pay dirt in tennis.

My friend Kate and her family also visited ski resorts frequently last year. Kate even sought to know

which skiwear would make her stand out from others on the slopes, given that skiers hire professional photographers for action pictures. I suggested red and that was that.

The more I learn about the physical and mental benefits of skiing, the more I'm persuaded to embrace skiing sooner or later.

For instance, skiing, being a largely outdoor activity, helps vitamin D intake. That, in turn, helps dispel winter blues. And a positive mindset amid gloomy weather strengthens character.

A pal suffered a fall and fractured his shoulder last year. But the experience didn't dampen his enthusiasm; instead, he took it as a valuable lesson in caution.

His passion for snow sports grew stronger as the memory of the days he wasn't able to use his gear at the ski resort tormented his mind. "The fall taught me how to be cautious

when skiing. It's the best lesson I've learned."

He can't wait to get back on the white slopes and mingle with highly skilled skiers.

As I see it, China's winter sports industry can thrive on the growing interest of new participants, especially beginners, as long as costs are kept affordable.

This can be done. More and more domestic winter sport product makers should be encouraged to raise their competitiveness and build their brands, so as to lower costs of manufacturing, marketing and retail, and build a strong bond with a new generation of skiers and snowboarders.

Popularizing the rental culture would help in this regard. Who knows, come the 2024-25 winter, I might find myself in a bright red skiwear — either mine or Kate's — sliding down the white slopes as part of skiing lessons.

# BUSINESS



People walk past a snowboarding products brand Nobaday store at Chaoyang Joy City in Beijing on Oct 5. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## China's ice and snow city lifts ties with Europe

BEIJING — Bathed in enchanting moonlight, sculptures of the Temple of Heaven and Notre Dame Cathedral are attracting tourists from home and abroad in a celebration of ice and snow in the northern reaches of China.

Those brave enough to bear the frigid temperatures are participating in a cultural dialogue and exchange between China and France in the "ice city" of Harbin, Heilongjiang province.

Hailing the scenery as remarkable, Lyazid Benhami, vice-president of the Paris Association of French-Chinese Friendship, said he didn't expect to see the Notre Dame Cathedral's beauty in the form of an ice sculpture on social media.

Tourism in Harbin is booming, bringing much-needed economic impetus to the region.

More than 3 million visitors flocked to Harbin during the 2024 three-day New Year holiday period, surging 44.14 percent from last winter, and tourism revenue rocketed 791.92 percent year-on-year to over 5.9 billion yuan (\$820.2 million).

According to a report by online travel platform Trip, travel bookings to the snowy city for the Spring Festival holiday had surged by over 14 fold compared to the previous year.

Observing a remarkable surge in passenger numbers at both the airport and train stations, Pierre G. Chidiac, general manager of Sofitel Harbin, which is operated by leading French hospitality group Accor, said that tourists are not only exploring traditional attractions in Harbin, but also venturing to ski resorts in the town of Yabuli and exploring "Snow Town" in Mudanjiang.

"We have noticed that Harbin is becoming a more and more popular tourism destination. The amazing winters with ice and snow activities, the comfortable summers, the beautiful nature along the Songhua River, delicious local snacks and the rich culture are among many reasons for me to believe in prosperous tourism," the French hotelier said.

Echoing Chidiac, Ye Fei, president and CEO of Michelin China, said that Harbin's thriving ice and snow tourism has showcased the robust vitality of China's economy and

instilled confidence in Michelin and other international enterprises operating in the Chinese market.

"We plan to launch a series of food festivals in more Chinese cities, bringing high-quality French agricultural products, wines and more to Chinese consumers," Ye added.

With 2024 marking the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France and also the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism, anticipation is high for snow-related businesses to bring opportunities for both sides, further strengthening the connections between China and France.

Recently, China waived visa requirements for France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Ireland and cut visa fees for many countries, making it more convenient for personnel exchanges and tourism growth.

"The name Harbin, the brand Harbin, and what it stands for, the ice sculpture, are famous," Martin Nydegger, CEO of Switzerland Tourism, told Chinese media at the 54th annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, last month.

Noting that China and Switzerland have interesting assets in ice and snow tourism to share, Nydegger said, "We could learn from Harbin about how they do such a phenomenal spectacular sculpture festival!"

He said he is truly impressed by the fact that the "ice city" had drawn in more than 3 million visitors, equivalent to over one-third of his country's population, in just three days over the New Year holiday.

"Switzerland wants to welcome Chinese visitors very fast," he said.

In response, Wang Hongxin, head of the cultural, radio, television and tourism department of Harbin, said, "Welcome to Harbin! Welcome to my hometown!"

Noting that *Dongbei* (referring to China's three northeastern provinces of Heilongjiang, Liaoning, and Jilin) and Switzerland are both snowy places with similar latitudes, Wang said he looks forward to fostering closer ties between both sides. "We welcome friends from Switzerland to visit and explore Harbin."

XINHUA



Visitors take photos near an ice sculpture of a Terracotta Warrior at Harbin Ice and Snow World in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, on Jan 24. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Snowboarding glides into Gen Z mind space this winter

Sales on e-commerce platforms surge to 350 million yuan in 2023

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
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Snowboarding, once a niche winter sport, has gained traction among Gen Z consumers in China, fueling business growth for Beijing-based Nobaday.

The company, which since incubation in 2015 had focused on snowboarding products such as boards, boots, bindings and protective gear, has since evolved into a year-round outdoor sportswear and equipment maker.

Sales of snowboards on mainstream e-commerce platforms in China surged to 350 million yuan (\$48.7 million) in 2023, up 47.7 percent year-on-year, according to Mojing Market Intelligence.

During the first two months of the recent snow season — between Oct and Dec 2023 — monthly sales revenue skyrocketed by 179.2 percent to 125 million yuan.

The rising popularity of winter sports has prompted a younger generation of snowboarders to rush to the slopes, pushing up sales of both international and domestic brands such as Burton and Nobaday.

There has been a notable trend in the market lately with entry-level and advanced-level products garnering the most attention, said Liu Fengxi, the company's founder and CEO.

Nobaday's entry-level product "The little black board" experienced growth of 200 to 300 percent this snow season compared to last year, thanks to new people taking to snowboarding and price-sensitive existing customers seeking more affordable products, he said.

This product makes up about 10 percent of the company's sales, while its advanced products have also sold well among highly skilled skiers, he said.

Compared with an average price of 3,000-4,000 yuan for foreign brands, products of a similar performance level by domestic brands are priced at about 1,500 yuan.

"Offering products directly to consumers has enabled us to maintain competitive pricing compared to international brands, which are sold through wholesalers," he said.

In addition to its product innovation and pricing strategy, Nobaday has prioritized brand awareness through strategic collaborations and marketing initiatives.

The company has signed contracts with professional athletes, such as skiing world champion Max Parrot.

Despite the challenges posed by offline retail, Nobaday has expanded its retail network to 11 stores.

"We've continued to focus on providing in-store experiences for our customers," said Liu. "We are planning to release new products in collaboration with more partners from the industry."

Going forward, the brand plans

to introduce new products by teaming up with the British Museum to roll out snowboards featuring famous artworks.

Nobaday's online business has surged higher than the industry level, to post 40 to 50 percent growth in revenue from November to January.

"The online field is even more fierce in competitions, with more than 200 domestic ski brands," Liu said.

Consumers' behavior is also evolving, with more cautious spending and a preference for cost-saving measures, he added.

"Consumers are more picky nowadays," he said. "They are taking longer to decide. They are still going to ski but visibly spending less."

For example, some skiers are opting for nearby rental accommodation over traditional ski resorts.

Despite these shifts, Nobaday remains committed to meeting the evolving needs of its customers and staying positive about the long-term prospects of the winter sports industry in China, Liu said.

# Working together for shared prosperity

The Belt and Road Initiative



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## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## Overcome insufficient demand to lift growth

## EAGLE EYE

By Zhang Bin

Insufficient demand' could be the key to summarizing China's macroeconomy in 2023. The country has faced insufficient demand since 2021, and this was further aggravated last year.

The analysis of insufficient demand is not based on the country's growth rate, but on a comparison of supply and demand.

There are two criteria for measuring supply and demand: one is the consumer price level, and the other is the performance of the labor market.

Consumer price levels were stagnant last year, with CPI rising by 0.2 percent and PPI declining by 3 percent, while core CPI remained below 1 percent for four consecutive years, decreasing even further compared to that of 2022.

In terms of the labor market, the surveyed unemployment rate was slightly better than in 2020, but still higher than the level before the COVID-19 pandemic.

There was significant employment pressure on new entrants to the labor market. Meanwhile, the wage growth of migrant workers over the past year was relatively low.

China's GDP growth rate for 2023 is not low compared with other major economies. But why doesn't

the domestic economy feel very good at the micro-level?

## Difficulties, challenges

The Central Economic Work Conference pointed out that the difficulties and challenges include insufficient effective demand, overcapacity in some industries, weak social expectations, many hidden risks, blockages in domestic circulation, and the rising complexity, severity, and uncertainty of the external environment.

Among these difficulties and challenges, insufficient demand should be the primary concern. If this can be addressed, other problems can be largely alleviated.

Boosting demand can provide strong support for resolving overcapacity. Similarly, if enterprises can achieve higher profitability, employment becomes easier and residents' incomes increase, which will naturally contribute to the improvement of social expectations and boost confidence.

