

At odds over truce

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Farmers' fury



Greek farmers stand on tractors to protest rising fuel and production costs near the parliament building in Athens, the capital of Greece, on Tuesday. Thousands of farmers, beekeepers and livestock breeders joined the protest, voicing grievances at similar demonstrations across Europe. LOUISA GOULIAMAKI / REUTERS

Beijing, Paris agree to advance cooperation

Increase in direct flights, more high-level exchanges expected

By ZHANG YUNBI zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

Analysts said that China-France ties, which turned 60 on Jan 27, have made a new and productive start in the Chinese New Year, as Beijing and Paris agreed at their latest talks to increase direct flights between the two nations and conduct more high-level exchanges in 2024.

Another major highlight is the two sides' plan to deepen cooperation on major global issues and promote Beijing's ties with the European Union, observers added.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who is also director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, co-chaired the 25th China-France Strategic Dialogue with Emmanuel Bonne, diplomatic counselor to French President Emmanuel Macron, in Paris on Tuesday.

In addition to increasing direct flights, the two sides also agreed to strengthen cooperation in a long list of areas such as climate change,

biodiversity, agricultural and food products, clean energy, nuclear energy, artificial intelligence and aerospace.

Last year, bilateral trade reached \$78.936 billion. As 2024 is the China-France Year of Culture and Tourism, the two sides agreed to organize hundreds of cultural exchange activities throughout the year.

Also on Tuesday, Macron met with Wang in Paris and expressed his good wishes to the Chinese people in the Year of the Dragon.

Macron recalled his successful visit to China last year, and said that he looks forward to working with China to prepare for high-level exchanges this year.

Paris has consistently pursued the one-China policy and this position is clear and unequivocal, he added.

Wang hailed the strong mutual trust and sincere friendship of the two heads of state and their role in leading bilateral strategic cooperation.

China has been the No 1 Asian country investing and creating jobs in France for three consecutive years. Wang said that China will con-

tinue to open its market to other countries including France, and he expressed the hope that France will also create a fair and just business environment for Chinese enterprises.

At the high-level dialogue between Wang and Bonne, key agenda items included China-EU ties and global governance.

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said on Wednesday that China and France agreed to "act as a force of stability for China-Europe relations and for today's world".

"As major countries, permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and important forces in a multipolar world, China and France share similar positions on major issues," Mao added.

Zhang Ji, professor and deputy dean of Fudan University's School of International Relations and Public Affairs in Shanghai, said, "The strategic coordination and cooperation between Beijing and Paris is indispensable for shaping the balanced growth of relations among major countries in the world."

"China-France cooperation is

also greatly needed to help resolve regional hotspot issues, as both nations subscribe to multilateralism, political settlement, balance and fairness," he added.

Wang told Bonne that the two countries should "respond more effectively to global challenges and more positively to the expectations of the international community".

Bonne said Paris is willing to join hands with Beijing to avoid confrontation between major countries, prevent bloc confrontation and improve global governance.

On China-EU ties, Wang said Beijing supports Europe in strengthening its strategic autonomy and taking its future and destiny into its own hands. Meanwhile, Bonne said France stands for Europe's strategic autonomy and supports the EU and China further honoring the definition of their partnership and strengthening effective cooperation.

"China-EU ties have shown signs of relief and improvement over the past year," said Liu Zuokui, deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of European Studies.

"Wang's Europe trip, especially to France, will help reduce tension and misunderstanding brought by attempts to disengage China, hype risks and politicize China-EU cooperation," he added.

France was the third and last stop of Wang's Europe trip at the beginning of the Chinese New Year. He also traveled to Germany to attend the 60th Munich Security Conference, which was followed by a visit to Spain.

More women inspired by movie to practice boxing

By ZHAO YIMENG zhaoyimeng@chinadaily.com.cn

A new film featuring an overweight woman who regains her self-esteem after taking up boxing has sparked a wave of interest in the sport all over the country, especially among women.

In the film *YOLO*, short for You Only Live Once, protagonist Du Leying achieves fitness and rebuilds her confidence by taking up boxing. Off screen, Jia Ling, the director of the film who also played the role of Du, made headlines by losing about 50 kilograms over the course of filming.

YOLO topped China's box office during the Spring Festival holiday and has so far grossed over 3 billion yuan (\$420 million), with both Du's and Jia's physical and psychological transformation trending on social media platforms.

Since the movie premiered on Feb 10, online searches related to "boxing" have increased 388.4 percent year-on-year, and the major review platform Dianping saw a 337.53 percent increase in comments, data from e-commerce platform Meituan shows.

Keyword searches for "adult boxing", "boxing experience course" and "girls' boxing" have spiked in cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen in Guangdong province, Chengdu in Sichuan province, and Hangzhou in Zhejiang province.

Meituan data shows that women accounted for 67 percent of those searches on its platform.

Qu Zhongyuan, head of a Hurricane Fight Club boxing gym branch in Beijing's Chaoyang district, said the number of women coming to his gym wanting to learn boxing has soared lately.

"Most of them have been inspired by Jia. They have a strong desire to lose weight," Qu said. "Boxing stands out as the fastest calorie-burning exercise among all sports."

The 35-year-old coach started to learn boxing when he was 9, and has worked in the field for 11 years. He said that although more women

have been seeking his advice about the sport thanks to the movie, women outnumbered men at his gym even before the film premiered.

Since his gym opened in 2022, women have accounted for about 60 percent of his boxing students.

"Most of these women learn boxing for self-defense or stress relief," Qu said, adding that normally, the initial goals are met after training for more than a year.

"One of the reasons boxing is so popular among women is that it helps get rid of pent-up stress through all that punching, and it aligns with the human urge to vent frustration through physical activity," he said.

Kong Li, ages 7, has been learning to box for about half a year. She pesters her parents to get her to the boxing gym on time and sometimes practices at home with her father.

"She usually shouts as she punches, and I can feel her sense of power," said her father, Kong Dejian, a lecturer at China University of Political Science and Law.

Kong said that although he knows about the film, it is not the reason he wanted his daughter to try the sport. In reality, boxing training is primarily driven by interest rather than inspirational stories.

"I hope that doing the exercises will make her healthy while teaching her to protect herself if she encounters danger," he said.

Though the intense training comes with the risk of acute injuries, Kong said he is not unduly worried, as professional coaches can take good care of the trainees.

"Even if she does get injured, it's a normal process that raises a child's awareness about the need to bear risks," Kong said.

Beijing resident Guo Xiaojun took up boxing in 2022 when she adopted a comprehensive fitness plan that included aerobic exercise.

The 30-year-old preschool teacher registered for boxing courses with a professional coach at the gymnasium where she regularly works out.

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A poster for the film *YOLO* shows protagonist Du Leying practicing boxing moves. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Gulf region offers model for sustainable development

This year, it is clear that the Gulf Cooperation Council is undergoing a tech revolution, focusing on quantum and green technologies. This strategy is not just changing the region's economy; it is also setting a new standard for how regions can succeed in the face of global challenges.

By investing in these innovative technologies, the Gulf Cooperation Council is creating a future filled with hope and creativity.

Take, for example, the United Arab Emirates' launch of the Quantum Computing Research Group at the Technology Innovation Institute in Abu Dhabi. The aim is to develop quantum computing for things like cryptography and secure communication. Simi-

WORLD WATCH By Gokhan Erel

larly, Saudi Arabia's investment in NEOM, a \$500 billion megacity project, shows its dedication to green technology, with plans for a city powered by renewable energy and zero carbon emissions.

The Gulf Cooperation Council's focus on these technologies shows that the countries are serious about changing their economies. In addition to the use of new technology, this is also about leading a shift toward technological innovation and sustainability, putting countries in the region at the forefront

of global leadership in this area. The emphasis on quantum computing's potential to transform industries and the move toward green technology are more than strategic decisions. They are also a commitment to tackle global challenges head-on, and reflect a vision for a sustainable future marked by major advancements and a strong commitment to progress and taking care of the environment.

Additionally, the region has hosted a number of conferences, like the annual Green Tech Forum in Dubai, at which experts from around the world come together to talk about renewable energy, waste management, and making cities more sustainable. These events are great for sharing knowledge and building partnerships that help spread green technologies throughout the region.

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INSIDE EU's policy should avoid lose-lose trap Comment, page 12 www.chinadailyglobal.com A member of ANN China Daily Global @2024 All Rights Reserved Newsstand prices: US \$1 Canada CSI: UK 1.6 EU 1€ Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling Asia Pacific: Thailand 120 thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat; Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

PET HOTELS DO ROARING HOLIDAY TRADE

Boarding cats and dogs grows in popularity with absent owners

By YANG FEIYUE yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

The first thing Lu Yan did after returning to Beijing over the weekend from a two-week Spring Festival visit to her hometown, was to collect her "furry baby" and take the feline back to her apartment.

She had placed her 3-year-old cat, a British shorthair breed with white and gray fur, in a pet hotel before she left for Zibo in East China's Shandong province.

"Most of the time, I arrange pet boarding for my cat if I have to leave

in-depth

Beijing for long business trips or vacations," said Lu, who works at a publishing house.

If she has to leave Beijing for only a few days, she has someone come to her place at least twice a day to check on her feline friend. "It's less of a hassle this way, but for any absence longer than that I will definitely opt for a boarding service," Lu said.

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PAGE TWO

From page 1

She spent about 2,000 yuan (\$278) during Spring Festival to have her cat — named “Seventeen” after Lu’s birth date — well taken care of while she was away. Lu was pleased that there was someone at the pet hotel all the time to monitor the cat’s condition, ensure it was safe, and play with it so it wouldn’t get bored.

Lu has a membership with the company that runs the hotel and always books her cat a bigger room intended for two felines, which costs twice as much as a single room, so her pet has more space.

She was concerned the cat would be lonely on its own at home, and wouldn’t receive speedy medical attention if it became sick.

Lu, aged in her 40s, adopted the feline for company in 2021 when pandemic control measures meant people’s movements were restricted.

Spring Festival is a tricky time for pet owners like Lu who must find someone they trust to take care of their animals.

The number of pets in China was projected to increase to nearly 200 million in 2023, with dogs, cats and aquarium pets the most popular, according to the 2023 China Pet Industry Annual Report jointly released by the market researcher Euromonitor International and the Asia Pet Alliance.

The pet market was estimated to reach nearly 250 billion yuan in the same year, with pet services and related sectors to keep growing, the report said.

Filling the kitty

Compared to pets like lizards and fish, which can survive in smaller spaces and require minimal daily interaction, cats and dogs are more active and need care, companionship and room to exercise, all of which have contributed to the rapid rise in pet care services.

Animal boarding services are in strong demand as more pet owners are willing to dig deep into their pockets for a quality environment for their furry companions.

According to corporate information provider Qichacha, more than 2,000 pet boarding businesses have opened in the past three years.

Some pet services also offer to monitor the health status of animals and allow them to roam and exercise daily, which eases the anxiety of some overly protective owners.

Wang Can, who heads operations at the Maotuo Hotel in Fangzhuang neighborhood, Fengtai district, Beijing, said their pet accommodation was fully booked three months before Spring Festival.

Her company has five venues exclusively for cats. The Fangzhuang one has 29 rooms of three different sizes, with daily accommodation prices for one cat ranging from 39 to 179 yuan.

“We are located in a quiet neighborhood away from the street chaos, and all of the rooms are separate and offer wooden furniture and DOAS (dedicated outdoor air systems),” Wang said, admit-

ting that their target clients are not penny-pinchers.

The other four facilities, located in busy business hubs or densely populated residential areas, were also fully booked during Spring Festival.

“Most customers have signed up for membership and often seek our services when they have to leave home,” Wang said.

“They can only stand to leave their cats alone for two to three days, and consider them in danger if it gets any longer,” she added.

Many owners have a deep emotional attachment to their pets and some check around the clock with the hotel on their cat’s welfare, Wang said.

In addition to regularly

feeding the felines, giving them water and cleaning up their cat litter, employees play with them four times a day. If the feline has a health emergency, hotel staff must respond within 20 minutes, even if it’s in the middle of the night.

Pet owners can also use their smartphones to view their pets in the hotel and can make requests for additional snacks and special dietary requirements, Wang said.

The hotel has more than 1,000 members, most of whom were born in the 1980s and 1990s.

Wang stressed that the cats must have all the necessary vaccination certificates, be in good health, and recently dewormed to be accept-

ed at their pet hotels. “This is to cut the risks of it (the pet) getting sick,” Wang said.

House calls

For customers who cannot book a room, Maotuo Hotel also offers house calls to check on pets. On one day during Spring Festival, they received more than 30 house call requests.

“We send the clients a message the moment we set out for their home and record everything from the moment we open the door,” Wang said.

The service includes opening the windows for fresh air, cleaning the cat’s living space as well as a health report about the cat’s condition.

“We also have an AR (augmented reality) service if a client’s home doesn’t have a surveillance camera so real-time communications can be effectively conducted,” Wang said, adding that a main objective is to ensure the safety of the customer’s home.

The cost of pet boarding services in big cities ranges from tens of yuan to more than 100 yuan a day, depending on factors such as room quality, the size of the pet and additional services.

Prices usually increase by around 50 percent during major holidays such as Spring Festival, said Kong Lingqi, who runs a pet grooming business in Tongzhou district in eastern Beijing.

“We received phone inquiries

about boarding or home services a month before Spring Festival,” Kong said.

Most of the inquirers were regular customers of Kong’s shop.

Hong Tao, vice chairman of the China Consumer Economics Society, said that pet-related consumption is a modern consumer phenomenon. The strong demand for pet boarding during Spring Festival is inevitable and businesses incur costs to provide services and must set prices based on supply and demand.

Regulations needed

The pet industry needs to be further regulated and establish industry standards to promote its sustainable development, Hong said. Related businesses also need to keep improving the quality of services to reflect the prices they charge, he said.

Wang Jiankun, a senior partner at Shanghai Hush Law Firm, said the pet boarding business is a civil contractual relationship between pet owners and caretakers.

Pet caretakers, as providers of the boarding services, should fulfill their obligations of proper care and custody.

He said that as consumers, pet owners should carefully select boarding services with proper qualifications that can provide suitable living spaces and facilities.

It’s advisable to sign a written agreement, specifying responsibility for any problems during the boarding period, Wang added. In the event of an accident, compensation should be made according to the agreement.

For many migrant workers in big cities, taking their pets home for the Chinese New Year is often not an option due to public transportation restrictions on animals.

Even when pet transportation services are available, there is also the possibility of accidents, said Dong Wei, a senior veterinarian at a pet clinic in Beijing’s Haidian district.

“This is especially true for cats, which are generally timid and are very likely to suffer a stressful response,” Dong said.

She recommended that owners who have to leave home for a long period board their pets.

“They can be under observation, so any diseases can be detected and intervention done in time,” Dong said.

“However, the pets must be properly vaccinated and have active antibodies for common diseases before they are put in a communal living environment,” she added.

For owners who have to leave their pets at home, Dong suggested they set up a surveillance camera to monitor their behavior and deal with any emergency.

“Enough space should be available for them at home, and sufficient food and water should be prepared and within the pet’s reach, along with some toys,” she said.

House calls by friends or professional care should be arranged, especially for dogs, at least twice a day, Dong added.



A cat sits beside a photo frame at a pet boarding house in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Pets: Owners willing to spend big to keep companions in comfort



A view of the cat boarding rooms at Maotuo Hotel in Fangzhuang, Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

feeding the felines, giving them water and cleaning up their cat litter, employees play with them four times a day. If the feline has a health emergency, hotel staff must respond within 20 minutes, even if it’s in the middle of the night.

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Lu spent 2,000 yuan (\$278) to board her cat, pictured, over the holiday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Lu Yan’s cat is seen wearing a tiger-shaped hat after a bath. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Above: A caretaker at a pet hotel ties a red scarf on a puppy on Feb 9. YANG HUAFENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE
Left: Pet caretaker Gan Shimeng (right) is given cats’ information on Feb 3 in Liangjiang New Area in Chongqing. ZHOU YI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

TOP NEWS

Support for Assange

People gather outside the High Court in London, the United Kingdom, on Tuesday to protest against the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to the United States. The High Court is hearing Assange's appeal against his extradition to the US to face espionage charges.

XINHUA



More foreign firms choose Chinese courts for IP cases

Protection for tech-related patents boosts global standing, official says

By CAO YIN

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More foreign enterprises have chosen Chinese courts to settle their patent and technology-related disputes, due to the equal protection offered to them in the handling of such cases, an official with China's top court said.

In 2023, 421 cases involving foreign litigants were filed with the Intellectual Property Court of the Supreme People's Court, said He Zhonglin, first deputy chief judge of the IP Court, in an exclusive interview with China Daily. That was 267 more than in 2019, the year the IP court was established, he added.

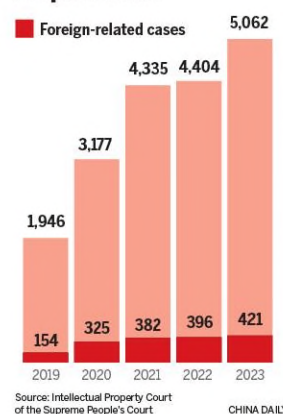
"The growth means market players have attached great importance to technology and IP rights as part of their core competitiveness, with foreign investors optimistic about the dynamic Chinese market," he said.

"It also indicates that Chinese courts are becoming one of the preferred venues for resolving international IP litigation."

The IP Court, which opened in January 2019, was established mainly to handle civil and administrative appeals related to invention patents, new varieties of plants, integrated circuits, technical secrets, computer software and monopolies.

Since the court's establishment, litigants dissatisfied with rulings made by intermediate courts at the city or prefecture level, or by other specialized IP courts, have been allowed to appeal directly to

Cases filed with the IP Court of Supreme People's Court



Source: Intellectual Property Court of the Supreme People's Court

CHINA DAILY

the national-level IP Court instead of first appealing to provincial high courts.

The streamlined appeal process has helped prevent inconsistencies and improved the efficiency and quality of difficult technical and patent hearings, according to He.

Although the number of cases has soared, the court continues to provide equal protection to all litigants, regardless of whether they are domestic or foreign, State-owned or private, inventors or scientific research institutions, he said.

In November 2021, for example, the IP Court supported a litigant from Switzerland, increasing com-

penation for the foreign patent holder from 1 million yuan (\$139,000) to 20 million yuan.

The case dated back to 2017, when Synthes, a Swiss company engaged in the development, production and sale of instruments and biomaterials for the fixation, repair and reconstruction of human bones and soft tissue, found that Double Medical, a leading Chinese enterprise for orthopedic implants, infringed on its invention patent on a device to treat femoral fractures.

Synthes first sued Double Medical in Changsha Intermediate People's Court in Hunan province, requesting compensation of 20 million yuan. In 2019, the court acknowledged Double Medical's infringement, but only required the company to pay Synthes 1 million yuan.

Both sides were unsatisfied with the decision, so they appealed to the IP Court.

During the second trial, the two parties disagreed on the method for calculating the infringement profits, but when the IP Court asked Double Medical to provide evidence, it refused to submit its accounting books or all sales data related to the device.

In the end, the court deemed that the Chinese company's infringement profits had exceeded 20 million yuan, based on the evidence provided by the Swiss company, and it fully supported the foreign party's claim for compensation.

In another medical device patent case, the IP Court sided with a

Chinese enterprise, "showing our judicial protection is equal for every technological innovator, no matter where he or she comes from," He said.

In 2016, a subsidiary of Echo-sens, a French company dedicated to liver health, took Wuxi Hisky Medical Technologies to Beijing Intellectual Property Court, claiming that a noninvasive liver fibrosis diagnostic instrument produced by the Chinese enterprise infringed on its patent.

Unsatisfied with the Beijing court's verdict in favor of the French party, the Chinese company appealed to the IP Court.

The high-tech medical equipment was the result of more than a decade of cooperation between the Chinese company and Tsinghua University, and public information showed that it has become a mainstream tool for liver health screening, disease diagnosis and treatment evaluation around the world.

"We fully compared and deeply studied the technology used in the Chinese instrument and the technology involved in the French patent, determining that the two were different, so we dismissed the claim of the French party," He said.

The deputy chief judge pointed out that both cases clearly show the equal protection offered to domestic as well as foreign litigants.

"They've also demonstrated China's open, fair, credible and nondiscriminatory environment for technological innovation," he added.

He pledged to strengthen efforts to solve foreign-related IP disputes, saying that better handling is a foundation for encouraging innovators and helping to build a sound business environment.

"It'll also be a robust and long-term guarantee to serve China's high-quality development and attract more foreign investment," he said.

China's solar companies building factories in US

By BELINDA ROBINSON

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Several of China's largest solar power companies are building factories in the United States, aiming to serve the growing US solar market.

At least four new factories backed by Chinese manufacturers will open this year. Most, if not all, have previously done the bulk of their manufacturing in Asia.

Once the factories are finished, the companies will have enough capacity to supply more than half of the 33 gigawatts of panels that were installed throughout the US last year.

Longi Green Energy Technology, based in Xi'an, the capital of Shaanxi province, is building a factory in Ohio in conjunction with Chicago-based Invenery. Production of panels is expected to begin by March.

Trina Solar, another Chinese-owned company, announced in September that it will spend \$200 million to build a factory in Wilmer, Texas. It will start operations by the summer.

"We have long had a vision to manufacture solar products in the US, and we are proud of the jobs we are creating and the investment we are making in the Wilmer community," Steven Zhu, president of Trina Solar US, said in a statement.

"Trina's goal in building this facility is to begin to create an ecosystem of American manufacturing that can serve the burgeoning US solar market," Zhu said.

China has quickly become a leader in solar panels, producing more than 80 percent of all panels sold worldwide.

In China, at least 12 percent of the country's electricity generation capacity comes from solar, according to the US Energy Information Administration, which said the figure for the US is 3.4 percent.

The technology was first developed in the US in the 1950s. But in recent years, the US industry has stalled and now reportedly has less than half the solar capacity of China.

Meanwhile, the US is a leader in producing silica sand, which is crucial in the process of solar generation. The country exports \$470 million worth of silica sand each year, according to the Observatory



We have long had a vision to manufacture solar products in the US, and we are proud of the jobs we are creating and the investment we are making in the Wilmer community."

Steven Zhu, president of Trina Solar US

\$200 million

the amount that Trina Solar, a Chinese-owned company, will spend to build a factory in Wilmer, Texas, in the United States

of Economic Complexity, an online data distribution platform.

China is the largest importer of silica sand. Other large exporters of the mineral include Australia and Indonesia.

Daniel Kirschen, a professor of electrical and computer engineering at the University of Washington in Seattle, said: "Solar energy is a very important part of achieving a carbon-free future. Wind energy and solar energy are the most effective renewable energy sources."

The administration of US President Joe Biden has set ambitious targets for producing clean energy.

One option is for companies to use subsidies under the Inflation Reduction Act that reward solar manufacturers with incentives for panel installation and tax credits for manufacturing solar components in the US.

First Solar, a US company, invested \$1.2 billion in local plants to boost its domestic manufacturing by 75 percent.

Biden championed the Inflation Reduction Act as a way to rebuild the US solar supply chain. The law provides an estimated \$300 billion worth of subsidies over the next decade to stimulate the low-carbon transition and the onshore manufacturing of renewable energy.

Having an ice time



Tourists pose for photos against the backdrop of a snow-covered Forbidden City in Beijing, the Chinese capital, on Wednesday. On Tuesday, Beijing received the first snowfall of the Year of the Dragon. JU HUANZONG / XINHUA

Boxing: Positive, healthy lifestyle encouraged

From page 1

"The most attractive aspect of boxing is the cathartic release you experience with every punch thrown. I usually engage in the sport during my lunch break at work, which helps revitalize my energy," said Guo, who has recommended boxing to many of her female friends. "I'm glad to see that more people have been encouraged by the movie and are paying attention to the sport," she said.

Boxer Wang Yanni has noticed

more overweight women appearing in the boxing gym for consultations after the Spring Festival holiday, coinciding with the success of YOLO at the box office.

Wang, who has been a fitness enthusiast for two decades and has three years of boxing experience, said the movie can help promote the development of combat sports in China. However, she warned women against believing that they could lose 50 kg just by undergoing boxing training.

"Big women barely showed up in the boxing gym before, as combat sports are not suitable for them and may hurt their ankles, especially if they are fitness novices," Wang said, suggesting jogging and maintaining a healthy diet instead.

Like many female boxers, Wang said she is fascinated with improving her strikes and throwing powerful punches, conquering her fears in the process. "The goal of experienced boxers is not to lose weight. The excitement of learning tech-

niques and challenging ourselves makes us keep practicing," she said.

Guo, the preschool teacher, also called for regular training rather than an impulse triggered by an inspirational movie.

"Sometimes it's necessary to try a new sport on a whim, but working out is far more involved than making a sudden decision or chasing a fad. The nature of sports is the pursuit of a more positive and healthy lifestyle," Guo said.

Coach Qu said that people should ease themselves into training gradually, and it is crucial to follow the guidance of a professional coach to prevent injuries.

Gulf: Move toward quantum computing, green technology smart choice

From page 1

The Gulf Cooperation Council's move toward quantum computing and green technology is a smart choice, as well as a necessary response to the urgent need for sustainable development and creative solutions to complicated global problems. Quantum computing is helping make our cybersecurity stronger and our energy systems better, while green technology is leading to sustainable, eco-friendly solutions. Together, they are tackling some of the biggest challenges we face today.

This effort by the Gulf Coopera-

tion Council is crucial for creating an economy that combines technological progress with caring for the environment. Moving away from relying on oil is a big shift that highlights how important these technologies are for the region's future economic health and growth.

For example, the council has launched significant projects such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which includes the development of smart cities like NEOM, designed to operate on renewable energy and innovative technologies. Similarly, the UAE's Dubai Clean Energy Strategy 2050 aims to produce 75 percent of the country's energy

from clean sources by 2050, showcasing a commitment to green technology.

The narrative's distinction is rooted in its holistic perspective, considering not just the technological or economic aspects in isolation, but also how these elements interlink to forge a path toward sustainable growth. This approach sets a precedent, illustrating that economic diversification, powered by cutting-edge technologies, can propel societies toward a future in which progress does not come at the expense of the planet.

In sum, the Gulf Cooperation Council's strategic embrace of

quantum computing and green technologies offers a blueprint for how regions can navigate the twin challenges of economic development and environmental sustainability. This vision for a balanced, sustainable economic model, powered by technological innovation, stands as a beacon for others, demonstrating that with strategic planning and investment, it's possible to pave the way for a prosperous and sustainable future.

In 2024, the council's member states are poised for economic growth — surpassing last year's performance, despite global uncertainties — by diversifying from oil

to sectors like infrastructure, tourism and hosting of events. With Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar leading the way, this shift toward economic resilience is further strengthened by investments in quantum computing and green technologies. This strategic move positions the region for sustainable growth and technological leadership, and represents a significant step toward a diversified and sustainable economic model.

The positive outlook for 2024 reflects the Gulf Cooperation Council's commitment to balancing economic vigor, technological progress and environmental stewardship. By

integrating economic diversification with environmental and technological innovation, the council is setting a precedent for sustainable and technological advancement. This approach, emphasizing the synergy between technological advancements and sustainable economic growth, serves as a global model for sustainable development, highlighting the importance of forward thinking in achieving a balanced, innovative and sustainable global society.

The author is Gulf studies coordinator at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research center based in Ankara, Türkiye. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

51 found accountable in gym roof collapse

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin
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Fifty-one people, including 33 government officials, have been held accountable for a gymnasium collapse in Qiqihar, Heilongjiang province, in July, according to a report released recently by the provincial department of emergency management.

The report said the accident was caused by illegal and unauthorized construction and renovation.

It said the improper stacking of perlite, an insulation material, led to rainwater retention and resulted in a significant increase in the load on the gymnasium roof that exceeded its carrying capacity, causing a collapse.

The accident at No 34 Middle School, in the city's Longsha district, on July 23, killed 11 people and injured seven, the report said. It led to direct economic losses of 12.5 million yuan (\$1.75 million).

At the time of the accident, 17 members of the school volleyball team and two coaches were training. Fifteen of them were trapped and four others managed to escape following the collapse.

The gymnasium, built in 1997, covered around 1,200 square meters.

After the accident, the local government set up an investigation team led by the provincial emergency management department, and a group of experts was invited to participate.

The report also listed indirect causes: the construction and supervisory units that failed to fulfill their primary responsibility for quality and safety production; as well as the industry regulatory department that did not adequately fulfill its responsibilities.

The construction unit started construction without obtaining permits and conducted false completion inspections.

During construction, there were no safety management personnel on duty and the project manager did not have professional qualifications.

The construction unit illegally subcontracted the project to individuals without qualifications, who did not follow the design drawings for construction and lowered the engineering quality standards.

The number of on-site supervisory personnel did not meet the needs of the work and they failed to stop illegal and irregular behaviors of the construction unit.

Six staff members from the construction and supervisory unit have been subjected to mandatory actions by the judicial authorities, and five others have been referred to the judicial authorities for further processing.

The 33 government officials have been subjected to different disciplinary actions, including serious warnings within the Party, dismissal from government positions, and downgrading of professional and technical ranks.