Despite some pessimistic voices, I believe that the most prominent challenge China currently faces is not on the supply side, nor production efficiency or resource allocation.

The most prominent issue in China now is on the expenditure side—how to increase expenditure to overcome insufficient demand.

So, what kind of demand do we lack?

Traditionally, the total demand can be split into consumption, investment, as well as exports and imports.

The growth rate of consumption in China last year exceeded the overall economic growth rate, with consumption's contribution to economic growth on the rise, while the contributions of exports and investment declined.

Total demand can also be divided into that from the private sector and the government sector, which include government-led expenditures and government-led infrastructure investment projects.

In 2023, the growth rate of government spending was lower than the overall average level and the growth level of the private sector, which showed that the contraction in government demand had a significant impact on the phenomenon of insufficient demand.

In terms of monetary policy, there are three suggestions.

First, to clearly announce to the market the target of achieving a 2 percent core CPI. The clearer and more resolute way in which the country expresses this, the better the effect will be. To announce such an inflation target is akin to telling residents that prices will rise, which will encourage them to consume now.

It is also like telling businesses that prices of goods will rise, leading to rising costs, so they need to invest as soon as possible. It is equal to telling residents that their savings will depreciate, which will encourage them to increase consumption, investment, and reduce savings. It is also an international practice.

Second, to significantly reduce

policy interest rates and depress real interest rates. The expansion of spontaneous market demand relies on price leverage, and price leverage is real interest rates.

Third, a total of 2 to 3 trillion yuan (\$417 billion) of pledged supplementary lending is needed throughout the year to support major investment programs, such as urban village renovation, affordable housing construction, and infrastructure, that can be quickly remodeled for emergency use. Meanwhile, the targeted growth rate of social financing should stand at above 11 percent.

In addition, it is necessary to restore the vitality of the real estate market. The priority is to restore cash flow for real estate enterprises. This can be achieved by measures such as lifting restrictions on home purchases, lowering mortgage rates, offering preferential loan rates to first-time homebuyers, helping developers liquidate idle assets such as commercial-residential buildings and parking spaces.

In short, fully implementing policies in these three areas can help the Chinese economy overcome insufficient demand and achieve reasonable growth rates.

## Global practices

When we look at developed countries, the process of industrial upgrading in the manufacturing sector has shown some trends.

The first trend is that the proportion of manufacturing in economic

activities tends to show a "hump-shaped" change with economic development and per capita income growth.

In the "hump" of different countries, the peak of the hump often corresponds to a per capita income of \$8,000 to \$9,000 and a manufacturing value-added ratio of 30 percent to 40 percent. After surpassing this peak, the proportion of manufacturing activities in the economy begins to decline.

The second trend is that manufacturing follows similar trajectories of industrial upgrading, starting from the initial stage of the textile industry, then progressing to energy, power tools, and infrastructure, followed by large-scale production tools, steel, machine tools, and equipment manufacturing, and finally to high-tech products such as telecommunications, computers, and biopharmaceuticals.

Whether it's the hump-shaped change pattern or the specific path of industrial upgrading, China is highly consistent with high-income countries.

Thus, the success of China's manufacturing lies in being the most open, fully competitive, and incentive-driven market.

We have a unique scale effect, and the changes in the share of manufacturing in China's GDP are very close to those of developed countries in the decade after peak industrialization, without a significantly greater withdrawal of manufactur-

ing or premature deindustrialization problems.

Some people may question China's overcapacity problem during the process. But overcapacity does not equal resource misallocation, nor does it equate to efficiency loss.

According to some researchers, assuming that all enterprises have formed a consensus on the development trend of a certain industry, the specific timing of industry profitability remains unclear, so more mature and efficient enterprises often choose to wait and watch.

They wait until the entry or even demise of medium- and low-efficiency enterprises before entering the market themselves, which will inevitably lead to overcapacity in the interim.

However, this overcapacity does not indicate a failure in resource allocation. In addition, some subsidy policies implemented by the government, if misused, can also lead to overcapacity problems.

To address such problems, it is not advisable to simply limit the number of enterprises joining the industry or restrict production capacity. Instead, the country should rely more on reducing subsidies and providing a market environment open to fair competition.

The writer is deputy director of the Institute of World Economics and Politics at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

## China provides huge opportunities for firms of United States

## MAIN STREET

By Zhou Mi

China stands firm in opening wider to the outside world and fulfilling its various international commitments. Over the past decades, foreign enterprises, including US businesses, have not only been deeply involved in China's economic and social development, but are also expected to play a more active and crucial role in China's pursuit of full modernization.

As it is the world's second-largest economy and is still growing at an annual pace of more than 5 percent, China is hoping that its modernization drive will create important opportunities for foreign businesses, including those from the United States, to develop both in China and globally.

China's modernization drive will inevitably depend on global resources and capabilities. Meeting the demand of a major market like China, which is undergoing technological upgrading and has a huge population of 1.4 billion, will certainly place higher requirements on sup-

pliers, and they will need to continually improve efficiency and reduce costs. Nevertheless, once US businesses manage to maintain steady participation in the course of Chinese modernization, they will be rewarded with long-term stable market support, and pressure on them finding new markets will be significantly reduced.

China's modernization is one of common prosperity for all. The concept of common prosperity for all that China is pursuing, instead of compromising the interests of some other countries or groups, involves a more rational and sustainable development pattern that provides large development space where all market players can make the best of their strengths to earn dividends. By participating in China's modernization process, US firms can also get a clearer picture of the local investment environment to facilitate better business strategies.

China's modernization drive is based on material, cultural and ethical advancements. Improving the material well-being of market players is an important goal of China's economic policymakers. Apart from a higher capacity to produce goods, improvements in the efficiency of logistics, transportation, and wholesale and retail systems are also impor-

tant factors. For a long time, the US culture of exploration and innovation has played a positive role in inspiring commercial success, especially in terms of business innovation, in Chinese society. The exchanges between East and West have also created more opportunities for US companies to develop their role as a bridge between the two countries.

As China pursues modernization, it is essential to reduce irreversible damage to the environment by reducing the activities of energy-intensive and high-emission industries. This requires adjusting market expectations and economic and social development patterns, and policymakers must be careful not to take shortcuts.

Since the US got an early start in terms of industrialization and modernization, US enterprises have richer experience in dealing with the impact of economic activity on the environment. They have developed and applied several technologies and product innovations to cope with and reduce environmental impact. As China is committed to achieving carbon peak and emission reduction goals, its development mindset contained in its modernization philosophy can provide a lot of space for such innovations by foreign firms, including US businesses.

As it is a major global player committed to high-standard opening-up, China's modernization process is extensively and deeply interconnected with the outside world.

For China, its development is neither intended to take away development space from other countries, nor is it targeted at replicating and imposing its own development philosophy and model on others. Instead, it is based on reciprocal cooperation and the principle of achieving shared growth through consultation and collaboration.

It is precisely this concept of Chinese modernization that contributes to reducing the negative impact of economic globalization and provides support for all parties to gain from China's development. As a result, US firms are also expected to benefit from it as China's growth is set to provide more development opportunities for their growth.

US companies were among the first foreign investors to enter the Chinese market some decades ago. Therefore, they enjoy some advantages, such as higher levels of familiarity with the local market environment. To fully benefit from these advantages and seek win-win and coordinated development, it is advisable for US businesses to participate in China's economic activi-

ties in a more active manner.

US firms in China should respect the basic principle of equality, mutual benefit, transparency and openness, which are the basic conditions for current cooperation-based global economic and trade interactions. They should reduce any differentiated development mentality resulting from trade protectionism—for example, an "America First" policy—respect the basic rights and claims of developing countries and, on this basis, seek to establish more friendly economic and trade ties with local players.

China's socialist market-oriented economy, on which its modernization drive is built, means the market plays a fundamental role in resource allocation. US businesses are encouraged to give feedback about their business development requirements through various channels, so as to build a more constructive, convenient and safe business environment for them, which will also promote cross-border two-way flows of capital and data, and improve China's ability to support the development of multinationals and meet their operational needs.

In the face of the current economic and trade frictions and protectionism on a global scale, Chinese and US businesses should further

enhance mutual trust, and engage in a more effective and flexible mode of cooperation and collaboration to build global value, industrial and supply chains. US firms should leverage China's manufacturing and services prowess to reduce the impact of supply chain fluctuations, improve supply chain resilience and further enhance their competitive edge amid global competition.

US enterprises can play a crucial role in the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative, and benefit from new development needs generated by such expansion of economic and trade activities by participating in BRI-related cooperative projects on supply chains, capital, personnel and corporate governance.

China highly values security amid development as it pursues modernization. US businesses can turn their competitive advantages into concrete market moves to help Chinese regulators improve risk prevention and response, and support China in its ongoing efforts to improve its risk prevention system and enhance the resiliency of its market, industries and enterprises.

The writer is a researcher with the Institute of American and Oceanian Studies of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, the Ministry of Commerce.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## US would step onto right side of history by acting in conformity with San Francisco vision

Foreign Minister Wang Yi's meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Friday on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference was the latest in the series of efforts by the two countries to inject stability and positive energy into their ties.

In what was reportedly a candid, substantive and constructive meeting, the two diplomats held an in-depth exchange of views on strategic and overarching issues critical to the direction of China-US relations and reached important common understandings.

Whether the two sides can find a way to get along with each other will determine whether their relations are defined by cooperation rather than rivalry, which will not only set the trajectory for bilateral ties but also regional and global stability.

The world is in the midst of a highly volatile situation with both traditional and nontraditional security threats prevalent. The ongoing Ukraine crisis, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the rising tensions on the Korean Peninsula and other pressing issues all need real cooperation and close coordination between China and the US.

In contrast to the US practice of pursuing bloc confrontation and stoking geopolitical tensions in many parts of the world to suit its own agenda, China remains committed to rallying countries to engage in the common endeavor of building a global community with a shared future.

In his keynote speech during the "China in the

World" session at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday, Wang, citing the attempts to shut China out of world trade in the name of de-risking, cautioned that, as more people have come to realize, "the absence of cooperation is the biggest risk".

China has repeatedly underscored the competition of major countries is not the defining trait of the times. That explains why Beijing urges major powers to uphold the trend of the times by strengthening coordination and enhancing cooperation.

As Wang said in his speech, on its part China will continue to push for cooperation among major countries. He said that the message he wanted to convey is clear: China's intent is to be a stabilizing force amid the turbulence and turmoil. To this end, China has proposed the Global Security Initiative, calling for global efforts to tackle the "peace deficit" and urging all peace-desiring countries to jointly work together in pursuit of universal peace and security.

If the US really cares about global security, it should abandon its divisive and destructive approach to global affairs so as to pave the way for practical global efforts to tackle the grave security challenges through international cooperation.

As part of that, as Wang reminded Blinken during their meeting, it is essential that the US should take an objective and rational view of China's development, pursue a positive and pragmatic China policy, and honor US President Joe Biden's commitments with concrete actions.

## Commendable restraint in face of provocations

The series of provocations Manila has orchestrated in waters adjacent to China's Huangyan Island in the South China Sea over the past Chinese Lunar New Year holiday only serve to further erode Beijing's trust in Manila's sincerity in its recent assertion that it wanted to work together with China to secure a political settlement of the two countries' maritime disputes.

In its latest move calculated to ruin Beijing's festive mood, the Philippine Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources vessel 3005 illegally intruded into the adjacent waters of Huangyan Island, ignoring repeated warnings from the China Coast Guard. The CCG implemented measures in accordance with the law to compel the vessel to leave the area.

This is not the first time that the Chinese side had to expel Philippine vessels that illegally intruded into waters adjacent to the island in recent days. The CCG has had to respond to a Philippine Coast Guard vessel illegally intruding into the waters on multiple occasions from Feb 2 to 9. China holds indisputable sovereignty over Huangyan Island and its adjacent waters, and the CCG's actions are legitimate activities to enforce the law in China's jurisdictional waters.

Were it not for the professionalism and restraint of the Chinese side, Manila's provocative moves might have easily escalated into skirmishes and even open conflict. Something Beijing is carefully trying to avoid

but which Manila seems to covet, no doubt in the belief, however misplaced, that it has Washington's backing.

Although escalated tensions do not serve the interests of any regional country, including those of the Philippines, open conflict between China and the Philippines, in the eyes of Washington would serve the US' agenda of derailing China's development.

The joint statement released by Beijing and Manila during President Ferdinand Marcos Jr's visit to Beijing one year ago, and the series of cooperation projects the two sides have carried out ever since, clearly highlight the tremendous benefits the Philippines can draw from cooperation with China. Manila should take a more rational view of the US' intentions, as it only regards the Philippines as a useful piece on the board in its geopolitical game with China.

Thanks to the tacit consensus between China and the Philippines, their maritime disputes have been shelved for decades in favor of win-win cooperation. It is the US that has sought to sabotage this consensus. That's why Beijing has always exercised patience toward Manila, despite its provocations.

The Marcos government cites "security concerns" to justify its leveraging the US' desire to militarize the region as "security" for its breaking and entering activities. But barking dogs that bark for the sake of straining the leash are nothing but a nuisance.

## Electioneering tariff talk belies the reality

There has been plenty of hoopla about the effectiveness of tariffs when it comes to correcting what in the eyes of US policymakers is unfair trade imbalances. Particularly so when it comes to trade ties with China, which they now take as the United States' foremost competitor, which must be contained at any cost.

The previous Donald Trump administration initiated a trade war against China, imposing 25 percent additional tariffs on Chinese imports worth \$300 billion in 2018. Having inherited those tariffs, the Joe Biden administration has chosen to keep them intact.

This is because, in US Trade Representative Katherine Tai's words, the US saw "strategic value" in keeping the tariffs in place to reinvigorate US manufacturing. The Biden White House has bragged about previously outsourced manufacturing flowing back to the US, inflation being tamed, and more jobs having been created.

Trump, who is now the Republican front-runner for the party's presidential nomination for the coming presidential election in November, recently promised to impose a flat tariff rate of 60 percent on all Chinese imports and to increase by 10 percent the tariffs on all other imports if elected.

But neither US consumers, nor manufacturers, support the tariffs. Despite Tai's claim that the tariffs have boosted US domestic manufacturing, US Bureau of Labor data show their contribution to job creation was less than impressive last year.

Jay Timmons, president of the National Association of Manufacturers, for one, has seen how those tariffs have worked against US manufacturers. "Before any elected official or appointed officials

starts talking about how good tariffs are, they need to look at the results of how these tariffs have been applied to some manufacturers here in America, and how that's actually cost jobs for American manufacturing workers," he said.

Instead of serving the purpose of spurring US manufacturing, the tariffs have driven up manufacturing costs and consumer prices, he said. He wanted them removed because they "created a system where a drill coming in from China that was fully assembled, is less expensive than a drill that's assembled here, because of the component parts that are being tariffed coming in".

"This is not just a shot you get to take without ... getting return fire," he said. His solution is simple and aligns well with economic common sense — negotiating a "rules-based enforceable free trade agreement". China has repeatedly urged the US to promote the sound and steady growth of China-US economic and trade ties, stressing they are mutually beneficial and win-win in nature, and serve the fundamental interests of both countries and peoples.

With the two parties vying to show they will be tough on China, which is now de rigueur on the campaign trail, trade and tariffs are likely to be increasingly in the spotlight in the run-up to the US presidential election. But it is to be hoped that the positive signals that emerged from the recent meeting of the two countries' respective Economic Working Group can be maintained in their next meeting penciled in for April despite all the rhetorical jockeying for the election limelight.

If the US does ramp up the tariffs, the outcome, as Timmons observed, will only be a vicious tit-for-tat exchange of fire.

Shi Yu



## Opinion Line

## Sora's text-to-video model opens a new can of 'post-truth' worms

On Friday, OpenAI released its first large-scale text-to-video model Sora. It can generate one-minute-long high-definition videos based on user input prompts, with multiple characters, scenes and camera movements. These functions are not new to artificial intelligence models, but Sora has made a major step forward by being able to generate the videos, while using camera language such as landscapes and colors to express emotions.

OpenAI claimed in a news release that Sora will become an important milestone in achieving Artificial General Intelligence.

Yet however realistic Sora videos may appear, they are still digital simulations and not real filmed reality, which might make the "post-truth" phenomenon worse.

"Post-truth" refers to a cultural climate in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and person-

al belief. Objective facts and expert opinions are downplayed or dismissed in favor of misinformation and disinformation that shape persuasive narratives that play on preconceived notions and emotions.

The use of various information and communication technologies can make it difficult for people to distinguish between what is real and what is fake in the content they view online and many lack the willingness or patience to figure out the truth. Instead, there is a tendency for individuals to align with information that confirms their existing beliefs, leading to echo chambers and the reinforcing ideological divides, with people quarreling with each other based on what they believe to be true. The emergence of Sora may exacerbate this situation by further blurring the boundary between what is real and what is fabrication.

Before popularizing new technology such as Sora, the potential risks

and challenges should be assessed and prepared for in advance. For instance, the government could make it mandatory for information providers to identify their provided information as Artificial Intelligence Generated Content, so that the origin of the content is clear.

Besides, the emergence of Sora may lead to significant job losses in related industries such as film and television, which is a significant social risk that cannot be ignored.

There have already been numerous in-depth studies on the potential job losses caused by the large-scale application of AI, and many solutions have been proposed, including slowing down the pace of AI technology application, assisting in reemployment, and imposing AI taxes. Now, the overnight popularity of Sora reminds people that it is time to accelerate, refine and implement these measures.

— BEIJING NEWS

## Festival spending a long-tail economic boost

The national tourism industry has seen a large boom in the Spring Festival holiday. That is an indicator of the recovery of the economy.

Tourists made 474 million trips at home during the Spring Festival holiday from Feb 10 to 17, up 34.3 percent year-on-year and 19 percent from that of 2019, spending 632.69 billion yuan (\$94.9 billion), an increase of 47.3 percent from 2023, and 7 percent up on 2019, according to the estimates of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

But the tourism boom would have been less significant without the encouragement of various levels of

governments taking measures to boost the industry. As early as the beginning of the Spring Festival, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism organized "Happy Chinese New Year" themed cultural and tourism activities.

Many local governments also issued consumption coupons to tourists so as to further stimulate the economy during the holiday. Their efforts have borne fruit, as official data from the Ministry of Commerce shows that from the first to the fifth day of the first lunar month, the sales of festive goods boomed, among which the sales of green organic food

and gold and silver jewelry by key retail enterprises increased by more than 10 percent year-on-year.