Seven have been handed administrative penalties, such as fines and revocation of their safety production qualification certificates.

Panda cam



Medical experts use a mobile C-arm X-ray machine to take images of the injured leg of giant panda Qi Zhen at Chongqing Zoo in Chongqing on Tuesday. Earlier this month, the bear hurt its leg when playing outdoors at the zoo. After examination, it was diagnosed as slight swelling from minor soft tissue damage, with no fractures. ZHANG XIUFENG / CHONGQING ZOO

Procuratorates adapt in anti-corruption fight

Coordination key to tracking down fugitives and confiscating illegal gains

By YANG ZEKUN
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Procuratorial authorities have been adapting to the evolving needs of anti-corruption efforts, including the pursuit of fugitives and the recovery of their illicit assets, a senior prosecutor said on Wednesday.

Shi Weizhong, head of the third procuratorial office of the Supreme People's Procuratorate, said that in response to the challenges of tracking down fugitives and confiscating their illegal gains, the top procuratorate, along with other departments, developed regulations for conducting trials in absentia, the confiscation of fugitives' illegal gains and standardizing the procedures for overseas investigations and evidence collection.

Shi emphasized the critical political and legal responsibilities that procuratorial authorities hold in combating corruption. He said that enhancing the quality and efficiency of handling job-related criminal cases is essential for strengthening the procuratorial role in anti-corruption efforts.

During the national prosecutors-general conference in January, a circular from the Supreme People's Procuratorate underlined the importance of active participation in anti-corruption activities and called for improved coordination between supervisory and procuratorial departments to ensure a

more effective approach to case handling.

Shi said procuratorates have adopted a careful and prudent approach in dealing with anti-corruption cases, especially those involving the pursuit of fugitives and the recovery of illicit assets. That includes meticulous attention to trial processes, confiscation of illegal gains, and the gathering of evidence.

He called for cross-departmental cooperation and enhanced review and oversight of each step of investigation and prosecution to ensure the overall quality of case handling.

Last year, under the guidance of the Supreme People's Procuratorate, the Jiangmen procuratorate in Guangdong province processed the case of Xu Guojun, former head of the Kaiping branch of the Bank of China, who had been on the run for 20 years.

Xu, who fled the country in 2001 and was the subject of an Interpol red notice in 2002, was repatriated in 2021.

In December 2023, he received a life sentence for embezzlement and misappropriation of public funds, was deprived of his political rights for life, and had all his personal assets confiscated.

"With the increase in major job-related crimes and the complexity of cases, ensuring the quality of case handling is the objective basis for reflecting on the effectiveness of anti-corruption work," Shi said.

"Procuratorial authorities should strengthen coordination and checks with supervisory organs and courts, solidify collected evidence and ensure accurate application of the law during proceedings."

Focusing on key areas prone to graft, Shi said prosecutors will seek to intensify punishment for the crime of offering bribes, and strengthen the recovery and correction of undue benefits obtained through bribery.

According to data from the Supreme People's Procuratorate, from January to November last year, there was an 18.1 percent year-on-year increase in the prosecution of individuals for offering bribes, totaling 2,306 people.

Shi also highlighted the commitment to addressing corruption in critical sectors such as finance, State-owned enterprises, energy, healthcare and infrastructure, through active collaboration and coordination with relevant departments to foster a united front against corruption.

"Based on general issues identified in case handling, procuratorates will issue suggestions to push forward the addressing of corruption issues in such sectors," he said.

Shi said the top procuratorate would continue to support lower-level procuratorates in resolving complex case-handling issues, analyzing case-handling characteristics and issues, and promoting the development of a procuratorial case database for job-related crimes to facilitate case management and provide guidance.

TWO SESSIONS

Lawmaker forges path ahead for agricultural modernization drive

By LI LEI
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A lawmaker who transformed her father's farming operation in Jiangsu province with smart technologies seven years ago is now attempting to help more young people become next-generation farmers.

"It's not an easy job to engage in farming," said Wei Qiao, chairwoman of Jiangsu Runguo Agricultural Development Co, her father's brainchild, in Zhenjiang.

"You need to make huge investments with very slow financial return," she said, adding that burnishing the appeal of being a farmer has always been on her mind.

Elected last year as a deputy to the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, Wei suggested that colleges should work closely with agricultural companies to train agronomists with hands-on knowledge of production who can help drive the country's agricultural modernization.

The 42-year-old also called for stronger backing for young farming talent, such as arranging tutors for them, providing training opportunities and giving them a lump sum subsidy for choosing to work in related jobs.

The suggestion received attention from the NPC's agricultural and rural affairs committee, and the central government.

In July, a group of officials from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs arrived in Zhenjiang. They had a lengthy exchange with Wei and vowed to work with authorities in education, employment and the banking industry to realize her proposal.

"As a representative of new farmers, I regard it as my mission to help blaze a trail for promoting high-quality development of Chinese agriculture," she said.

In 2017, Wei, who has a master's

degree in soil science, quit her job as an assistant researcher at the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research in Beijing.

She and her husband, a post-doctoral researcher at prestigious Peking University with a doctorate in agronomy, returned to her hometown, where Wei's father, Wei Yunfeng, ran a farm of some 1,700 hectares.

The couple took over the operation and experimented with technologies to bolster farming efficiency. With pesticide-spraying drones, a digital farmland monitoring system and other innovations, they helped reduce the labor required and increased the otherwise razor-thin profit margins from growing wheat, rice and rapeseed.

"A drone can help spray 20 hectares, and one person can operate two such drones at the same time," she said.

In 2022, Wei was recruited as a part-time professor at Jiangsu University in Zhenjiang, which is known for majors related to farming equipment and engineering.

As part of the program, she has brought many of her students to work in the fields, learning to operate drones and adapting their body clocks to the rhythm of real-life farming, which sometimes requires them to arrive in the field at 5 am. She also negotiated with the college to move major exams to slack winter seasons to allow for field studies in the busy harvest season in summer.

"It is pretty much like swimming," she said. "You have to jump into the water to learn."

Figures from the agriculture ministry show that some 12 million urban-educated people had returned to their rural roots to start businesses by the end of 2022, including those engaged in agriculture. The number is estimated to exceed 15 million by next year.

Escort mission



The 46th Chinese naval escort fleet sets sail from a military port in Zhanjiang, Guangdong province, on Wednesday to take over an escort mission from the 45th fleet in the Gulf of Aden and the waters off Somalia. YANG JIE / XINHUA

FROM THE FRONTLINE

Guizhou 'super factory' helps take matcha to the world

By YANG JUN in Guiyang
and CHEN MEILING

At the foot of Fanjing Mountain in Tongren, Guizhou province, a "matcha super factory" is racing to bring the unique taste of nature to the world.

Sweetness interlaced with a hint of subtle bitterness, swiftly transforming into a delightful aftertaste, much like the palpitations of a youthful crush — matcha, a finely ground powder of processed dried green tea leaves, is gaining popularity among consumers.

Matcha powder, matcha latte, matcha cookies, matcha noodles, matcha chocolate — various products are ready to be shipped from the automated production lines of Guizhou Tongren Gui Tea Co.

The company sold 1,000 metric tons of matcha last year, 40 percent of which was exported. It exports to more than 40 countries and regions such as the United States, Germany,

Canada, Saudi Arabia and Singapore, according to Lan Fangqiang, deputy general manager of the company.

"The high altitude, low latitude, cloudy and misty climate with limited sunshine in Guizhou endows matcha with excellent quality, characterized by its original ecological and pollution-free nature," Lan said.

"In addition, as the province cracks down on the illegal use of pesticides and herbicides, Guizhou tea has become 'clean tea' in every sense of the word."

In 2017, Guizhou Gui Tea Group invested 600 million yuan (\$83.4 million) to build the Tongren branch, which has the world's largest single-unit matcha production workshop, capable of producing 4,000 tons of matcha a year.

Compared to other types of tea, matcha has stricter requirements for cultivation and processing because it is also eaten, creating a

certain industry threshold, according to Lan.

"Furthermore, we want to challenge people's traditional perceptions of Chinese tea and to expand the younger generation of tea consumers," he said.

Lan said the modern development of the Chinese matcha industry dates back only about 30 years — still in its early stages — and the market demand remains largely untapped.

"Currently, looking solely at the demand for raw materials in the domestic beverage and baking industries, production capacity falls short of meeting market needs," he said. "The market space is immeasurable."

Matcha originated in China, dating back to the Sui (581-618) and Tang (618-907) dynasties, and reached its peak during the Song Dynasty (960-1279). After the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), China started to popularize the consumption of

tea, brewing and drinking the liquid, discarding the tea residue. As a result, Chinese matcha was lost.

However, during the Tang Dynasty, a Japanese envoy took Chinese matcha back to Japan, where it was preserved, inherited and greatly developed. At the end of the 20th century, scholars and experts returning from Japan reintroduced matcha production techniques to China.

Lan said that because matcha is part of traditional Chinese culture, and has health benefits thanks to its high content of calcium, iron, beta-carotene, fiber, vitamin B1 and vitamin E, it's favored by young consumers.

Tongren aims to develop into a high-quality matcha base and processing center, with an expanded brand influence, local authorities said.

By next year, it expects to increase its matcha raw material base from 2,000 to 3,000 hectares. By 2026,

annual matcha production will surpass 1,300 tons and the output value will reach more than 1 billion yuan, data from the city's ecological tea industry development office showed.

The industry has also helped boost the incomes of more than 50,000 tea farmers.

"Guizhou will vigorously support the high-standard construction of the matcha industry, ensuring stable and consistent matcha quality through standardized production," Hu Jicheng, then deputy head of the Guizhou Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, said at the 2023 Fanjingshan Matcha Conference in Tongren in March.

It will introduce mechanized and intelligent tea grinding equipment to enhance efficiency, he said, and also promote the "Fanjing Matcha" brand and increase the industry's added value and competitiveness.

Yu Liaoyuan, an industry insider and chief editor of the book *Chinese Matcha*, said the industry has a promising future.

"It not only can improve the utilization of late spring tea leaves and

summer-autumn tea resources but also contributes to achieving full mechanization and digitalization of tea production," he said.

"Additionally, it provides diverse tea consumption options for young consumers."

Besides food and drinks such as matcha ice cream, matcha milkshakes and matcha pudding, more matcha-related products are being developed in the industrial and medical fields, such as matcha soaps.

Globally, China has become the largest producer and consumer of matcha, with production of 3,916 tons in 2020 and consumption of 3,966 tons, both more than 55 percent of the global totals, according to a matcha industry development white paper released by the China Center for Information Industry Development.

Five leading companies, including Guizhou Gui Tea Group, produced 97 percent of Chinese matcha in 2020. By 2027, global production will reach 12,000 tons, it said.

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

Ozone-depleting substances targeted

Amendment to national regulation includes stiffer penalties for violations and extends coverage to hydrofluorocarbons. **Hou Liqiang** reports.

China has enhanced the management of ozone-depleting substances by amending a national regulation that allows the authorities to oversee their production and consumption.

The amendment has addressed some loopholes in ODS management, experts said, and will also help authorities enforce laws in a more targeted way.

With the amendment, China is expected to make even greater contributions to protecting the ozone layer and also reduce emissions of ODS substitutes that exacerbate global warming, they said.

Premier Li Qiang signed the amendment to the regulation earlier this year as part of China's efforts to implement the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer, which China joined in 1991.

Enacted in 2010, the regulation was revised for the first time in 2018. The latest amendment included stiffer penalties for violations.

Previously, for instance, those who produced ODS without a production quota permit were subject to a penalty of 1 million yuan (\$139,000). They also faced confiscation of the raw materials used in production, the finished products and the illegal gains, and the dismantling and destruction of facilities used to produce and consume ODS.

The amendment raised the fine to 5 million yuan, with the other punishments unchanged.

It also raised the maximum fine for those consuming ODS without the necessary quota permit from 500,000 yuan to 1 million yuan.

The amendment said companies that receive penalties for violating the regulation will have their misconduct included in their credit records, and the violations will be made public.

The revised regulation also added some clauses concerning incidental ODS generation, which was not covered previously.

Enterprises that generate ODS incidentally in their production process should not discharge the substances directly, the amendment said, and should instead dispose of them in an environmentally friendly manner. If they do not, they will be subject to a penalty of 100,000 yuan to 500,000 yuan, and their



A vehicle equipped with water cannon is seen in Jiaozuo, Henan province, on April 11. The water cannon can disperse water into the air to control dust and reduce air pollution. CHENG QUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

operations will be suspended if they fail to rectify the problem.

Zhang Yujun, former head of the Foreign Environmental Cooperation Center at the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, said the clause about incidental ODS generation meant that all sectors that generate ODS are now covered by the regulation.

Companies that produce and consume large quantities of ODS and those that generate a large amount of the substances incidentally should install automated monitoring devices, and the devices should be connected to the monitoring systems of environmental authorities, the amendment said. Those breaching that rule will be fined up to 200,000 yuan.

Zhang said the stipulation aimed to address the great difficulties

authorities had in unearthing the illegal production of some ODS.

In a campaign launched in 2019 to crack down on ODS violations, the ministry shut down an illegal workshop that produced CFC-11, a kind of ODS, and found 16 enterprises illegally consuming the substance, he said. It learned that illegal production of CFC-11, which needs very low investment, a small space and simple technology, was hard to discover.

To address the problem, Zhang said the ministry established a national supervision platform based on existing automated monitoring facilities in factories that produce CCL4, an ODS that is a raw material for CFC-11 production.

Thanks to the platform, all CCL4 production procedures were

brought under supervision, he said, helping to prevent illicit flows of CCL4 and effectively curbing illegal production of CFC-11.

The automated monitoring provision in the amended regulation, based on the ministry's experiences in running that platform, will help the country manage controlled ODS in a more precise manner, Zhang said.

The amendment changed the definition of ODS to allow potent heat-trapping gases known as hydrofluorocarbons — used to replace some ODS — to be covered by the regulation.

Finalized in 1987, the Montreal Protocol came into effect in 1989. Parties then agreed on the Kigali Amendment to the protocol in 2016, which aimed to gradually reduce

the consumption and production of HFCs, based on the consensus that they are powerful greenhouse gases.

ODS are widely used in foam-blowing agents and refrigerants. HFCs, which do not deplete the ozone layer nearly as much, are used as replacements for some of them.

Hu Jianxin, a professor with the College of Environmental Sciences and Engineering at Peking University, said China has made significant progress in reducing ODS to protect the ozone layer.

It has published a series of documents to support the implementation of the 2010 regulation on ODS, including lists of controlled ODS and ODS subject to import and export control, he said.

To date, Hu said, China's reduction in ODS accounts for over half of

the total reduction contributed by developing nations.

According to an assessment report compiled by the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Programme, the ozone layer over the world's mid-latitude region is expected to recover to 1980 values by around 2045, he said.