In 2023, the total retail sales of consumer goods reached a record high, while consumption became the main driving force of economic growth, with a contribution rate of 82.5 percent. The booming domestic consumption during this year's Spring Festival period shows consumption must now be sustained so it has a long-tail effect, and the overall performance of consumption in 2024 is a sustained driving force for the economy.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Lack of drivers drops Japan down to fourth

German has overtaken Japan to be the world's third-largest economy. According to official Japanese data released on Thursday, Japan's nominal GDP in 2023 was 591.48 trillion yen (\$4.21 trillion), lower than Germany's \$4.46 trillion.

Nominal GDP refers to the value of all products and services produced in a year, calculated at current market prices. Compared to real GDP, nominal GDP is more susceptible to fluctuations in market prices and exchange rates. The average exchange rate of the yen in 2023 was 140.5 yen per US dollar, higher than the previous year, and the significant depreciation of the yen is the direct reason why Japan's nominal GDP was surpassed by Germany in 2023.

However, the depreciation of the yen has also directly driven an increase in inbound tourism and consumption by foreign tourists in Japan, stimulating the Japanese economy. While being surpassed by Germany, Japan's nominal GDP grew by 5.7 percent in 2023, marking

the third consecutive year of positive growth and the highest growth rate since 6.5 percent in 1991.

The long, deep-seated reason why Japan's nominal GDP was surpassed by Germany in 2023 is the long-term lack of stable growth momentum in the Japanese economy. Following the collapse of the bubble economy in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Japanese economy has been stuck in a long-term slump and has continuously narrowed the economic gap with Germany.

According to IMF data, Japan's GDP was \$4.96 trillion in 2000, while Germany's was \$1.95 trillion. Yet by 2020, while Germany's economy had expanded to \$3.88 trillion, the Japanese economy had only slightly grown to \$5.51 trillion. In other words, the size of the Japanese economy has changed little in the two or three decades since Japan's bubble economy burst, while in contrast, the German economy has experienced significant expansion and has now surpassed Japan.

The collapse of the bubble economy, which was fueled by easy credit, speculative real estate and stock market investments, also ruined the perception that Japan's economic growth would continue indefinitely.

Japan has struggled to find long-term stable drivers of economic growth. The competitiveness of Japan's electronics industry has weakened, and issues such as its aging population and declining birthrate have intensified. Japan's influence in the automotive sector, where it has traditionally held a dominant position, has also declined significantly, and it failed to seize the opportunities presented by the significant changes in the global automotive industry, resulting in the loss of its status as the world's largest automotive exporter in 2023.

Finding long-term stable drivers of economic development to pull Japan's economy out of its long-term slump has become an urgent priority for the Japanese government.

— GUANCHANG

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

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## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Chinese Tourism

**Editor's note:** The recovery of tourism has become a driving force for China's economy. Tourism bureaus across China are promoting local attractions and employing innovative means to entice visitors. These means include distinctive dressing-up, traditional dances and delicious cuisine especially in the Spring Festival holiday. Four experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Mario Cavolo

# China offers peace of mind to foreign tourists

It is true that China's foreign tourist arrivals have declined substantially, mainly because of the impact of the three pandemic years and geopolitical issues. So, naturally, China wants to attract foreign visitors back.

But why should foreign tourists flock once again to China?

China's tourist spots are as attractive as any others in the Asia-Pacific region. When tourists from other countries think of "heading East", they might think of destinations in Japan, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines.

Yet most of them do not realize that China has more world-class, stunning natural landscapes and urban destinations than those countries, and those are easily accessible and offer equally fascinating histories to explore.

But how appealing is China today?

China has rolled out a 15-day visa-free entry policy for citizens of seven European countries and Malaysia. The government has made it even easier for citizens of many countries to visit China by removing the requirement of having hotel reservations before arriving in China.

China is also rolling out more streamlined, simplified information in English and other languages along with the improved visa application policies.

What about peace of mind during your holiday?

Easy, inexpensive access to healthcare services is a major plus for tourists visiting China, particularly for those visiting major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen. Expats living in China know that in hospitals across the country, services such as blood tests, X-rays, CT-scans and ultrasound scans are remarkably inexpensive, professional and fast. Tourists can also be assured of getting English-speaking doctors and international departments in hospitals in major cities.

Healthcare services are only one example of how tourists, in case of emergencies, can save a huge chunk of

their travel budget. Most Western economies have experienced massive inflation, up to 30 percent, which has resulted in higher tariffs for hotel rooms and higher shopping expenses. But China has been almost free of such inflation.

For example, a world class zoo like the San Diego Zoo in California offers a wonderful experience but its costs \$70 per person. A family visit to the zoos in Shanghai, Hangzhou and many other Chinese cities, on the other hand, costs less than \$5 per person and offers that same wonderful experience to visitors — a stroll through lush gardens, super cool animal habitats and entertainment facilities, for example.

The rich experience of visiting ancient cities such as Xi'an of Shaanxi province to see the Terracotta Warriors cannot be gained by visiting the histori-



The author is an American writer living in China.

cal sites in other countries. Plus, tourists visiting China can stay in five-star hotels for about one-third of the cost they pay in places like Singapore and Tokyo.

If you prefer exotic tropical destinations, look no further than Hainan province's gorgeous beaches and the charming Xiamen Island in Fujian province where a stay at a luxury international five-star hotel will cost you about \$100 per night rather than \$300, and an affordable excursion into the lush sub-tropical countryside to the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Tulou ancient villages.

Can you imagine countries like the United States, France or Italy having 40,000 kilometers of high-speed railway connecting their cities and transporting you to a city 150 km away for just \$10? That is the sort of transportation service available in China. The high-speed railway is not only inexpensive but also connected to urban subway lines and airports. Even the urban taxi fleets will save you a fortune with the average taxi or Didi car-hailing ride costing between \$3 and \$10.

In fact, medical tourism is an

extremely attractive option in China. Foreign tourists, especially Americans with friends or colleagues living in China should seriously consider setting aside two-three days to arrange for a comprehensive full body medical checkup because it costs between \$200 and \$500. For many Americans, that's a genuine bargain.

Another, and a big, attraction for foreign tourists is China's diverse cuisine. Available in virtually every city, the cuisines of different regions will simply blow you away, leaving you with a mysterious but satisfactory smile on your lips. Food in China is simply a different experience, and you can indulge yourself, in most restaurants, for no more than \$10.

More important, China is the safest travel destination in the world. On top of that, the Chinese people are amiable and altruistic in nature, ready to help foreigners. Peace of mind plays a big role in making a holiday enjoyable, and China offers peace of mind in abundance.

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

Hui Ming

# Cultural, tourism integration via museum craze

Culture is the soul of tourism. Drawing on the successful experiences of the countries and cities that attract the highest number of tourists, tapping into various cultural resources such as museums, industrial and intangible cultural heritages, theater performances, and more to attract more visitors is an important way of upgrading China's cultural tourism industry.

Thanks to mobile internet and digital cultural technology, the integration of the culture and tourism industries has been progressing at a fast pace.

China has more than 5,000 cultural relic protection and exhibition institutions, with about 760,000 immovable cultural relics nationwide and 108 million movable cultural relics in national museums.

Protecting these cultural relics is an extremely arduous task. And since the strict security needed to protect these relics prevents many from viewing them, China's cultural relic protection departments have built digital museums which have 3D digital archiving and cloud exhibitions, allowing not only people to admire them but also developing a new mode of cultural heritage dissemination. This has enabled the preservation of cultural relics and heritage.

The digitalization of cultural resources and the construction of digital museums facilitate the creative transformation of traditional Chinese culture and development of the tourism and digital cultural industries.

A large number of digital presentation projects of cultural relics have been developed, such as the "Digital Palace Museum" and "Digital Hall of Treasures" by the Palace Museum (Forbidden City), the "Digital Dunhuang" and "Digital Cave of Scriptures" by the Dunhuang Academy, "Cloud Tour of the Great Wall" jointly developed by Tencent and other institutions, the "Tang Dynasty Palace Night Banquet" and the stunning underwater dance "Prayer" presented by the Henan Museum, as well as the "Zhou, Qin, Han, Tang" digital cultural spectrum course launched by the Shaanxi History Museum.

These projects have greatly stimulated people's love and interest in China's historical and cultural heritage. Museums across the country are using digital technology to exhibit various cultural relics and heritage online, arranging for professionals to conduct museum tours through livestreaming, providing virtual immersive museum experiences.

The implementation of targeted policies has increased the public's interest in museums. The museum craze has five prominent manifestations. First, the public's enthusiasm for visiting museums has reached an unprecedented level, with rapidly increasing visits.

According to National Bureau of Statistics data, from 2012 to 2019, the number of museum visitors nationwide increased from about 560 million to 1.2 billion, with an average annual growth of 79.74 million. After the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2023 museum visits in China saw an explosive growth. Last year, the National Museum alone recorded 6.76 million visitors, up 314 percent year-on-year.

Second, the internet has become a main source of museum communication. According to the "2023 Museum Data Report" of Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok), in 2023, the total number of museum-related video views on Douyin alone reached about 51.3 billion, equivalent to 66 times the annual number of visitors to museums nationwide.

Third, themed TV programs on cultural relics and museums continue to be popular. They innovatively use different methods to enhance the audience's perception and depth of understanding of China's culture.

Fourth, museum cultural and creative products and intangible cultural heritage products continue to sell well, and continue to attract visitors to museums and boost the sales of cultural and creative products.

And fifth, museums have helped young students to study, better understand history, learn about cultural dissemination, and enhance their aesthetic knowledge.

The museum craze in China is the result of various factors, including the overall improvement in the level of museum services and people's quest for a better life. But the core factor that has ignited the museum craze is undoubtedly the arrival of the digital culture era.

Digital technology has transformed the existence of museums, allowing traditional museums, which were previously confined to physical spaces, to have digital counterparts online.

The integration of culture and tourism has thus entered a new digital stage, with an unprecedented increase in its depth and breadth.

Behind the museum craze is also the significant enhancement of the historical and cultural confidence of the Chinese nation. The digital integration of culture and tourism continues to create new aesthetic forms of modern Chinese civilization, consolidating the common consciousness of the Chinese nation among the people and enhancing the public's sense of cultural attainment and happiness.

The status of digital museums will be further elevated in the national digital culture strategy. And the integration of culture and tourism led by digital culture will propel China toward a new height of digital civilization.

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



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY



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Jiang Yiyi and Wang Shifeng

# Publicity and service key to attracting more visitors

The term "Erbin", a nickname of Harbin, Heilongjiang province, known for its ice and snow festival, has gained popularity across China. Many tourism officials are using techniques such as "topic flooding", "local-style rap", "directors' speeches" and the "star effect" to promote cultural tourism, leaving netizens exclaiming in amusement. Shifting from online antics to offline engagement, tourism authorities in other provinces also compete for tourists.

The essence of this "fancy rat-race" lies in the fact that various regional cultural tourism initiatives are targeted at the Spring Festival tourist boom, using hype to attract tourists and boost the local economies. But relying solely on publicity and extravagant tactics is not enough to attract more tourists. With the extended Spring Festival this year, the key lies in converting the Spring Festival "tourist traffic" into "long-term tourist traffic" by providing quality services. So cities and tourist spots should focus on three factors to attract more tourists.

As cultural tourism gains popularity, tourist spots and the places they are located in must have the capacity to accommodate the increasing influx of tourists. First, they need to improve tourism infrastructure and tourism services through rational planning and establishing efficient tourism information centers, building better roads to scenic spots and tourist service platforms, and installing proper traffic signs.

Second, they should provide related supporting services to enhance tour-

ists' experience. For that, the tourist spots and cities need to further develop tourist attractions, providing comfortable and safe parking lots, restrooms, rest areas, dining services and other supporting facilities.

For example, Harbin has done that by reducing the waiting time for tourists. Harbin's Ice and Snow World has introduced a 3D-composite ice bar, ice hot-pot, and ice house experience hall, which are innovative facilities that both increase consumption and enhance tourists' experience. Similarly, the Beidahu Ski Resort in Jilin province has expanded its ski trails from 27 to 64, increasing the area from 126 hectares to 239 hectares, with the aim of becoming the first skiing resort in China to accommodate more than 1 million visitors.

Quality tourism service is key to propelling the high-quality development of the tourism industry. In this context, it is necessary to first improve the tourism service quality. Tourist attractions, star-rated hotels, travel agencies, online travel agencies, and homestay providers should endeavor to provide overall better tourism services.

For instance, Harbin's promotion has been successful because of not only its ice and snow show but also its warm and thoughtful services, evident in its

promotion of local specialty, frozen pears, and the laying of slipping-resistant carpets in underground passages on Central Street, and building of warm rest stops in collaboration with Haier, which show its concern for the safety and well-being of tourists.

Besides, local government departments should create a good environment for tourists. For example, following the success of Zibo's barbecue promotion, multiple departments of the city in Shandong province issued price limits, prohibiting barbecue outlets and hotels from hiking their prices and room tariffs, and launched special barbecue shuttle buses, showing their concern for tourists.

Yet there is also a need to make tourists better aware of the services available. As front-line workers in the reception industry, the words and actions of tour guides reflect the nature of a travel agency, and influence tourists' ideas and evaluations about its service quality. Travel agencies should therefore provide proper training to their staff, so the latter can provide better, professional services to tourists, and be courteous toward their clients.

At present, many regional cultural tourism departments and travel agencies use the internet to attract potential tourists' attention. But if they believe

they can replicate the success of Harbin by blindly following its promotional methods, they are wrong. They should, instead, tap into their unique resources, highlight their cultural characteristics, tell authentic local cultural tourism stories to enhance tourists' experience and thus attract more tourists.

Also, the local tourism departments and travel agencies should identify their advantageous tourism resources, focus on their unique selling points and develop branded cultural tourism products to draw more visitors.

For instance, Xi'an, Shaanxi province, has the first immersive Tang Dynasty (618-907) market town themed district in China, the Longest Day in Chang'an, which covers different aspects of the Tang Dynasty's cuisine, handicrafts, cultural banquets and immersive performances, providing tourists with a unique chance of "traveling through the Tang Dynasty in a day".

It is also important to tell compelling local cultural stories. While cultural tourism bureaus generally engage in competition based on the number of promotional videos and other forms of promotional material they release, they often lack in depth knowledge and fail to promote characteristic local cultural products. They should therefore focus on promoting local cuisine, local natural resources, local culture and local personalities, and tell their stories in a way that resonates with tourists, so as to attract more visitors.

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



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## GLOBAL VIEWS

MARCELO MUNOZ

## Catalyzer not converter

China is not seeking to impose its vision of a community with a shared future on anyone, but inviting all to help realize it

China and the West are two very different and very distant civilizations, in their conceptions of life, philosophy, politics and economics. To some extent, the two know each other only superficially and, in this era of change, they appear to be at odds.

Is it possible, despite everything, to speak of an alliance of civilizations, as the United Nations says?

I prefer to put it another way: Can we aspire to a dialogue between the two civilizations?

On the part of the West, this dialogue seems impossible, since the United States aspires to contain China, economically, commercially, scientifically and technologically, and the European Union is suspicious of China for its alleged systemic rivalry.

Yet, at the same time, both the US and the EU trade with China on a large scale, their representatives meet with those of China at major summits and in a multiplicity of bilateral and international meetings.

Reality imposes itself: containing China, which the West describes as an "Asian giant", seems politically naive. How can an entire people, one that comprises nearly 20 percent of humanity and which has its own philosophy of work, society, economy, education, politics of multilateralism, and the aspiration to build a world community with a shared future, be contained?

And what does systemic rivalry mean? That one wants to impose its "system" on the other? China has never wanted to impose its system on other peoples, nor does it intend to do so now: "We do not want to be a superpower" as its leaders repeat. While the EU and

the US insist on convincing China that Western liberal democracy is the universal paradigm and, in addition, impose sanctions on it for not following the Western development path.

A very notable and regrettable case of this attempt at imposition is the European Parliament's boycott of the mutual investment

agreement, that would be beneficial to both sides, because the anti-China lobby does not want to ratify it, with the excuse that China does not "comply with human rights", according to the Western conception of them. Is this the "systemic rivalry"? China signs and ratifies, without adding extra conditions beyond what

was agreed by both parties, but the EU sets conditions. In reality, this "systemic rivalry" is not mutual.

In the face of these difficulties for dialogue on the part of the West, China offers the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind, one without an exclusive hegemony, and proposes multilat-

eralism, inclusiveness and cooperation.

This concept of a community with a shared future is not imposed on anyone, it is offered as a way to coexist in peace in pursuit of shared prosperity.

There is a palpable expression of a shared future, the Belt and Road Initiative — the largest global con-

nectivity project ever to take effect. It is open to all countries in the world, without exclusions or systemic conditions. It strengthens not only road, land, air and sea connectivity, but also global connectivity that is digital, cultural (dialogue of civilizations), political (without "systemic" impositions), and environmental connectivity to share a clean planet.

How can we carry forward this thinking of a shared world?

Of course, it is not a question of one day or of a few, but of all: a strategic objective for the whole of the 21st century.

Great strides are already being made, which must be explained and disseminated in the face of the catastrophists and the exclusionists. For example, the major road and digital corridors have already been built, or are under construction, the major international forums have been convened for debate and dialogue, a multitude of bilateral and multilateral agreements have been signed, and new multilateral governance institutions, such as the BRICS and the G20, have been established.

Powerful actors are needed to give impetus to efforts to realize a shared world. China, the US and the EU should play their respective roles in promoting understandings between civilizations and maintaining multilateralism.

*The author is founder and chairman emeritus of Catedra China, which promotes knowledge and dialogue between Spain and China. 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.*



ZHANG YUJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

QIU CHENGCHENG

## Breathe easy

China's new air quality plan can deliver major health benefits

Since China launched a nationwide campaign a decade ago to improve its air quality, the change has been visibly remarkable. The long periods of severe smog that were once a common sight 10 years ago have become increasingly rare. Yet, the winter of 2023-24 has seen a resurgence of smog in northern cities, raising the alarm and highlighting the ongoing battle against air pollution. This resurgence serves as a stark reminder of the direct impact on public health. The Chinese National Center for Disease Control reported in 2017 that 1.24 million deaths in China were attributable to air pollution, underscoring the urgent need for sustainable development policies that address both economic and health benefits.