Making the regulation cover HFCs means China will make an even greater contribution to reducing emissions of the powerful greenhouse gases, Hu said.

China is a major producer, consumer and exporter of HFCs, with Chinese-made refrigeration and air conditioning equipment containing the heat-trapping gases exported to most countries around the world, he said.

By promoting green alternatives to HFCs in sectors such as refrigeration, fire control and semiconductors, Hu said China will have a profound impact on the global reduction of HFC emissions.

Zhuang Xiangning, deputy director of the quality, safety and environmental protection department at the China Petroleum and Chemical Industry Federation, said China tops the world in the production of fluorochemicals and can produce almost all fluorochemical products.

He said it currently produces and supplies 70 percent of HFCs in the world.

Zhao Yingmin, vice-minister of ecology and environment, said China will fully implement a quota-based HFC management mechanism to ensure it can realize its target of controlling HFCs this year.

With data verification accomplished in the HFCs sector, the country has worked out a plan to cap the production and consumption of such substances and will distribute the quotas this year, he said in September at an event celebrating the International Day for the Preservation of the Ozone Layer.

Zhao said China has phased out roughly 628,000 metric tons of ozone-depleting substances, and the country's efforts to phase out ODS from 1991 to 2020 avoided the emission of greenhouse gases equivalent to 26 billion tons of carbon dioxide.

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Left: A worker prepares a cloud seeding rocket to improve drought and air conditions in Shanxi province. XUE JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Middle: Researchers collect greenhouse gases at an atmospheric comprehensive research station in the Xizang autonomous region on May 23. JIGME DORJE / XINHUA



Right: Researchers record the atmospheric monitoring data from a monitoring device in Yunnan province, on March 23. HU CHAO / XINHUA

Hole in protective layer on road to recovery in decades

By **HOU LIQIANG**

A hole found in the ozone layer, which protects lives on the Earth by shielding it from the sun's most harmful rays, is on track to recover in the next four decades, according to a United Nations-backed panel of experts.

The panel also found that the treaty that made that possible has played a big role in mitigating climate change.

A colorless active gas, ozone reacts readily with a great many other substances. It is listed as one of the major air pollutants near the ground, as even relatively low amounts of the gas can cause lung damage and result in shortness of breath.

However, the ozone layer, about 20 kilometers above the ground, helps shield the Earth from harmful ultraviolet radiation known as ultraviolet B.

After the discovery of the ozone hole in the 1980s, the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the

198 parties

ratified the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer

Ozone Layer was adopted in 1987 to regulate the production and consumption of nearly 100 human-made chemicals that deplete the ozone layer. It has since been ratified by 198 parties.

The latest quadrennial assessment report by a UN-backed scientific assessment panel said the accord has succeeded in safeguarding the ozone layer.

If current policies remain in place, the ozone layer is expected to recover to 1980 values by around 2066 over the Antarctic, by 2045 over the Arctic and by 2040 for the rest of the world, according to a report by the panel published in late 2022.

Variations in the size of the Antarctic ozone hole, particularly between 2019 and 2021, were driven

mainly by meteorological factors, it said. Nevertheless, the area and depth of the Antarctic ozone hole have been slowly decreasing since 2000.

The report also reaffirmed that the treaty has played a positive role in climate change mitigation.

It said new studies supported previous assessments that the decline in emissions of ozone-depleting substances due to compliance with the Montreal Protocol would reduce global warming by approximately 0.5 to 1 C by midcentury compared to an extreme scenario in which ODS emissions increased by 3 to 3.5 percent a year.

A 2016 amendment to the Montreal Protocol, known as the Kigali Amendment, is also expected to contribute to the global endeavor to cope with global warming, the report said.

The amendment calls for a gradual reduction in the consumption and production of hydrofluorocarbons, which are used to replace ODS in foam-blowing agents and refrigerants but are powerful heat-trapping gases.

Compliance with the Kigali Amendment will help reduce global warming by 0.3 to 0.5 C by the end of this century, the report said.

Air pollutant densities expected to decrease

By **HOU LIQIANG**

Despite a grim situation in ozone pollution control, densities of the air pollutants in China are expected to decrease significantly as the country forges ahead with meeting its climate targets, experts said.

The average concentration of the colorless gas across the country stood at 144 micrograms per cubic meter last year, down by 0.7 percent from 2022 and 2.7 percent from 2019, according to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment.

Some regions, however, still registered an uptick in ozone density last year. In Beijing, for instance, the concentration reached 175 mcg/cu m, up by 2.3 percent from 2022 but down by 8.4 percent from 2019, it said.

China saw ozone densities rebound in 2022, following consistent declines in the previous two years.

The average ozone density across the country is on an upward trend, with fluctuations from 2013 to 2022, Zhang Weihao, manager of the China air quality

program at Clean Air Asia, a non-governmental organization, told a forum in October.

"The density increased in all years but 2020 and 2021," he said, adding that the situation "is still very grim".

High levels of ozone are more likely to occur in warmer temperatures. Sunlight and high temperatures can trigger chemical reactions between chemicals known as volatile organic compounds and nitrogen oxides that lead to the formation of ozone.

Because they are essential ingredients in many products and materials, there are many sources of VOCs in indoor and outdoor environments. They can be found, for example, in household cleaning products, homebuilding materials, and makeup and skin care essentials.

Nitrogen oxide pollution is usually contributed by automobiles, trucks and construction machinery. Some industrial sources such as power plants, industrial boilers, cement kilns and turbines are also to blame for the pollution.

By 2025, China aims to see a decrease of 10 percent in emissions of VOCs and nitrogen oxides in major cities from the 2020 levels, according to an action plan for consistent air quality improvement made public late last year by the State Council, China's Cabinet.

He Kebin, dean of Tsinghua University's Institute for Carbon Neutrality and an academician of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, said ozone pollution will not be a lingering problem for China.

If the country manages to see carbon dioxide emissions peak as planned before the end of this decade, ozone densities will stay below 130 mcg/cu m and even drop to as low as 120 mcg/cu m, he said.

Once China becomes carbon neutral, which should be achieved before 2060, ozone densities will drop to below 100 mcg/cu m, which is the World Health Organization's recommended guideline level, He said.

"So by that time, people will not have to worry about the problem of ozone pollution anymore," he said.

WORLD

US again vetoes UN resolution

Cease-fire urged for resolving Gaza conflict as Israel continues attack despite pressure

By MINGMEI LI
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The United States exercised its veto power for the fourth time on Tuesday on the United Nations Security Council resolution that called for a cease-fire in Gaza in an attempt to halt fighting between Israel and Palestine.

The UN Council voted on the resolution proposed by Algeria on behalf of the Arab states. The draft resolution called for an immediate cease-fire in Gaza, the immediate release of all hostages, guaranteed access to humanitarian supplies, and the rejection of forced displacement. Unfortunately, the resolution did not pass due to a veto by the US.

China voted in favor of the draft resolution with 13 countries, while the United Kingdom abstained from voting. China expressed strong disappointment and dissatisfaction with the US veto.

"While the Council cease-fire resolution has been vetoed, innocent civilians in Gaza are dying in the fighting and struggling on the brink of death," Chinese Ambassador Zhang Jun said, adding the cease-fire is urgently required by the situation on the ground and it is also based on the minimum requirements of humanity. It deserves the support of all Council members, he said.

"The US claimed that the Council resolution would interfere with the ongoing diplomatic efforts. Such a claim is totally untenable. Given the situation on the ground, the continued passive avoidance of an immediate cease-fire is nothing different from giving a green light to the continued slaughter," Zhang said.

The US has exercised its veto power on the Gaza cease-fire issue for the fourth time, following its rejection of resolutions proposed by Brazil in October 2023, the United Arab Emirates in December, and a proposed amendment by Russia.



People gather to inspect a wrecked vehicle that was destroyed by Israeli bombardment in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip on Tuesday. ISMAEL MOHAMAD / NEWSCOM

China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said the conflict has resulted in a devastating humanitarian situation in Gaza.

"The United States' veto pushes the situation in Gaza into a more dangerous one. Various parties, including China, expressed strong disappointment by and dissatisfaction with the veto," she told a daily briefing on Wednesday.

"We will continue to work with the rest of the international community to push the Council to take further actions that are responsible and meaningful for an early end of the fighting in Gaza, de-escalation of the humanitarian situation, implementation of the two-state solution and lasting peace and security in the Middle East."

Drawing criticism

The veto also drew criticism from countries including Russia, Saudi Arabia and Slovenia.

Hamas said the US veto equaled "a green light for the occupation to commit more massacres".

Colombian President Gustavo

Petro on Tuesday accused Israel of committing a "genocide" of the Palestinians in Gaza — echoing harsh criticism made by Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

As world powers voted, the UN's highest court continues to hear arguments on Wednesday in proceedings examining the legality of Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories. More than 50 states will present arguments until Feb 26.

Israel, which is not taking part, said in written comments that the court's involvement could be harmful to achieving a negotiated settlement.

It came as Israeli strikes pounded Gaza on Wednesday as fighting on the ground raged on, leaving 103 people dead, according to the Hamas-run health ministry in the territory.

Witnesses reported heavy fire in areas around Gaza, including the south of the territory's main city Khan Younis and Rafah near the Egyptian border, where around 1.4 million displaced Palestinians have sought shelter. Rafah is also the main entry point for desperately needed relief supplies via Egypt.

Qatar, which has played a key role in mediation efforts between Hamas and Israel, said on Tuesday that medicines sent into Gaza under a deal co-negotiated by France had reached the hostages held by the militants in exchange for a shipment of humanitarian aid.

But overall, negotiation efforts have failed to secure a long-term truce and despite international pressure, Israel has insisted that a ground operation in Rafah is essential to destroy Hamas.

The conflict started when Hamas launched its surprise attack on Oct 7 that resulted in the deaths of about 1,200 people in Israel, according to Israeli figures.

Israel's retaliatory campaign has killed at least 29,195 people, according to the territory's health ministry.

Leaders of global humanitarian groups said a ground offensive could turn Rafah into a "graveyard", warning of the "truly unimaginable" consequences of a full-scale assault.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Better social protection advocated for children

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Child welfare advocates have urged policymakers and donors to take more decisive steps in scaling up universal social protection for children, as an estimated 1.4 billion people under the age of 15 have been left out globally, leaving them vulnerable to health risks.

Expert groups noted that while there has been a modest global increase in access to child benefits in the last 14 years, the progress "has been unequal".

Shahra Razavi, director of the Social Protection Department at the International Labour Organization, or ILO, called the situation a "crisis" and said there is an urgent need for effective policymaking to help close protection gaps.

She also highlighted that regional inequalities in coverage and progress "are of serious concern" as improvement in child benefit coverage is marginal in most regions and too many children are still being left behind.

According to data released last week by the ILO, humanitarian organization Save the Children and the United Nations children's agency UNICEF, fewer than 1 in 10 children in low-income nations have access to child benefits, showing a significant disparity compared to children in high-income countries.

The agencies noted in a joint report that child benefits are a critical form of social protection, intended to promote the long-term well-being of children. Delivered as cash or tax credits, child benefits are essential for reducing poverty as well as for accessing healthcare, nutrition, quality education, water and sanitation.

Data also showed that coverage rates for children in countries that were highly vulnerable to the impact of climate change were a third lower than those in countries that are not classified as being at high risk.

The report noted that there has

been a modest global increase in access to child benefits over 14 years, from 20 percent in 2009 to 28.1 percent in 2023, but the progress was unequal.

In low-income countries, rates of coverage remain staggeringly low at around 9 percent. At the same time, 84.6 percent of children in high-income countries were covered.

Natalia Winder Rossi, director of Social Policy and Social Protection at UNICEF, noted that globally, 333 million children are living in "extreme poverty", struggling to survive on less than \$2.15 per day, and nearly 1 billion children living in multidimensional poverty.

'Policy choice'

With the current progress, she added, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals' poverty targets "are out of reach".

She said ending child poverty "is a policy choice" and that expanding social protection coverage of children in the fight against poverty is critical, including the progressive realization of universal child benefits.

The three agencies appealed to policymakers and donors to attain a broader universal social protection by building systems that are rights-based, gender-responsive, inclusive and shock-responsive to address inequities and deliver better results for girls and women, children with disabilities, migrant children, and those caught up in child labor.

They also said closing protection gaps, like filling the "financial gap" by investing in child benefits and securing sustainable financing for social protection systems by mobilizing domestic resources, were key.

Strengthening social protection for parents and caregivers by guaranteeing access to decent work and adequate benefits, including those related to unemployment, sickness, maternity, and disability, was also highlighted.

Researchers find 275m new genetic variants

LOS ANGELES — Researchers have discovered more than 275 million previously unreported genetic variants, the US National Institutes of Health said on Tuesday.

The new genetic variants were identified from data shared by nearly 250,000 participants of the NIH's All of Us Research Program. Half of the genomic data are from participants of non-European genetic ancestry.

The unexplored cache of variants provides researchers with new pathways to better understand the genetic influences on health and disease, especially in communities that have been left out of research in the past, the NIH said.

Nearly 4 million of the newly identified variants are in areas that may be tied to disease risk.

"As a physician, I've seen the impact the lack of diversity in genomic research has had in deepening health disparities and limiting care for patients," Josh Denny, chief executive officer of the All of

Us Research Program and an author of the study, said.

"The All of Us data set has already led researchers to findings that expand what we know about health — many that may not have been possible without our participants' contributions of DNA and other health information. Their participation is setting a course for a future where scientific discovery is more inclusive, with broader benefits for all."

The mission of the program is to accelerate health research and medical breakthroughs, enabling individualized prevention, treatment and care for all.

The program will partner with 1 million or more people across the United States to build the most diverse biomedical data resource of its kind to help researchers gain better insights into the biological, environmental and behavioral factors that influence health.

XINHUA

Gulf countries slam Washington stand

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong

Both the Gulf Cooperation Council and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation countries have lamented the US veto of the United Nations Security Council resolution demanding an immediate humanitarian cease-fire in Gaza, seeing it as defying growing international appeals for peace.

On Tuesday, the Security Council failed to adopt the resolution — put forth by Algeria — which also demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, as well as unhindered humanitarian access.

The Gulf Cooperation Council spokeswoman and Qatar's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Alya Ahmed Saif Al Thani said the GCC countries — the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Ara-

bia, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar — expressed regret, calling Algeria's draft "humanitarian" in content and consistent with international humanitarian law.

"Our countries will continue their efforts along with partners to ensure reaching a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip, in order to spare the blood of our Palestinian brothers and to ensure the arrival of more humanitarian and relief aid to the Strip and to protect civilians," Al Thani was quoted as saying by the Saudi Press Agency.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Saudi Arabia warned of the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Gaza as well as the escalation of military operations "that threaten international peace and security".