To inject new momentum into China's efforts to clean up the air, the State Council, China's Cabinet, has recently issued a new air quality action plan, setting targets for reducing pollution levels across the country and in designated key regions. It is projected that meeting these new targets will avoid approximately 180,000 deaths related to PM 2.5 pollution per year by 2025, compared with the situation in 2020. The largest benefits accrue to the regions around Beijing and Xi'an, Shaanxi province, which have the strongest pollution reduction targets.

China's action plan sets new PM 2.5 reduction targets by 2025, focusing on the three key regions, namely the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei province and surrounding areas, the Fenwei Plain and the Yangtze River Delta. Reduction efforts vary based on progress from 2020 to 2023. The key regions must reduce PM 2.5 by 5 percent from 2023 levels, impacting approximately 520 million people and their health. The rest of China targets a 2 percent reduction from now. Accord-

**Achieving cleaner air is not only a health imperative but also a critical component of China's wider strategy for decarbonization and sustainable development, balancing environmental needs with economic growth and public well-being.**

ing to an analysis by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, the Beijing and Xi'an regions are expected to see the most health benefits, with an estimated 92,000 and 12,000 fewer deaths respectively due to air pollution, accounting for 60 percent of the national reduction in death cases.

In Beijing and nearby areas, per capita health costs from air pollution are expected to decrease most significantly, with a reduction of 3.3 deaths per 10,000 people by 2025, followed by the Fenwei Plain's 2.3 deaths reduction. Beijing's stricter target of 32 milligrams per cubic meter (ug/m3) of air should lead to a 3.5 deaths decrease per 10,000, surpassing the national average reduction of 1.3 air pollution-related deaths per 10,000 individuals. This reflects the effectiveness of targeted regional policies in mitigating the health impacts of air pollution.

Worldwide, the World Health Organization estimates that air pol-

lution is responsible for 7 million premature deaths per year and constitutes one of the main risk factors for non-communicable diseases, including heart disease, strokes, lung cancer, and both chronic and acute respiratory diseases. In China, respiratory diseases rank fourth among the leading causes of death, and lung cancer ranks top for deaths from malignant tumors. Thus, combating air pollution continues to be a crucial front in safeguarding human well-being.

Mortality rates from lung cancer are mainly related to atmospheric pollution, with higher mortality in the urban and industrially developed areas of China, especially in the eastern and northern areas. Eastern China has undergone rapid urbanization since the start of reform and opening-up. The exhaust gases from transport and pollutants from industrial combustion and coal power have resulted in high levels of pollution. In addition, because the northern region requires prolonged heating in the long winters and coal is the primary fuel for heating, the pollutants emitted from burning coal are a health risk. In fact, the northeastern region in China has a relatively higher risk of death from lung cancer compared to other regions, according to the Center for Disease Control. Therefore, reducing coal use remains an essential tool in the fight against air pollution. Enacting policies and making strategic investments to promote cleaner power generation and sustainable development would significantly reduce key sources of air pollution.

After 10 years' consecutive work on controlling air pollution, China has achieved extraordinary results in improving air quality. From 2013 to 2022, the PM 2.5 concentration has dropped by 57 percent, with a 92 percent reduction in the number of heavily polluted days. Recent



TONG JIAHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

research by Peking University has shown that the life expectancy of the Chinese population increased by 1.94 months and 3.87 months during the policy implementation of the first two national air pollution action plans, known as the "Ten Articles on Air Pollution", and the "War to Defend Blue Skies", respectively. However, pollution rebounded in 2023, mainly because of more frequent sandstorms in the spring due to the warming climate and higher operation rates of industrial plants. In apparent response to the rebound in pollution levels, new policies were released in late 2023.

In addition to the new national

action plan, the final draft of the comprehensive air pollution control action plan for the autumn and winter of 2023-24 in Beijing and surrounding areas and the Fenwei Plain was also released on Dec 25, designating each city a target for PM 2.5 concentrations and the allowed number of heavily polluted days between October and December. In January 2024, the Opinions on Comprehensive Advancement of Building A Beautiful China by the State Council further added a mid-term reduction target by 2027 and a longer-term reduction target by 2035 for PM 2.5 at 28 ug/m3 and 25 ug/m3, respectively, down from 29 ug/m3 in 2022.

China's ambitious journey necessitates sustained policy efforts and actions. Achieving cleaner air is not only a health imperative but also a critical component of China's wider strategy for decarbonization and sustainable development, balancing environmental needs with economic growth and public well-being.

*The author is a China policy analyst at the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. 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



Chen Rui, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Zoology, helps kids examine insects in Beijing (left) and Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region (top right) in recent years. **Right:** Chen's museum of insects displays his amber collection in his hometown of Sanming, Fujian province.



China-chic inspires warmup to France fashion week

PARIS/NANCHANG — In bright sunlight, a 3D-printed blue-and-white twin lotus graces a down jacket, evoking the elegance of fine blue-and-white porcelain.

It is a collaborative creation by tutors and students from the Textile and Garment Industrial Research Institute at Wuhan Textile University in Gongqingcheng city, Jiangxi province, where China's first down jacket was made.

The design has been made for the 2024 China-France Week, which is scheduled to take place in Paris this autumn.

"Our objective is to infuse additional traditional Chinese cultural elements into our creations, including the exquisite blue-and-white porcelain of Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province. By showing the wealth of ceramic culture and classical patterns to a global audience, we aim to breathe new life into ancient Chinese civilization through contemporary and stylish clothing," says Wang Qiuhan, head of the institute.

These "China-chic" down jackets blend modern design seamlessly with traditional elements. Designers make use of traditional textile techniques, embroidery, and decorations like Chinese buttons and collars, while integrating abstract patterns of ink, mountains and rivers with mosaics. The result is fashionable and distinctly Chinese.

"We are also promoting cooperation with the inheritors of Xiabu embroidery, a form of intangible cultural heritage, for our down jackets," Wang adds.

This year, China and France are celebrating the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties, and are also observing the occasion as the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism. This milestone year promises a plethora of bilateral cultural exchange activities.

With captivating images of waterfalls and ridges on its collar and belt, the down jacket resembles a Chinese landscape painting, and blends abstract ink patterns with the serene images of mountains and rivers. The institute made its debut on the fashion runway during the China-France Week in Paris last autumn, with 30 sumptuous down jackets, which took center stage and captivated the audience.

"The clothes were very pretty. It would be great to see more traditional Chinese elements in fashion, because it's a change from the type of fashion we have in France," one of the spectators says, recalling the show.

"The down jackets got attention from major European media and fashion magazines, sparking numerous order inquiries after their international debut. This highlights the attraction of traditional Chinese culture, with clothing serving as a powerful medium to share it with the world," Wang says.

"I really liked the show, especially the cut and fabric of the designs, and some of the elements from nature, such as birds and mountains, are classic Chinese concepts. The mixing and stitching of fabric materials was amazing," says Isabelle Lawson, executive director of the French International Art Salon.

One of the designers, 27-year-old Wang Ran, says that, in the 1970s, when down jackets made their way to China, they were humorously known as "bread suits" because of their coarse fabric, minimal down stuffing, unexciting styles and drab colors. Over the years, they have evolved to embrace lightness, fashion and variety.

"Nowadays, these China-chic down jackets are not only visual feasts, but also embody traditional culture," she adds.

High quality and superior design have invested made-in-China products with confidence and strength. The connection between China and France through the fashion industry is becoming increasingly close.

French designers are keen on collaborating with China, acknowledging its leading position globally in garment production and processing. With strengths in both design and cost-effectiveness, the fashion industry sees significant potential for cooperation between China and France.

"In recent years, China has made great progress in the fashion industry. We are very willing to expand cooperation with China," says Xavier Romatet, dean of the French Fashion Institute, a leading fashion institute in France.

More than a mere interest in insects

A researcher's unique outlook has enabled him to explore the world of bugs from a new perspective and share their 'superpowers' with the rest of us, **Wang Ru** reports.

Nature was Chen Rui's "childhood home". The 37-year-old researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Zoology was not able to talk until he was 4 years old because of the way his brain processes sensory information.

This made him "strange" in some people's minds. So, he didn't have friends who were around his age.

This led him to turn his attention to nonhuman things around him. He became enraptured by the world of insects.

"The happiest time of my childhood was in the farm fields," says Chen. "I squatted there, observing the activities of insects, including ants building their homes, grasshoppers nibbling grass and dragonflies flying low. I had so many questions about their activities and was full of curiosity about this world."

These experiences planted a seed in his heart. Decades later, he's a scholar who has engaged in life-science investigations in nearly 100 countries and regions on five continents.

He has found around 100 new species, living and extinct, many of which are named after him.

"I was a child who was 'cured' by nature," he says. "I wanted to grow up to share the power of nature with more young people and to popularize understanding of animals, including insects. I wanted to start classes to bring children to learn in the open air and experience the gifts nature endows."

These aspirations led him to recently publish the popular-science book, *Du Chong Ji* (Reading About Insects).

It's a continuation of a mission he began to act upon as a freshman in 2006, when he started an association for people interested in insects at Nanjing Agricultural University. He often arranged for members to visit the Zijin Mountain in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, to look for bugs. His organization eventually had nearly 600 members.

After graduating in 2010, Chen was admitted to the University of Chinese Academy of Sciences to complete his doctorate in zoology. In 2016, he was recruited by the Institute of Zoology of the CAS.