"The escalation does not serve any efforts, calling for a dialogue and a peaceful solution to the Pales-

tinian (question) in accordance with the relevant international resolutions," the statement said.

In a post on X, formerly Twitter, the UAE's Permanent Mission to the UN said it "is deeply disappointed with the outcome" of the vote on the humanitarian cease-fire draft resolution, which it noted was supported by 13 of the 15 members.

'No end in sight'

"After more than four months of carnage and no end in sight, this war must end," it said.

According to the UN, the Security Council resolutions are legally binding. If the Council cannot reach a consensus or a passing vote on a resolution, it may choose to produce a nonbinding presidential statement instead of a resolution.

"Now that the US has taken this unfortunate position at the UN Secu-

rity Council, the average person in the Gulf expects the US to press Israel not to carry out its threatened assault on Rafah," Jasim Husain, a Gulf analyst and former member of Bahrain's parliament, told China Daily.

"Also, people here want the US to ensure no fighting during the fast-month of Ramadan," he added.

Meanwhile, in a statement on Wednesday, the 57-member Organization of Islamic Cooperation said it "regrets deeply" the US' use of veto against the Security Council draft resolution, describing it as "a negative reflection of the Security Council's role in the maintenance of international peace and security, protection of civilians and ensuring delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip".

Furthermore, it renewed its call on the international community, particularly the UN Security Council, to "assume its responsibilities" and "take urgent measures" to stop the conflict in the Gaza Strip, now more than four months old.

S. Korean hospitals under strain as doctors' strike widens

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong
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More trainee doctors in South Korea have joined protests against a government plan to increase medical expenses because physicians locked in competition could perform unnecessary treatments.

In a poll conducted by Gallup Korea, about 76 percent of South Koreans support the government's plan. Some critics said doctors, one of the best-paid professions in South Korea, oppose a steep increase in admissions because of worries that they may lose income.

Noting that the government has issued back-to-work orders to more than 6,000 trainee doctors, Park said failing to comply with the order could result in serious punishment, including up to three years in prison, 30 million won (\$22,480) fines, or even revocation of their licenses.

"The trainee doctors' right to take

quality education to that many students. They argue that the government's push to have more doctors would lead to increased public medical expenses because physicians locked in competition could perform unnecessary treatments.

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Noting that the government has issued back-to-work orders to more than 6,000 trainee doctors, Park said failing to comply with the order could result in serious punishment, including up to three years in prison, 30 million won (\$22,480) fines, or even revocation of their licenses.

"The trainee doctors' right to take

collective action cannot have precedence over people's basic right to life," Park said.

South Korea's general hospitals rely heavily on trainees for emergency operations and surgeries, and local reports said cancer patients and expectant mothers needing cesarean sections have seen procedures canceled or delayed, with scores of cases causing "damage", Park said.

Intimidation

Trainee doctors said the government's return-to-work order was intimidation and must be withdrawn immediately. The Korea Medical Association, which represents 140,000 doctors, said it supports the trainee doctors' walkouts but has not decided whether to join them.

Joo Soo-ho, a spokesman for a

KMA task force, accused the government of "demonizing doctors".

"We strongly condemn the government for holding the people hostage and suppressing doctors," he told reporters.

To deal with the trainee doctors' walkouts, the government has opened military hospitals to the public, extended operating hours of public medical institutions, and emergency medical treatment centers stay open round the clock. But observers said if the walkouts are prolonged or joined by senior doctors, that could cause major disruptions in South Korea's overall medical services.

Hong Jae-ryun, a brain cancer patient in his 50s from Daegu, said his chemotherapy had been postponed indefinitely due to the current situation, even though the cancer has spread to his lungs and liver.



South Korean Prime Minister Han Duck-soo (center) arrives for a meeting with doctors at the National Police Hospital in Seoul, South Korea, on Wednesday. HWANG GANG-MO VIA AP

"It's absurd. Amid the conflict between the government and doctors, what can powerless patients say? It feels like a betrayal," Hong told Agence France-Presse.

Those aged 70 and older outnum-

bered those in their 20s for the first time last year, according to data from South Korea's Ministry of the Interior and Safety.

Agencies contributed to this story.

WORLDUS

Experts: China leads globe in manufacturing

Narratives of decline refuted as country embraces new constructive approach

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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China's manufacturing dominance remains unshaken, evolving and adapting to the shifting global landscape despite narratives of decline, said experts who believe that perceptions of diminishing power often stem from anecdotes rather than data.

The rhetoric that businesses are increasingly looking to relocate manufacturing closer to their home markets to "de-risk" from China overlooks the fact that China is not only adapting to this new trend but also embracing it with a constructive approach, said Kerim Antoine Kfuri, a supply chain expert.

This strategic approach that China

is making to maintain its role is "near-shoring", Kfuri said, where China extends its manufacturing expertise to countries closer to its target markets.

"By working diligently to be a part of global near-shoring efforts, China continues to solidify its position as the dominant player in manufacturing and global supply chain," said Kfuri, founder of The Atlas Network, LLC, a US company that provides mass production, consulting and logistics services.

Mexico serves as a prime example of China's active participation in this near-shoring trend. With its proximity to the United States, it has attracted not only US companies but also Chinese ones.

A 2023 analysis by Holland &

Knight revealed that 80 percent of the space leased by foreign companies in Mexican industrial parks is occupied by Chinese firms, compared to 15 percent rented by US-based companies.

Furthermore, the perception of China as solely a "low-cost, low-quality" manufacturer is outdated. "This couldn't be further from the truth as some of the most luxurious and prolific global brands have been producing their goods for decades in China," said Kfuri.

Additionally, while geographical distance may seem like a hurdle, China's production speed and scale often compensate, leading to faster product delivery despite the distance, Kfuri pointed out.

Faster solution

China's production speed and manufacturing scale are five to 10 times (even greater in many

scenarios) faster than anywhere else in the world, he explained, so shorter production windows yield a faster "product-in-hand" solution despite the geographic distance.

William Bratton, head of Asia-Pacific cash equity research at BNP Paribas, a leading bank in Europe, emphasized the "all-too-frequent" disconnect between rhetoric and reality when discussing China's manufacturing capabilities, while maintaining that analysis should be driven by numbers and data rather than anecdotes or perceptions.

What is "particularly remarkable" about China's evolving trade structure, said Bratton in a recent blog post, is its capabilities to expand exports in both low- and high-technology industries simultaneously, whether it's leather

products or optical instruments.

The country's rising share of global manufacturing exports also demonstrates that "Chinese manufacturers are, in fact, continuing to go from strength to strength", he said.

A new study by the European think tank, the Centre for Economic Policy Research confirms China's dominance in global manufacturing, with its production exceeding that of the nine next largest manufacturers combined.

Analyzing the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's recently released 2023 update of the TIVA database, the study found that in 2020, China accounted for a staggering 35 percent of global gross manufacturing production, followed by the US, Japan, Germany — China's share is three times the US' share,

six times Japan's, and nine times Germany's.

The Trade in Value Added, or TIVA, database is a collection of measures that can provide insights into global production networks and supply chains.

Richard Baldwin, the study's author, and professor of International Economics at IMD Business School in Lausanne, Switzerland, urged caution against calls for decoupling from China, highlighting the complex and interconnected nature of global supply chains, where all major manufacturers in the world rely on China for at least 2 percent of their industrial inputs.

"Politicians who indulge in loose talk about decoupling from China need a clear-eyed look at the facts," he said.

"Decoupling would be difficult, to say the least."

Boeing ousts head of its 737 MAX jet program

By AIHEPING in New York
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Boeing announced Wednesday that it is removing the head of its 737 MAX passenger aircraft program following an incident that left a fuselage hole in an Alaska Airlines plane last month during midflight.

Ed Clark, an 18-year Boeing veteran, is "leaving the program" immediately, Boeing Commercial Airplanes chief Stan Deal said in a memo to employees Wednesday morning.

Clark was the head of the company's production facility in Renton, Washington, which is the final assembly site of the 737 MAX airliner and builds its MAX 9 aircraft.

Deal said that Katie Ringgold, previously in charge of 737 deliveries, would take over the MAX program, and that another executive, Elizabeth Lund, would take on a new role overseeing quality across all of Boeing's commercial airplanes.

Clark is an engineer. His successor Ringgold has business degrees. She began her aviation career performing avionics systems maintenance and troubleshooting on C-130 cargo aircraft in the US Air Force.

Deal wrote that the leadership changes are intended to drive Boeing Commercial Airplanes' "enhanced focus on ensuring that every airplane we deliver meets or exceeds all quality and safety requirements".

The announcement came two weeks after a report from the US National Transportation Safety Board found that bolts that held a panel known as a door plug in place were missing when the nearly brand-new 737 MAX 9 used for Alaska Airlines Flight 1282 departed the Portland International Airport in Oregon for Ontario, California, on Jan 5. The bolts prevent the door plug from sliding up from the frame when pressurization changes in the cabin midflight.

The incident occurred at about 16,000 feet, when the door plug blew off the jet, forcing the pilots to return to Portland for an emergency landing. The plug is a barrier used to cover a gap in the plane's body where an extra exit door could optionally be installed. The mishap could have been catastrophic if the plane were at cruising altitude.

The incident aboard the Alaska Airlines MAX 9 is the latest crisis for Boeing, which has been plagued by manufacturing problems after fatal crashes of its 737 MAX 8 in 2018 and 2019 that killed all 346 people on board the two flights.

Although there were no reports of serious injuries to passengers, some are now suing Boeing and Alaska Airlines, claiming the flight caused them trauma and injury.

The problems on Boeing planes have delayed deliveries to customers. A month after the Alaska Airlines flight, Boeing said improperly drilled holes on some MAX planes would delay handovers of the aircraft to airlines.

The Federal Aviation Administration has said it has increased direct inspections of Boeing's MAX production lines and said it would prohibit the manufacturer from increasing output until the agency is satisfied with its quality controls.



The New York Philharmonic hosted its annual Lunar New Year concert and gala at Lincoln Center's David Geffen Hall on Tuesday night, once again celebrating the Year of the Dragon and the completion of a full 12-year cycle since the tradition was first introduced in 2012. Yu Long, who first introduced the tradition to the orchestra, again leads the concert. CHRIS LEE / FOR CHINA DAILY

New York Philharmonic completes cycle of Chinese New Year concerts

By MINGMEILI in New York
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The New York Philharmonic hosted its annual Lunar New Year concert and gala, celebrating the Year of the Dragon and the completion of a full 12-year cycle since the tradition was first introduced by the orchestra in 2012.

Yu Long, who first introduced the tradition to the orchestra, led the concert Tuesday, starting with composer Elliot Leung's *Lunar Overture* at Lincoln Center's David Geffen Hall.

"We can hear the loud and distinctive sound of the Beijing Opera gong, which adds a festive touch reminiscent of the Chinese New Year. The rhythm of this piece is fast, much like the way we exchange New Year's greetings," said Leung.

"We've now gone dragon to dragon," said Gary Ginstring, president and CEO of the New York Philharmonic told China Daily. "We are so excited how the Lunar Year celebration at the New York Philharmonic has grown into one of our most important and special traditions."

He said that the connections fostered by music are always important and remain despite some challenges between countries, and that the New York Philharmonic has played an important role in cultural exchange for the Chinese community in the US and China.

"We've had regular appearances in China now for the past decade,



We've now gone dragon to dragon ... the Lunar Year celebration at the New York Philharmonic has grown into one of our most important and special traditions."

Gary Ginstring, president and CEO of the New York Philharmonic

collaboration with the Shanghai Symphony and the Shanghai Conservatory of Music to create the Shanghai Orchestra Academy," he said. The orchestra also sent nine musicians to Shanghai to resume in-person training with young musicians in 2023.

"We are looking forward to taking the full New York Philharmonic back to China, back to Shanghai, as soon as we can," he said.

"The 12-year persistent efforts in disseminating diverse cultures, especially integrating Chinese music into this celebration, have enriched the multicultural exchanges of New York," Huang Ping, Chinese consul general in New York told China Daily. "It brings joy to everyone during the

New Year. We also hope to further strengthen collaboration with the New York Philharmonic, having more cultural exchanges that promote friendship between our two countries."

Huang said Chinese audiences are looking forward to having the entire orchestra return to China.

The Lunar New Year concert also featured excerpts from Asian musician Zhou Tian's *Transect*, composed in 2019 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the completion of the First Transcontinental Railroad; *Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1*, with Clara-Jumi Kang in her New York Philharmonic debut as soloist; and Saint-Saëns' *Carnival of the Animals*, narrated by Jamie Bernstein and featuring pianists Clayton Stephenson and Serena Wang.

"Our initial goal was to introduce the Lunar New Year concert to American audiences," said Angela Chen, the gala co-chair. "But we are glad to see a significant number of Chinese audiences, especially the younger generation, participating."

"The Chinese New Year and its traditions serve as a favorable promotion for the relationship between the two countries. Simultaneously, we also aim to let Americans experience the Chinese New Year, the importance of family, and the essence of love. No matter how far one may be, returning home for the New Year is a cherished tradition in China," she said.

Horror stories unfold in New York's subway

By HENGWEILI in New York
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A cellist was entertaining New York City subway riders in Manhattan when a woman sneaked up behind him and bashed him in the head with his own metal water bottle.

A bystander was killed and five people injured in an afternoon rush-hour shooting at a Bronx subway station, in which police said 19 shots were fired in the train and on the platform, after a brawl broke out between two groups of teenagers. A 16-year-old boy was subsequently apprehended.

A 31-year-old rider was repeatedly struck in the head by a man with a metal pipe at a subway station in Queens.

A subway worker at a Manhattan station was punched in the face by a homeless man.

Those are some of the violent incidents recorded last week in the city's Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) subway system, by far the largest in the United States.

Transit crime is up 22.6 percent since the start of the year through Feb 11 compared with the corresponding period last year, with felony assaults up more than 10.3 percent, according to New York Police Department statistics.

Five of the six major crime categories — murder, robbery, felony assault, burglary and grand larceny — have increased year to date in a CompStat report published by the NYPD on Sunday.

Mayor Eric Adams said on Tuesday that the city is trying to get more funding to restore a program that stationed police officers in the subway on 12-hour shifts.

"We want officers walking through the trains, being at the platforms, being near the token booths and identifying where the crime is actually taking place."

"And we're seeing a substantial amount of that crime taking place on our subways."

"Proportionally, the number of riders that we have, we are capping over 4 million riders. We have about six felonies a day on our subway system."

The Feb 13 attack on the cellist, Iain Forrest, 29, at the busy 34th Street-Herald Square station was enough for him to stop performing underground. The assault was captured on video by a spectator

recording Forrest's performance.