He now focuses on animal evolution. "Evolution is the source of civilization. It gives all living beings the superpowers they need to live on Earth," says Chen.

He has visited the Amazon rainforest several times.

"Chinese scientists hadn't been there often, and we didn't really understand the place. So, we are traveling there to try to discover new species, and to collect more data and information," says Chen.

Amazon ants

One impressive insect variety he observed in the tropical, biodiverse area were leaf-cutter ants, a species that shows impressive cooperation and farming abilities.

He explains that the ants tear leaves into small, easily movable pieces and carry them back to their colonies to fertilize mushrooms that they, in turn, eat.

Chen spent three days observing one nest in the Amazon several years ago and was amazed by their close coordination.

He observed that the ants are divided into different groups that are respectively responsible for cutting leaves, transporting harvested pieces, clearing obstacles out of the way, guarding the colony, taking care of the young and planting mushrooms.

"Several million ants can live in one nest, but their activities are very orderly," says Chen.

To ensure the freshness of the harvested foliage, leaf-cutter ants often find the shortest routes from the source to their nests. When they move leaves from different places to their nests, it seems in some ways similar to human



**Top:** Chen with a red panda in Pu'er, Yunnan province. **Middle:** Leaf-cutter ants that impressed Chen when he visited the Amazon rainforest. **Above:** Chen's shrimp in amber is the only example discovered of a piece of amber containing a shrimp and heralds the discovery of a previously unknown species.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

logistical systems, Chen says.

He points out that ants planted mushrooms tens of millions of years before humans did, creating one of the oldest agricultural systems on the planet.

And Chen also points out that leaf-cutter ants are not the only species to possess "magical" abilities. All insects have such "superpowers", he says.

"Half of the world's living beings are insects," says Chen.

"Humans only have an evolutionary history of 6 million years, but insects have been around several hundred million years, which means they experienced competition for incredibly long periods but haven't been eliminated.

"Insects were the earliest creatures that could fly and feed themselves by farming. They have survived three mass extinctions. No other living things can claim such great achievements."

He hopes that people will learn and take inspiration from insect "superpowers" and apply it to their own lives.

"If we humans believe we are the smartest beings in the world, we may be constrained by this preconception. If we are instead humble and regard all other beings as our teachers, we can gain boundless wisdom," Chen says.

"We should actually see ourselves as equals with other species and believe this is a great world."

This belief has also led Chen to upload over 350 videos about animals, which have gained over 350,000 followers on the short-video platform, Douyin.

He has also taken youngsters to observe insects in the wild.

"Actually, insects are the best playmates for young people. For example, we get them to think about how mosquitoes can stand upside down on the ceiling and why humans can't," Chen says.

"They discover the charm of nature and scientific knowledge from such observations, and find new curiosity about this world."

Beijing primary school student Wang Ruocan participated in a camp Chen organized in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in 2021.

"It was a marvelous journey during which I learned a lot of new things about insects," she says.

Frozen in time

Time is another important metric for evolution. This has prompted Chen to collect amber, which often contains samples of life forms from ancient eras.

One of his prized pieces is a 22 million-year-old chunk that contains a shrimp, which he bought in Mexico around 2016.

"At first, it looked like it was just a black stone, but after I polished it, the amber appeared. I felt like I'd just won a 100 million yuan (\$13.9 million) lottery prize," Chen recalls.

It's the only amber specimen to be discovered with a real shrimp and heralds the finding of a previously unknown species.

Chen and his colleagues published the results of their research about the piece of amber in the academic journal, *Science Bulletin*, in 2021.

It is particularly precious since the shrimp had to be out of the water and somehow end up trapped in resin in order to be preserved in the amber, which is a very rare scenario, Chen says.

He has collected a lot of amber and put it on display in an insect museum in his hometown of Sanming, Fujian province.

"Amber is like a time capsule left by nature, and offers the only three-dimensional historical images of many ancient insects. It solidifies moments that have occurred on Earth. Through them, we can catch a glimpse of what has happened on this planet," says Chen.

"This is particularly fascinating."

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XINHUA

## LIFE

## A new way to key into classical music

Luminary pianist Lang Lang notes how a recently released app could connect the genre with ordinary listeners, **Fang Aiqing** reports.

If Frederic Chopin's music can be described as an apple pie with whipped cream on top, then Franz Liszt's would taste spicy, Johann Sebastian Bach's could be likened to fine bread, and that of Ludwig van Beethoven would be stewed pork knuckle. Spanish seafood paella or Russian borscht would also be great.

That is the way pianist Lang Lang introduced classical composers he appreciates to an audience of all ages and walks of life in Beijing on Jan 25.

Have a balanced diet and be open to every type of music, suggests the musician, who is a household name in China.

The 41-year-old has been keenly promoting classical music to a wider audience in recent years. He believes the diverse genre can be enjoyed in multiple ways, either as background music at work or on a subway trip, as a way of cheering up when feeling gloomy, or an intensive auditory and visual feast in concert halls.

Since he was speaking to a crowd of laypeople, Lang avoided using technical vocabulary but answered the abstract question — how he expresses music that's so rigorous in its structure in his own style — with a concrete and visual explanation. That is, by analyzing the composers' handwritten scores.

For example, he says that Beethoven composed in an authoritative way, delineating things clearly in detail like a series of laws to follow. But people can also feel what he wanted when they see his wild scribbles jotted down for a presto segment.

Bach, however, would leave the grace notes for players themselves to decide as they saw fit, embellishing his pieces on the basis of the structural framework he built.

In general, classical music is about accuracy and delicacy, but players still have to pay attention to make sure they are not too stiff, Lang says.

He made these comments while speaking at a "Today at Apple" session at the Apple Store in Beijing's Sanlitun as an artist ambassador for Apple Music Classical, a stand-alone app designed specially for the genre, which launched its Chinese version on Jan 24.

Among the app's library of more than 5 million songs are pieces by modern Chinese composers, including Nie Er (1912-35), who composed the Chinese national anthem, *March of the Volunteers*; Huang Zi (1904-38), who wrote the patriotic song, *Kang Di Ge* (Song of Fighting Against the Enemy); and Xian Xinghai (1905-45), who composed *Yellow River Cantata*.

Contemporary Chinese composers Tan Dun and Zhao Jiping, who are particularly known for their film and TV series soundtracks, also have music available through the app.



**Top:** Pianist Lang Lang plays in front of a crowd of classical music enthusiasts in Beijing on Jan 25. **Above left:** Young audience members listen attentively to the musician, as he shares his views about classical music and gives tips on appreciating the genre. **Above right:** Lang particularly emphasizes the importance of cultivating an interest in listening to and learning classical music for young piano players.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

We welcome more attention to classical music, which also includes Chinese music and both modern and ancient pieces. It's a good thing that world music from different times, styles and cultural backgrounds will be included (in the app)."

Lang Lang, pianist

Lang says any music passed down through the ages and welcomed by generations can be called "classical", and this category is by no means as far removed from daily life as some imagine.

"We welcome more attention to classical music, which also includes Chinese music and both modern

and ancient pieces. It's a good thing that world music from different times, styles and cultural backgrounds will be included (in the app)," he tells China Daily.

The pianist particularly stresses the demanding sound quality required to convey the plentiful details in classical music — which

coincides with Apple's pursuit of expanding the application of its Spatial Audio technology support provided by Dolby Atmos — and the benefit of promoting music appreciation and education, as well as generating more exposure for emerging musicians.

Lang sees the launch of a dedicat-

ed streaming platform like Apple Music Classical as a win-win opportunity for both the company and listeners.

It's also worth mentioning that digital technology and streaming platforms have lowered the cost for ordinary people to enjoy quality classical music, he adds.

"Everything we do comes down to our deep love for music," says Oliver Schusser, global head of Apple Music. "Classical is so foundational to music of all genres. ... I am excited to make it available to even more listeners all around the world today."

Apple Music subscribers can download the app as part of their existing subscriptions at no additional cost.

Apart from Lang, the China NCPA Orchestra — the resident orchestra of the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing — and the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra have become partner organizations with the streaming platform, through which exclusive content will be made available.

However, live shows are truly irreplaceable to the classical genre.

"Don't stop coming to concerts after you get this app. Or else we (musicians) will be crying in the bathroom," Lang says, jokingly.

The pianist points to his performance of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* as a sign of change — that is, as a moment when he started to put more emphasis on the depth of his music.

"It's not that I don't continue to polish my skills anymore," he says, adding that at a certain point, there was no longer a need to prove his skill to the audience.

"It's definitely not my goal to play Rachmaninoff's third piano concerto (*Piano Concerto No 3 in D Minor, Op 30*) faster at the age of 50," he says.

Now, he's turning his attention to Beethoven's later sonatas, which arouse his desire to explore the philosophy of the music, French pieces that he wants to present with inner maturity, and some new compositions he has never tried before.

On March 1, he plans to release his new album, *Lang Lang — Saint-Saens*, which focuses on the work of French composers, including Charles Camille Saint-Saens, Maurice Ravel, Gabriel Faure and female French composers who are often neglected. He plays alongside his wife, Gina Alice Redlinger, on some of the pieces.

"It's my first time recording French music, which is multilayered in terms of sound and more sentimental. I hope this album with its feeling of French perfume will bring the audience fresh experiences," he says.