"Two attacks in less than a year is two too much," Forrest said in an Instagram post on Sunday.

"I have been punched, choked, and now bashed in the head," he said. "I love performing for you all in the subway, but I'm at my breaking point and can't take more injury or harm."

An MD-PhD student of the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York, Forrest said he was one of the many subway performers who have been "attacked, harassed or robbed" while entertaining subway riders.

He suggested that other musicians join the Subway Performers Advocacy Group to demand better security at transit hubs, the New York Post reported.

In a statement, the MTA said, "No one in the transit system, including the musicians, should be subjected to violence, and when the NYPD catches up with the person who committed this senseless attack, they will be held accountable."

The MTA is replacing fluorescent lighting with LED fixtures at some stations as a security measure.

"Your platforms, mezzanines and staircases will now be lighter and brighter, and that will give a sense of comfort that our system is more safe," Demetrius Crichtlow, senior vice-president of the NYC Transit Department of Subways, was quoted by CBS New York as saying.

"Our hundreds of thousands of cameras that we have throughout the stations will be able to get better images when things happen."

In another incident, a Brazilian tourist was stabbed in the back at the Queens Plaza station on Feb 15, according to police, the New York Post reported. A stranger ran up to the 29-year-old and slashed him in the neck, it said, citing authorities and sources.

"People get stabbed at the end of this station, sometimes in the elevator," an MTA worker at the Queens Plaza station told the Post on Monday. "It's very, very bad."

On Feb 14, a 16-year-old boy was stabbed in the thigh at the Coney Island-Stillwell Avenue station in Brooklyn, police said.

On the same day, a 58-year-old female MTA worker was punched in the face by a homeless man on a Lower Manhattan subway platform — a bystander was also hit when he intervened to help the woman.



New York City Police Department officers stand guard following a shooting at the Mount Eden subway station on Feb 12 in the Bronx borough of New York. Police said a 35-year-old man died after being shot in the chest. EDUARDO MUNOZ ALVAREZ / AP

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BUSINESS

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Big LPR cut lifts hopes of homebuyers

Analysts say more capital will likely flow to private firms, small businesses

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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The 25-basis-point cut to over-five-year loan prime rate to 3.95 percent on Tuesday is good news for mortgages, and will help commercial banks to lower interest rates on first-home loans and guide more capital to private and small enterprises, industry experts said on Wednesday.

This, they said, will bode well for both the capital market and the struggling housing market.

The LPR cut, the biggest ever by the central bank, not only indicated the financial authority's resolve to stabilize the property market, but also sparked talk that it will boost housing demand, said analysts.

“With the exception of a few regions that are still having their first-home mortgage rates above 4 percent, the majority of local home markets will be capable of enjoying a lending rate of below 4 percent.”

Chen Wenjing, director of research with the China Index Academy

In China, many lenders base their mortgage rates on over-five-year LPR. On Tuesday, the People's Bank of China left the one-year LPR unchanged at 3.45 percent.

Introduced in 2019, the over-five-year LPR has been China's benchmark rate ever since. Tuesday's cut has made the home mortgage rates approach historical lows, said Chen Wenjing, director of research with the China Index Academy.

Following the cut, housing loan rates for first-time homebuyers can fall to as low as 3.75 percent, and rates on second-home mortgages could decline to 4.15 percent, he said.

“With the exception of a few regions that are still having their first-home mortgage rates above 4 percent, the majority of local home markets will be capable of enjoying a lending rate of below 4 percent,” said Chen.

Rational homebuyers will be among the first to benefit from the LPR cut, said Yan Yuejin, director of the Shanghai-based E-house China Research and Development Institution.

“Taking the 30-year 1 million

loan fully amortized mortgage for example, the monthly payment would be reduced about 150 yuan (\$20.85), a comparatively big relief in comparison to previous adjustments,” Yan said.

Tuesday's rate cut, he said, will further encourage buying sentiment in the property market in the coming months.

Li Yujia, chief researcher at the Guangdong Planning Institute's residential policy research center, said further LPR cuts may be unlikely in the near term, though mortgage rates will continue their downtrend.

First-home buyers saw their mortgage rate stay at 3.84 percent on average in major Chinese cities in January, while that for second-home buyers was 4.41 percent, Li said.

The steep cut will effectively decrease the cost for buying residential properties, and ease the repayment pressure on existing home loans, said Ma Hong, a senior researcher with GDDCE (Guangzhou Development District Chief Economists) Industrial Research Institute.

Considering the lower-than-expected recovery in housing sales, more supportive policies are needed to boost market confidence, Ma said.

Several supportive measures have been introduced this year. To encourage demand, the nation's four biggest cities — Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, and Shanghai and Beijing — had eased their housing policies ahead of the Chinese New Year.

The top-tier cities' moves suggest more cities may follow suit to fine-tune their home market policies in accordance with their own conditions in a timely manner, said Chen.

Meanwhile, along with the founding of the urban property financing coordinated mechanism, property developers' financing has gained more support.

More than 8,000 real estate projects were eligible for property financing, according to China's five biggest commercial banks. On the one hand, the financial support will promote the timely delivery of these property projects; on the other, it will help stabilize real estate enterprises' expectations and boost market confidence, said analysts.

Major Chinese cities might welcome a mild post-Spring Festival sales pickup, considering the positive effects of the property measures introduced in first-tier and key second-tier cities and Tuesday's big cut, Chen said.

Owing to the high base of last year, however, home sales data in the following months may not be strong in year-on-year terms, she said.



A view of a McDonald's restaurant in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

McDonald's charts ambitious roadmap in China by 2028

By WANG ZHUOQIONG
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Quick service restaurant chain McDonald's Corp is aiming to operate 10,000 outlets in China by 2028, on the back of a record-breaking number of new store openings last year.

The US-based company reported a 10 percent increase in global comparable sales to \$25.5 billion and a 37 percent growth in net income to \$8.47 billion in 2023. Its international developmental licensed markets segment, of which the Chinese market is the largest contributor in terms of newly added stores, increased 9.4 percent in 2023, results showed.

McDonald's President and CEO Chris Kempczinski said the company performed well in China last year and showed a strong growth trajectory.

The company added 925 stores last year, or 67 percent of the new stores

that were opened in the international development licensed markets.

“We built 1,000 restaurants in China (an all-time high for the company in the country). So, we're very much on track from our development aspirations and we would expect to do something similar in 2024 from that standpoint,” Kempczinski said.

He said the company will focus on remaining competitive, projecting continued strong comparable sales performance in the Chinese market as consumer wealth and GDP continue to grow in the mid-single digits in the country.

“We think there's going to be an opportunity for us to continue to build out development and penetration in that market to many places where we don't really have McDonald's presence. So, the overall outlook on China for us continues to be very robust, which is why we increased our stake,” the CEO said.

In a strategic move to solidify its

presence, McDonald's completed the acquisition of an additional 28 percent in its China operations at the end of January, taking its total ownership to 48 percent.

McDonald's operates 5,903 stores in China, of which half are in third- and fourth-tier cities. Rival KFC operates 10,296 stores in the country.

Jason Yu, general manager of market research firm Kantar Worldpanel China, said: “This number (of new stores) is still some distance away from the previous plan, especially compared to the number of stores of competitors. Therefore, reaching 10,000 stores is still ambitious.”

An increasing number of price-sensitive consumer groups have chosen cheaper Chinese burger and fried chicken brands such as Wallace and Tasiting, he said. Therefore, maintaining an active stance on marketing and pricing is crucial for stimulating consumer demand and defending market share, Yu said.

Tianjin to free ‘new productive forces’

By YANG CHENG in Tianjin
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Tianjin, a municipality in North China, is intensifying efforts to leverage its strengths and spearhead the advancement of new productive forces, in response to President Xi Jinping's call during his visit earlier this month.

Xi called on the city to attach equal importance to scientific and technological innovation and industrial innovation, strengthen the building of sci-tech innovation parks, further integrate the digital economy with the real economy, and promote the high-end, smart and green development of its manufacturing sector.

He called on Tianjin to strengthen its coordination with Beijing on sci-tech innovation and the integration of industrial systems, so as to jointly build world-class advanced manufacturing clusters.

Yin Jihui, Party chief and director of the Tianjin Industrial and Information Technology Bureau, said: “The city is poised to make significant strides in upgrading its industries, accelerating the convergence of the digital and real economies, and promoting high-end digitalization, intelligent and ‘green’ manufacturing.”

Yin emphasized that this year, the city will persistently strive to promote its coordinated development within the Beijing-Tianjin-

Hebei region, aiming to make the three locations into international advanced manufacturing clusters.

A recent significant development was the establishment of an advanced manufacturing alliance for the region at the beginning of this year. Based in Tianjin, it comprises nearly 100 top domestic and foreign intelligent manufacturing companies.

Furthermore, the bureau revealed that additional projects are in the pipeline. Some 32 industrial parks and 12 industrial chains backed by leading companies are taking shape in the city.

Post Spring Festival, international manufacturing companies in Tianjin have ramped up their production, showcasing the city's position as a hub for the manufacturing sector in China and underscoring their commitment to mutually beneficial growth alongside Chinese manufacturers.

For instance, German company Benteler, which ranks among the Top 100 auto part producers globally, operates 16 auto part and module companies in China and has seen robust sales growth in Tianjin since launching its factories in the city's Beichen district in 2021.

Liao Kai, the general manager of its Tianjin branch, highlighted the company's focus on digitalization and intelligent manufacturing, along with several ongoing industrial upgrading projects in the city's

top industrial ecosystem.

Notably, the company's sales revenue surged by 200 percent last year and is projected to exceed 940 million yuan (\$130.6 million) this year.

Liao also mentioned that new rounds of industrial upgrading, incorporating new robots and equipment renovation with digital operations, are underway in the city.

In addition, Boeing Tianjin Composites told Tianjin TV that this year, its Boeing 747 and 737 aircraft models' 1,500 components' orders will double in volume compared to last year, with their value hitting 1.3 billion yuan.

The engineers began their work on the fourth day of the eight-day Spring Festival holiday, in order to deliver the first batch of the orders.

Liu Lei, a senior executive in charge of production of the company, said, “With new facilities and engineers, our production capacity is expected to surge to 20,000 units from the current 12,000 units per month.”

The company's latest investment of up to 650 million yuan is expected to expand its production capacity and new facilities are expected to be put into service this April.

According to data from the bureau, in 2023, the incremental industrial value of the Tianjin's integrated circuit, internet of vehicles and aerospace industries grew by 20.9 percent, 19.2 percent and 17.8 percent, respectively.

Fujian becoming even more friendly for Taiwan biz

By ZHU WENQIAN in Beijing and HU MEIDONG in Fuzhou

Tseng Chih-ying, from Taipei, Taiwan province, who came to Fujian province in 2018 with a team of young designers from Taiwan to undertake rural vitalization projects, received a loan of 300,000 yuan (\$41,725) in January. It was the first personal credit loan issued to a Taiwan compatriot in Fuzhou, capital of Fujian.

Tseng's main work includes building bed-and-breakfast homestays in villages, renovating old streets and filming documentaries to record local history, which requires a significant amount of funding.

Previously, Taiwan compatriots faced difficulty with verification and credit inquiry paperwork, often encountering hurdles when applying for loans. When they needed to apply for housing, auto, travel and education loans, applications could only be made using prohibitive collateral.

Last year, the State Council issued a guideline supporting Fujian exploring new platforms for cross-strait integration and development. Mingqing county in Fuzhou took the lead in launching personal credit loans for Taiwan residents, which has significantly helped people associated with small and medium-sized businesses.

1.5 trillion yuan

cumulative value of trade between Fujian and Taiwan provinces in 2023

“At a rural credit cooperative in Mingqing, it only took one day for me to sign the contract, open an account and get the loan. I believe such trust will encourage more young Taiwan people to come to Fujian and start their entrepreneurial endeavors,” Tseng said.

The rural credit cooperative in Mingqing said Taiwan compatriots are an important part of the local community. The cooperative will continue to increase financial support for Taiwan residents and their business undertakings, and provide more innovative products and service models, thus helping them achieve their entrepreneurial goals.

Fuzhou stands as the closest provincial capital to Taiwan province on the Chinese mainland, and it has the largest number of settled Taiwan residents on the Chinese mainland. As of 2023, more than 26,000 Taiwan people lived in Fuzhou, according to the local government.

The guideline also pointed out that Fujian is being encouraged to create an international first-class business environment, and guide Taiwan compatriots and their enterprises to jointly build a market-oriented, law-based and convenient business environment.

Some key industrial bases for Taiwan investment have been successfully established in Fujian, forming multiple industrial chains such as those in the sectors of display screens, automobiles and their components and foodstuffs, the local government said.

Last year, the number of newly established Taiwan enterprises and the actual scale of utilized Taiwan capital in Fujian remained tops on the Chinese mainland, and cumulative value of trade between Fujian and Taiwan provinces exceeded 1.5 trillion yuan, according to the local government.

This year, Fujian will continue to strengthen economic and trade cooperation with Taiwan and create a demonstration model for cross-strait economic integration, Zhao Long, governor of Fujian, said in a government work report in January.

Fujian will optimize the business environment for Taiwan individuals and firms, and relax market access restrictions for enterprises from Taiwan in accordance with laws and regulations, Zhao said.

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A woman jogs past the headquarters of the People's Bank of China, the central bank, in Beijing. AP

Briefly

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 49 billion yuan (\$6.9 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Wednesday. The move aims to keep liquidity reasonable and ample in the banking system, the People's Bank of China said in a statement. A reverse repo is a process by which the central bank purchases

securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

Renminbi strengthens against greenback

The central parity rate of the Chinese currency renminbi, or the yuan, strengthened 38 pips to 7.1030 against the US dollar on Wednesday, according to the China Foreign

Exchange Trade System. In China's spot foreign exchange market, the yuan is allowed to rise or fall by 2 percent from the central parity rate each trading day. The central parity rate of the yuan against the US dollar is based on a weighted average of prices offered by market makers before the opening of the interbank market each business day.

XINHUA • CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS

SOE helps improve infra in Africa

Railway builder works through holiday to advance Cameroon highway

By ZHONG NAN
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While most Chinese residents celebrated their Spring Festival holiday in the cold winter weather last week, nearly a thousand Chinese and Cameroonian engineers and workers rushed to advance the Ntui-Mankim highway project to its final stages in the African nation, laboring in temperatures around 28 C.

The 96.7-kilometer-long highway project, which runs through Cameroon's Centre and Adamawa regions, is being built by State-owned China Railway 20th Bureau Group Corp, a subsidiary of Beijing-based China Railway Construction Corp Ltd. The company said it was the prime time of the year for construction in the west-central African country, as the rainy season has since passed.

By organizing more than 40 Chinese engineers and over 800 local staff to fully advance the construction progress of the remaining roadbed and ancillary projects for the Ntui-Mankim highway project, Xi'an, Shaanxi province-based CR20G started the asphalt paving construction of the experimental section for the project in mid-February.

Under the work schedule, the project is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

"Although the total length of the experimental section is only 200 meters, it is the key basis for the asphalt concrete mix ratio and paving thickness of the entire project," said Shi Fei, project manager for CR20G's Ntui-Mankim highway project.



Engineers of China Railway 20th Bureau Group Corp discuss construction plans on a section of the Ntui-Mankim highway project in Cameroon last week. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The tropical rainforest, with its abundant rainfall, provides a wealth of forestry resources to the local people in Cameroon. However, it also poses significant challenges to the construction team of the project.

"In Cameroon, the rainy season can last for more than half a year, during which the surrounding red clay becomes extremely sludgy after absorbing rainwater," said Shi, adding that this stickiness makes it difficult to unload the clay from trucks and hampers the roadbed filling process, severely affecting the progress of construction work.

The Chinese executive said that the phased construction of the Cameroonian highway is an important passage connecting Yaounde — the nation's capital — with various regions in the north, and also a crucial livelihood project for locals.

The abundance of ebony and mahogany trees in Cameroon is renowned worldwide, and after the

completion of this road, wood and cash crops along the motorway can be directly transported to Yaounde or exported from the country's ports, further boosting the economy.

Shi said that to ensure the smooth progress of all construction aspects, CR20G's construction team has devised a comprehensive construction plan for the experimental section of asphalt paving.

Throughout construction, laboratory technicians monitor the quality of the asphalt mix and temperature control at each stage on-site, according to information released by CR20G.

"This project marks our inaugural venture in Cameroon," Shi said, stressing that the tangible growth of the Belt and Road Initiative will continue to enable deeper collaboration between China and partner countries in areas such as modern infrastructure, high-end manufacturing, services, environmental protection

and smart city development over the long term.

China's nonfinancial ODI in other countries participating in the BRI amounted to 224.09 billion yuan (\$31.14 billion) in 2023, an increase of 28.4 percent year-on-year, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

With nearly 20,000 employees, CR20G has built a market presence in more than 20 countries, including Angola, Mozambique, Uzbekistan and Mongolia.

With China planning to sign more high-quality cooperation deals with its partners for jointly developing the next phase of the BRI, many domestic companies are devising fresh strategies to enhance their market footprint in other countries and regions involved in the BRI, injecting impetus into the global economy, said Zhou Lisha, a researcher at the Institute for State-owned Enterprises of Tsinghua University.

Guangxi looks to improve biz climate for economic growth

By SHI RUIPENG in Nanning and ZOU SHUO

The Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region aims to continuously open up to both the domestic as well as international markets and further help business entities at home and abroad, said Liu Ning, Party secretary of Guangxi.

As an important coastal hinterland linking the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and ASEAN region, Guangxi is a window for opening-up and has favorable conditions to build bridges among various regions, Liu said at a meeting held on Monday.

If Guangxi wants to achieve major developments and breakthroughs, it must greatly improve its business environment and make it easier to do business in the region, Liu said.

For Guangxi to build itself into a place with easy access to both the domestic and international markets, the region must follow international high-standard economic and trade rules, and further facilitate investment, trade, consumption, capital flow, people-to-people exchanges and logistics, he said.

Guangxi has been making efforts to build the required infrastructure for linking the region with the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area and ASEAN region.

More than 3,000 construction workers have not even taken time off during the Spring Festival holiday so as to build the Pinglu Canal, a flagship project on the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor.

The corridor stretches from the Xijin reservoir in the city of

Hengzhou to Qinzhou port in the south of Guangxi, where ships can reach the Beibu Gulf via the Qinzhou River, opening a shorter route to the sea for Guangxi and other regions in Southwest China.

Total trade between Guangxi and other Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership member countries reached more than 390 billion yuan (\$54 billion) in 2023, up 23.7 percent year-on-year, according to local government data.

Meanwhile, a total of 117 freight trains have traveled between China and Vietnam via Guangxi in 2023.

Zou Zhanyue, head of the Guangxi industrial park reform and development office, said the region is building a more effective service platform for enterprises to make it easier for them to invest and do business in the parks.

A total of 215 industrial parks started construction recently, with total investment reaching almost 158.3 billion yuan, according to local government statistics.

Hou Gang, mayor of Nanning, said the city has improved mechanisms to swiftly handle inquiries and requests from enterprises. The city wants to enhance its business environment to attract more enterprises to set up offices, he said.

Liu Tao, general manager of Huawei Guangxi Corp, said the company aims to make full use of its strength in 5G, artificial intelligence and cloud computing to contribute to the building of the China-ASEAN AI computing center.

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CHINADAILY

Future calling

As we move on to even greener pastures, more farmers are reaping the benefits of digital technology. Internet-connected infrastructure and a future blossoming with opportunities for green growth. With the digital world at their fingertips, they can unleash the power of innovation to welcome a more bounteous harvest than ever before.

PUBLIC INTEREST AD: 0108

Bustling business

Performers wearing Chinese drama costumes participate in a ceremony celebrating the business resumption after the Spring Festival holiday at the Yiwu International Trade City in Zhejiang province on Wednesday. The port city, known to many as a leading exporter of countless goods, posted nearly \$70 billion in exports last year, a year-on-year increase of 16 percent.

LYU BIN / FOR CHINA DAILY



TotalEnergies eyes wider footprint in Chinese renewables market

By ZHENG XIN
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Multinational energy company TotalEnergies is eyeing expansion in China, especially in the renewables business, as the nation intensifies efforts to transition toward cleaner energy sources, a top company executive said.

As a key player in China for over four decades, TotalEnergies will continuously leverage its experience and expertise to propel the growth of renewable energy projects in the country, said TotalEnergies China Country Chair Yu Yongjian.

"Our business, starting from offshore oil and gas exploration and refining, has expanded to the entire energy industry value chain, including a network of retail service stations, production and distribution of lubricants and battery and energy storage solutions, to better serve our customers in China," Yu said. "We share common vision and enthusiasm with the country on cleaner energies, which sets the ground for mutual success."

As part of its expansion strategy, TotalEnergies has been increasing its footprint to cover more of the renewable business in China. The company has already developed more than 1 gigawatt of distributed

“Our business, starting from offshore oil and gas exploration and refining, has expanded to the entire energy industry value chain ... to better serve our customers in China.”

Yu Yongjian, country chair of TotalEnergies China

photovoltaic projects in the country, contributing significantly to China's renewable energy capacity.

In addition to solar initiatives, TotalEnergies is also looking to accelerate the development of wind energy projects in the country. Collaborating with local partners, the company aims to harness the vast potential of wind power to meet China's increasing demand for cleaner and sustainable energy.

To align with the nation's push toward sustainable transportation and the growing popularity of electric vehicles, it has also formed a

joint venture with China Three Gorges to develop high-power charging infrastructure for electric mobility, which is already a leading player in Wuhan, Hubei province.

Multinational energy companies' expansion in the renewable energy sector in China is expected to strengthen their position as leading contributors to the country's green transition, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

The move also underscores the global energy industry's recognition of the importance of collaborative efforts to address climate change and promote cleaner energy solutions, he said.

According to Yu, the company is also actively pursuing projects in e-mobility, biofuels as well as hydrogen energy to support China's progressive shift toward net-zero.

"We are committed to stepping up our presence in the renewable energy sector, teamed up with Chinese partners," he said.

As the world's third-largest LNG player, TotalEnergies has also supplied more than 5 million metric tons per annum of liquefied natural gas to the country in 2023, he added.

BUSINESSFOCUS

China e-com boom boosts trading status

BRI, developing markets better tapped by surging cross-border transactions

By FAN FEIFEI
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In Africa, almost every fishing company is familiar with a particular "fishing king" from China, whose English name is Bill. Jiang Song, general manager of Wuhan Jianuo Industrial Co Ltd, has been specializing in the export of fishing net products used by anglers across the continent.

Jiang's family has been involved in the fishing net business for more than 30 years. His father was engaged in trade in Zhanjiang, Guangdong province, many moons ago, and Jiang took over the job about 15 years ago and has since begun to expand into overseas markets.

"When I first came to Nigeria in 2011, I found prime angling areas in West Africa to be particularly large, but the fishing methods of local fishermen were still relatively primitive. They usually plunged into the water directly to catch fish with their hands or use hand-woven fishing nets," Jiang said. After visiting some local dealers, Jiang deemed that the fishing nets, which serve as a necessity for local fishermen, would enjoy huge market potential in West Africa.

He initially sold fishing nets overseas through middlemen in South Korea, and now he is riding the cross-border e-commerce wave to sell fishing nets directly to emerging markets such as West Africa and Central America.

In his eyes, channels for traditional Chinese foreign trade enterprises to obtain customers have changed in recent years, as digitalization has become a necessary option for small and medium-sized companies to reach more global shoppers and rev up sales.

"We usually obtained new clients through the Canton Fair and other exhibitions, or directly paid visits to overseas customers to launch promotional campaigns locally," Jiang said, while emphasizing that the fast-developing cross-border online marketplaces have opened up a new gateway to secure orders and boost business abroad.

At the end of 2021, Jiang registered with Alibaba.com — Chinese tech heavyweight Alibaba Group's online business-to-business marketplace for global wholesalers — to develop digital foreign trade.

His company's annual sales reached 15 million yuan (\$2.1 million) within just two years. Jiang's firm has also made forays into Europe, the Middle East, Central America and Southeast Asia. Apart

from traditional fishing net products, Jiang has expanded new categories such as fishing gear and fishing rods through the digitalized tools provided by Alibaba.com.

"At present, sales of these new products account for more than 30 percent of my company's total exports," Jiang said, adding that he wants to cultivate more distributors and regional agents in emerging markets via digital trade platforms, and expand the number of big clients to 50.

Jiang is among a large number of entrepreneurs who are capitalizing on the cross-border e-commerce sector to expand their footprint in emerging markets. Experts said digital trade is a new engine for China's efforts to build itself into an even more formidable trading nation, while cross-border e-commerce has played a vital role in stabilizing China's foreign trade amid downward economic pressure and external uncertainties.

China's cross-border e-commerce industry has seen robust growth in recent years, with the sector's import and export scale reaching 2.38 trillion yuan in 2023, up 15.6 percent year-on-year, the General Administration of Customs said. E-commerce exports stood at 1.83 trillion yuan, up nearly 19.6 percent on a yearly basis.

According to Alibaba.com, niche sports products, intelligent hardware, smart home devices and customized small machinery equipment made by Chinese manufacturers have gained popularity among overseas consumers, whose demand for personalized commodities is rising.

It said as artificial intelligence technology has accelerated the popularization of intelligent hardware, overseas consumers are increasingly favoring consumer electronics products and small household appliances containing innovative technologies.

In addition, the African market is in a phase of high demand for consumer goods, with a hunger for clocks, glasses, bags, footwear, accessories, household appliances and vehicles all witnessing triple-digit growth in Africa between January and August 2023, Alibaba.com added.

Zhang Zhouping, a senior analyst of business-to-business and cross-border activities at the Internet Economy Institute, a domestic consultancy, said unlike Europe and the United States, where penetration rates of online shopping are relatively high, Africa has enormous growth potential in the cross-



border e-commerce sector.

Zhang underscored that digital trade is expected to play a bigger role in promoting economic and trade cooperation between China and Africa, and empower the development of the real economy in Africa.

"As a new form of foreign trade, cross-border e-commerce witnessed rapid growth during the COVID-19 pandemic and became a new engine of the country's foreign trade development," Zhang said, adding that it is also playing a vital role in helping micro, small and medium-sized enterprises to build new brands and open up more overseas markets.

Online discounter PDD Holdings, parent company of Chinese e-commerce platform Pinduoduo, recently rolled out its cross-border e-commerce platform Temu in South Africa. It is the 49th country that Temu has entered since its launch in September 2022 in the US.

Temu, which has expanded its presence in North America, South America, Europe, Asia and Oceania, has gained popularity among consumers there as it offers a wide array of merchandise, including apparel, consumer electronics, jewelry, shoes, bags, cosmetics, baby products and pet supplies at competitive prices.

Chen Lei, chairman and co-CEO of PDD, said the company hopes to leverage the supply chain capacities it has accumulated over the

Top: Customer service employees deal with client orders at a Chinese e-commerce platform in Mlolongo, Kenya, in November.

Above: A staff member sorts products for online orders at a warehouse in Mlolongo in November.

PHOTOS BY LI YAHUI / XINHUA

“Chinese online retailers are accelerating their expansion into overseas markets to seek new sources of revenue, as growth in the domestic e-commerce sector is slowing.”

Chen Tao, a Beijing-based analyst at internet consultancy Analysys

past years to create a new channel that enables consumers from different countries and regions to directly purchase products from factories, providing more flexible and personalized supply chains and more cost-effective shopping experiences.

According to global research firm Statista, the number of registered e-commerce users in South Africa stood at about 27 million in 2022, and the figure is expected to rise to 33.4 million by 2025, with an e-commerce penetration rate of 53.1 percent, making it the largest e-commerce market in Africa.

Industry insiders said demand for Chinese products from economies participating in the Belt and Road Initiative and other emerging markets is rising rapidly, which provides a new approach for foreign trade companies to tap new business opportunities and expand their global foothold.

Data from the GAC showed that in 2023, China's imports and exports with countries and regions involved in the BRI reached 19.47 trillion yuan, accounting for 46.6 percent of China's total foreign trade. Imports and exports with Latin America and Africa reached 3.44 trillion yuan and 1.98 trillion yuan, up 6.8 percent and 7.1 percent year-on-year, respectively.

Foshan Xincode Electronic Technology Co Ltd is one of the earliest manufacturers engaged in producing barcode scanning equipment in China, and it found demand for such devices in overseas markets is robust during their development processes.

Cheng Zhen, general manager of Xincode, said the online search volumes for "code scanning guns" in Southeast Asia are very significant based on statistics from Alibaba.com, so they have formulated product promotion strategies targeting the region.

"Our overall sales in Southeast Asia increased 300 percent in the third quarter of last year compared with the previous quarter," Cheng said. Currently, the company's prod-

ucts are sold in more than 80 countries and regions.

Qin Fen, who is in charge of industries and merchant business at Alibaba.com, said they will make use of big data to optimize operations and focus more on specific industries and different countries, in a bid to help Chinese enterprises expand into overseas markets more quickly and smoothly.

Cindy Tai, vice-president of Amazon and head of Amazon Global Selling Asia, said in an earlier interview that Chinese sellers who sell products abroad through Amazon's overseas marketplaces maintained steady growth last year, while emphasizing cross-border e-commerce is an unstoppable trend that helps drive the transformation from "Made in China" to "Brands from China".