"As I grow older, experience more, and see a lot of ups and downs, it becomes easier for me to calm down, eliminate external interference and simply focus on things that I think I should do. No matter what's happening or what mood I'm in, as long as I sit down at the piano, I'm concentrating."

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## French director hails 20 years of ties with Chinese operas

PARIS — French theater director Patrick Sommier is devoted to passing on the true meaning of Chinese operas which, according to him, are an assembly of all art forms, to the French public.

On the occasion of the celebration of the 40th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France in 2004, Sommier was invited to collaborate on a joint project with the Beijing Vocational College of Opera and Arts to take Peking Opera to France.

Sommier says that when he arrived in China, like many other Europeans, he had plenty of clichés about Chinese opera, "magnificent costumes, multicolored makeup, and extraordinary acrobatic movements".

The beauty of Peking Opera quickly captured his heart, he says.

Recalling his first collaboration with the BVCOA, Sommier says he was impressed by the vigor of the actors behind the makeup and costumes, and the characters of incredible strength from the Chinese classics that reminded him of Greek tragedies.

He was also touched by the Chinese professors who passed their know-



**Left:** French theater director Patrick Sommier (left) receives a Great Wall Friendship Award from a representative of the Beijing government in 2010. **Right:** Sommier poses with members of a visiting troupe of the Beijing Vocational College of Opera and Arts in front of a theater in Bobigny, France, in 2010. PHOTOS BY XINHUA

how to their students by acting with them, which is different to the way things are done in the French theater world, he adds.

"In China, opera is an art requiring lifelong devotion and actors are the embodiment of the opera."

Sommier began delving into different performance forms and advocated for introducing traditional Chinese operas to the French audience.

Following his suggestion, the BVCOA staged a series of innovative performances in 2005, the first half featuring professors and students collaborating onstage without makeup or costumes, the second half showcasing students performing classics like *Farewell My Concubine* in a traditional manner.

The performances drew over 22,000 spectators, and more than 7,000 French students participated



in the workshops on Chinese opera makeup and body gestures.

Sommier expresses his hope that the audience truly understand the beauty of Peking Opera instead of just watching it with a "tourist gaze", focusing on the "exoticism" of the art.

"Theater is not a product to consume but a real cultural meeting and an approach toward what we do not know. Apart from pleasure, it

should intrigue people to make a bit of effort to understand unfamiliar things."

In 2010, Sommier extended his cooperation with the BVCOA and brought the newly created version of the Chinese classic *The Water Margin* to the stage.

Over the years, he has continued to discover and promote different Chinese operas. In the southeastern city of Quanzhou in Fujian province,

he was fascinated by Liyuan Opera, which he says was the best he'd ever seen.

In 2014, on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties, Sommier took Liyuan Opera to Paris and many other European cities on tour.

Last year, he published his book, *Ximi* (Theater Enthusiast), dedicating a significant portion of it to recounting his experiences with Chinese operas.

Noting that "theater constitutes another step" toward Chinese culture and that "the image of China is underrepresented in the world", he says, "the differences between Chinese operas and French theater enrich the public's view and thus enrich the image of a country".

The year 2024 marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and France. It's also the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism. Numerous bilateral cultural events, including theater shows, are scheduled.

Having served as a cultural courier between both countries for two decades, Sommier hopes that the French and Chinese will impress each other with high-quality shows.

XINHUA

CULTURE

# London wowed by ancient, heroic dance

Performers take 300-year-old warriors' dance to Europe for the first time as part of UK's Chinese New Year festivities, **Zheng Wanyin** and **Wang Linyan** report in London.

**Main photo and below:** Performances of Puning Yingge dance feature not only electrifying actions but colorful and exciting costumes. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY, YU GUO / FOR CHINA DAILY

“The performance is electrifying. I feel like it has woken up everybody in the arcade.”

**Trupti Shah**, commercial director of Burlington Arcade

For more than a month, Chen Jinxiang, a villager from Puning, a city in South China's Guangdong province, has been living a life like the fictional Clark Kent: working by day — in this case as the owner of an online clothes shop — and becoming a hero when needed.

But Chen is no superhero and adopts his hero persona for entertainment, along with other dancers in his troupe who practice traditional Chinese Puning Yingge folk dance for an upcoming trip to London, UK.

The dance, a national intangible cultural heritage in China, dates back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and is considered a dance of heroic warriors due to its close association with the classic novel about Chinese heroism called *Water Margin*.

Through its combination of opera, acrobatic dance, and martial arts, it retells the literature stories of good suppressing evil.

Performers wear opera-style facial makeup in diverse colors and patterns that reveal the personalities of the characters they are portraying. And with a pair of short batons in hand, they jump, swing, and hit the sticks together while walking and dancing, all to the resounding beat of drums, gongs, and shouts.

Since January, Chen and 15 other selected dancers have been working by day and training by night for a series of performances at landmarks in London. It is the first time the dance has been seen in person anywhere in Europe.

All 16 of the performers taking part in the UK tour hail from Nanshan Yingge dance team, one of the most exceptional Yingge dance troupes in China. Nanshan is a village in Puning.

On Feb 10, the squad, under the direction of the Guangdong Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism with support from the Cultural Section of China's Embassy in the UK, took center stage at London's Burlington Arcade, to mark the start of the Year of the Drag-

on. The performance was part of a series of activities hosted by the shopping gallery to herald Spring Festival.

On the day, as the spectacle unfolds in the long hallway, crowds flock to see what is happening, holding mobile phones aloft to film and take photos of the excitement and immersing themselves in the thundering sound and explosion of color.

“The performance is electrifying. I feel like it has woken up everybody in the arcade,” says Trupti Shah, Burlington Arcade's commercial director.

**Worth the wait**

Mark Lord, the arcade's head beadle, jokes that Europe has patiently waited to catch its first glimpse of the Puning Yingge dance.

“We've waited more than 300 years for the dance troupe to leave China and come and perform in Europe,” he says. “I have to say, it was well worth the wait. It has been fantastic.”

Because the gestures, moves and steps of the dance are designed to evoke the fighting spirit of heroes, it is seen as a symbol of good prevailing over evil and of bringing peace, making it a popular dance at traditional Chinese festivals, says Chen Laifa, a nationally recognized inheritor of Puning Yingge dance, who is also the leader and trainer of Nanshan Yingge dance team.

“We would like to convey this spirit to the British people, and at the same time, promote our own culture,” he says.

The 68-year-old is a ninth-generation inheritor of the dance, who has been dedicated to performing and promoting it ever since he joined the team aged 18.

On Feb 11, the warrior dance amazed London again as it was performed at a Chinese New Year parade and a grand celebration in Trafalgar Square at the invitation of the London Chinatown Chinese Association. The New Year celebration in the prestigious square in

the UK capital is said to be the largest such event outside Asia, with more than 700,000 people in attendance.

Maintaining such a powerful cultural heritage requires efforts from every generation and, during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Nanshan Yingge team formed an inheritance custom in which the craft would be passed on from fathers to sons, and from masters to apprentices, according to the local government of Puning.

Chen Laifa, however, says the traditional practice has, in recent years, restricted the preservation of the dance. “How can we carry forward the heritage, if there are not enough people proficient in the skills,” he says.

The folk dance is demanding with fast-paced moves. “As the dance can be physically consuming, you can't keep dancing as you get older. There is an age limit,” reveals Chen Jinxiang, who started learning the dance when he was 5 years old.

At 30, he is the oldest among the London squad and considered “old” for a Yingge dancer, with most of the visiting team aged between 25 and 28.

Participation from young dancers is welcomed. Since 2017, Chen Laifa has assisted Nanshan Primary School in setting up and running a voluntary Yingge dance-learning program, and gifted students are included in his team. While the delegation to London performed in the UK on Feb 11, the junior troupe, which has grown into qualified dancers, has also taken over in downtown Puning.

Chen Laifa says Nanshan Yingge troupe has also taken the bold move this year of including more female performers, finally abandoning the ancient, unbending male-only rule.

The most important thing dancers need is the commitment to put effort into learning and performing the dance, and to bring heartfelt passion to the dance, Chen says.

“If you love it, you can persist in doing it. If you don't, you can't hold on to it,” he says.

Just like Chen Jinxiang, many members of the dance team are not full-time performers but ordinary villagers who make their living by doing a wide range of jobs, including car detailing and managing small businesses, Chen Laifa says.

He notes that it is their genuine affection for the timeless tradition that makes them who they are today.

Hard work and dedication has been keeping Puning Yingge dance vibrant in China for centuries, and now the troupe's efforts have captivated overseas audiences. As the dancers take their final bow at Burlington Arcade and in Trafalgar Square, enthusiastic applause from the audiences echoes throughout the space.

“Having the opportunity to perform in London is a testament to not just the charm of Chinese traditional culture, but also the enduring power of cultural exchanges,” says Wu Chen, chief of the intangible cultural heritage section of the Guangdong Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism.

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**Clockwise from top left:** A dancer from Nanshan Yingge dance team and employees at Burlington Arcade pose for a group photo on Feb 10 at the famous shopping center in London. ZHENG WANYIN / CHINA DAILY; Burlington Arcade has been an iconic London landmark since 1819. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY; Spectators take photos with Puning Yingge dancers during the Chinese New Year parade in central London on Feb 11. YU GUO / FOR CHINA DAILY