She added that the recovery of consumption and online shopping demand from overseas consumers has brought enormous business opportunities to China's cross-border e-commerce sector.

Tai said the company will ramp up efforts to help Chinese merchants build brands, simplify global operations, optimize global supply chain services, expand their global footprint as well as scale up localization inputs this year.

"Chinese online retailers are accelerating their expansion into overseas markets to seek new sources of revenue, as growth in the domestic e-commerce sector is slowing," said Chen Tao, a Beijing-based analyst at internet consultancy Analysys.

Chen said Chinese enterprises should step up localization efforts in overseas markets, comply with local laws and regulations and seek development strategies to differentiate themselves from competitors.

He added the competition among cross-border e-commerce companies is expected to focus on the supply chain. "The platforms that can offer products at competitive prices, fast delivery and good shopping experience will gain an upper hand in the fierce competition."

By FAN FEIFEI

Cainiao, JD, SF among logistics firms on global march

Chinese logistics companies are ramping up efforts to boost delivery efficiency for cross-border parcels and build global logistics networks as part of their broader push to speed up expansion in overseas markets and ensure the stability and security of supply chains, experts said.

Cainiao Group, the logistics arm of Chinese tech heavyweight Alibaba Group Holding Ltd, has recently enhanced the efficiency of its direct import shipping logistics services, allowing domestic consumers who buy products from cross-border import e-commerce platforms to receive their goods in just five working days.

Currently, Cainiao's direct import shipping service is available in 15 countries and regions, such as Singapore, Japan, South Korea, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom. The company said it focuses on improving digital operating capabilities and optimizing end-to-end import logistics systems.

Meanwhile, Cainiao has collaborated with Tmall Global, Alibaba's cross-border e-commerce platform. Consumers are now informed of the

latest delivery times before placing orders and can claim compensation for tardy deliveries, which will significantly improve the overall logistics experience for both import merchants and consumers.

The company also said in January that it had entered the consolidated shipping sector in the US, aiming to offer millions of overseas Chinese and international students who place orders on Chinese e-commerce platforms more convenient delivery experiences.

Its offerings in the US market include both air and sea freight consolidation options, with the shortest delivery time being five days. The minimum shipping fees are just 12 yuan (\$1.7) per person, Cainiao said.

Consolidated shipping services involve cross-border logistics combining orders from multiple e-commerce platforms or online stores into one package, which will be transported to consolidated warehouses before being delivered to individuals overseas.

JD Logistics, an arm of Chinese e-commerce giant JD, announced in December the launch of its interna-



Employees work at a logistics warehouse of Cainiao Group in Madrid, Spain, in July. MENG DINGBO / XINHUA

tional express delivery service. Currently, the express delivery service is available for individuals in Shenzhen and Guangzhou in Guangdong province, and will initially cover 23 countries across North America and Europe.

Customers can book doorstep pickups through the JD Express

mini program on social media platform WeChat and expect one-hour pickups by couriers. Looking ahead, JD Logistics plans to extend the reach of this service across the nation.

JD is actively expanding its international supply chain and logistics capabilities. It has inked a strategic

partnership with France-based Geopost, Europe's largest international parcel delivery network.

This collaboration enables prompt local delivery from JD's overseas warehouses, with one-day delivery possible in countries such as Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, France, the UK and Spain.

It is also accelerating the construction of a global logistics infrastructure, with plans to build more overseas warehouses in the Americas, Europe, Southeast Asia, Australia and the Middle East, where Chinese enterprises are accelerating steps to expand their business volume with e-commerce penetration rates continuing to rise.

Lu Zhenwang, CEO of Shanghai-based Wanqing Consultancy, said efforts to invest in global logistics networks and overseas warehouse construction will enhance the competitiveness of Chinese foreign trade enterprises, facilitate the development of the cross-border e-commerce sector and bolster sales of Chinese products overseas.

"Overseas warehouses serve as vital infrastructure that boosts

growth in the nation's cross-border e-commerce sector," said Zhang Zhouping, a senior analyst of business-to-business and cross-border activities at the Internet Economy Institute, adding that such facilities enable quicker Customs clearance, faster delivery and lower costs.

SF Airlines, the aviation branch of logistics giant SF Express, has invested heavily in providing air cargo services and expanding its freighter fleet globally. Ezhou Huahu Airport in Hubei province — China's first dedicated freight airport — began operations in July 2022. SF Express holds a 46 percent stake in Hubei International Logistics Airport Co Ltd, the operator of Ezhou Huahu Airport.

To date, SF Airlines has launched a total of 11 international cargo routes from Ezhou to global destinations, said the cargo airline, adding it will continuously expand its fleet size and strengthen its air logistics service capacity.

Yang Daqing, deputy director of research at the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing, said developing the international air freight business will help enterprises boost long-haul freight capacity and further improve cross-border delivery efficiency.

COMMENT

Editorials

France's insistence on strategic autonomy means it's immune to bloc confrontation

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of diplomatic relations between China and France. The win-win cooperation and strategic coordination of the two countries over the past six decades have yielded fruitful results, benefiting the people of both nations, contributing to global peace and stability, and promoting a multipolar world.

Thanks to France's strategic independence, as well as the two countries' common commitment to multilateralism, Sino-French relations have demonstrated stability and sustainability amid the global volatility. Despite the attempts of the United States to drive a wedge between them, they continue to seek to explore the potentialities of new areas of cooperation.

The differences that exist between them have never become hindrances to exchanges and collaboration but avenues for arriving at mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual learning.

In the 25th China-France Strategic Dialogue hosted by the French president's diplomatic counselor, Emmanuel Bonne, and visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Paris on Tuesday, the willingness and openness the French side expressed to continue to deepen the already broad and productive pragmatic cooperation with China was a clear dismissal of the "security concerns" the US has been hyping up with regard to cooperation with China. The green economy, clean technology, nuclear energy, artificial intelligence and aero-

space are all "sensitive fields" that the US seeks to exclude China from.

That, along with the stable bilateral cooperation between China and other major EU members, including Germany and Spain, the first two stops of Wang's Europe tour over the past few days, should serve to prove to the decision-makers of the European Union the necessity of upholding the bloc's strategic autonomy in handling relations with China, as well as the rationality of providing a fair, transparent and sound business environment for Chinese enterprises. Doing so can help avoid the EU footing the bill for the US' geopolitical gambling.

It is heartening to hear Wang's French hosts saying they will play their respective part to help stabilize the overall Sino-EU relations.

Both permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, China and France are also working together to help broker a cease-fire in both the Ukraine and Gaza conflicts, a key part of the talks between Wang and French President Emmanuel Macron, that also took place on Tuesday.

Unlike the "values" the US advocates to drag the world into a new Cold War, the values being jointly upheld by Beijing and Paris are the foundations of the norm of international relations and accord with the principles of the UN Charter. Their common stance is to promote development, peace and stability and concerted efforts for the solution of global challenges.

US veto of UN resolution unjustifiable

At an emergency session of the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday, the United States once again vetoed a resolution calling for a cease-fire in Gaza.

Put forward on behalf of the Arab states by Algeria, the resolution demanded "an immediate humanitarian cease-fire that must be respected by all parties".

The resolution, which gained the support of 13 out of the 15 members of the UNSC, with the United Kingdom abstaining, represents the voice of the majority of countries and the will of the international community, which wants an end to the indiscriminate killing by Israel in Gaza.

As Amar Bendjama, Algeria's ambassador to the UN, said, the UNSC "cannot afford passivity" in the face of what is unfolding in Gaza, and silence is "not a viable option".

More than 29,000 people have been killed in the "self-defense" operation Israel has launched, and more than 80 percent of the population of Gaza has been displaced over the past four months, according to Palestinian authorities.

Washington traditionally shields Israel from UN action, and it has previously vetoed two other UNSC resolutions since the conflict began on Oct 7, when it was triggered by Hamas' attack on Israel.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US ambassador to the UN, said her country was vetoing the resolu-

tion over concerns it would jeopardize talks between the US, Egypt, Israel and Qatar that seek to broker a "pause" in the war and the release of hostages held by Hamas.

But this excuse does not hold water. The talks she referred to are one thing, and the UN draft resolution is another. Since the four-party talks are supposed to be seeking to realize a cease-fire, why can't the US support the UN resolution? How does passing the resolution jeopardize the talks? If the UN resolution exerted any influence, it would only help to promote the success of the talks.

The US ambassador to the UN rejected claims that the veto was the US' latest effort to cover for an imminent Israeli ground invasion into the southern-most Gaza city of Rafah, where some 1.4 million displaced Palestinians are sheltering. But other countries cannot help but think otherwise, as there is no other justifiable explanation for the US' vote against the resolution.

The US said on Monday that it had proposed a rival draft resolution calling for a temporary cease-fire and opposing a major ground offensive by Israel in Rafah. It is to be hoped that the US resolution can be put forward before Israel begins its ground offensive.

If the offensive is launched, it is inevitable that many more innocent Palestinian civilians will be killed and there will be a new humanitarian disaster in the city.

With no leg to stand on, UK shuns Malvinas talks

United Kingdom Foreign Secretary David Cameron's visit to the Malvinas Islands on Monday has once again brought to the fore the nearly two-century-long sovereignty dispute over the South Atlantic archipelago between the UK and Argentina.

The two countries fought a brief war in 1982 over the islands which the UK won, and since then Argentina has sought to resume talks on the islands' sovereignty, only for its overtures to be rejected by the UK.

Thus the move by Cameron, especially the statement he made that the UK would "help protect and defend" the islands for as long as they want to be "part of the UK family", is tantamount to rubbing salt in the wounds of Argentina's painful past. Gustavo Melella, governor of Argentina's Tierra del Fuego, Antarctica and Southern Atlantic Islands province, called Cameron's presence "a new British provocation that seeks to ... sustain colonialism in the 21st century".

Yet apart from that, the overall response from Buenos Aires to Cameron's controversial visit has generally been subdued, with Argentinian Foreign Minister Diana Mondino only making a tongue-in-cheek jibe by thanking his UK counterpart for "including Argentina in his visit to the region". Argentinian President Javier Milei, who took office in November, has so far made no comment on Cameron's visit.

It is not that the main point of contention

between the two countries has slipped out of his mind. Just last month during a "warm and cordial" meeting on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Milei and Cameron touched upon the issue and said they would "agree to disagree and do so politely". Only that Cameron's high-profile move a month later has nothing to do with "politeness" as far as many Argentinian people are concerned.

Yet Milei has too many irons in the fire to make the dispute a priority at the moment, as he is seeking to lift the country out of the economic quagmire it has got itself into. Argentina's annual inflation rate has reached a three-decade high of more than 250 percent, even though the month-on-month pace slowed slightly after he took office. Poverty levels skyrocketed to 57.4 percent of Argentina's 46 million people in January, the highest rate in 20 years. The International Monetary Fund predicts the country's economy will contract by 2.8 percent this year, following a 1.1 percent decline in 2023. Faced with so many pressing economic problems, Milei has no choice but to put the Malvinas Islands on the back burner.

Nonetheless, the dispute surrounding the Malvinas Islands is essentially a legacy of colonialism. The UK should respond to Argentina's request for negotiations as soon as possible with a view to finding a peaceful, just and lasting solution in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Significant interest rate cuts, just what the market needs

China's central bank announced the largest cut to a benchmark mortgage rate in recent years on Tuesday, lowering the over-five-year loan prime rate (LPR) by 25 basis points to 3.95 percent.

Although the market was widely expecting a rate cut, such a huge reduction was beyond people's expectations. Hopefully, the cut can trigger an extensive rise in the country's stock market.

At a time when economic growth is facing great uncertainty, the effective and measured monetary policy coordination from the monetary authorities has become particularly important. In 2023, the central bank introduced a series of rate cuts, lowering the medium-term lending facility and seven-day reverse repo rates several times, something that the market inter-

preted as a move to guide the downward adjustment of the LPR.

The rate cut is undoubtedly a boon for a large number of economic entities who will see a direct decline in their financing costs, helping lubricate the economic circulation.

China now has a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises engaged in foreign trade, but the volatile changes in the international situation have affected their operation. For a long time, financing difficulties and high financing costs have affected the development of the private economy. The rate cut will alleviate the funding and financing pressure of a large number of enterprises.

Not only for enterprises, for millions of households, too, the rate cut means a reduction in repay-

ment pressure. For most homebuyers who have to pay mortgage for over five years, the latest LPR cut will directly reduce their repayment costs, thus alleviating their economic burden.

Actually the central bank had mentioned before Spring Festival that there is a gap between the current inflation level and the target, and the country needs to further reduce real interest rates. It can be expected that the rate cut will play a positive role in stimulating the financing demand of the real economy and stabilizing economic growth.

Judging from market feedback and the actions of global central banks, there is high probability that China's central bank will continue to promote monetary policy loosening in 2024.

— THEPAPER.CN

Rectifying arbitrary fines entails close oversight

A document released by the State Council, China's Cabinet, on Sunday, aimed at curbing arbitrary and excessive fines, has hit the nail on the head.

Imposing arbitrary fees and excessive fines might increase local fiscal revenue in the short term. But the loss obviously outweighs the gain, as doing so harms the local business environment and adds to the burden on enterprises. In 2023, a media survey in 38 towns in the Yangtze River Delta region found that the lower the intensity at which fines are imposed, the stronger the economy of a city is.

Yet, the revenue gained from fines belongs to nontax revenue, which can easily evade budget supervision. Thus, some local governments bank on the fines to increase unsupervised revenue.

In 2021, the media reported that about 62,000 vehicles were caught by one single camera breaking regulations at a junction in Foshan, Guangdong province, resulting in the total fines paid by the drivers exceeding 120 million yuan (\$16.71 million). Such fines have become a reliable source of income for local government, having nothing to do with their initial purpose of reducing

violations of traffic rules.

The document aims at resolving the issue. It stipulates that, by the end of this year, local governments must stop using illegal, irregular, and unnecessary law enforcement monitoring equipment. In addition, newly added monitoring equipment must also be reported to the higher authorities, so as to minimize the chance of electronic surveillance equipment becoming a tool to make money.

The document also establishes a mechanism for on-site inspection if the revenue from fines in a place is found "abnormal".

— CNR.CN

What They Say

NEV brands need to accelerate internationalization

The United States is mulling restricting imports of Chinese smart cars and related components by nontariff means. And the European Union has launched an anti-subsidy investigation into the imports of electric cars from China.

The moves are against the law of the market and harm fair competition. Division of labor and mutually beneficial collaboration are distinctive features of the auto industry chain. The leapfrog development of China's auto industry has provided cost-effective products with high quality to the world. It should be seen that every one in three exported automobiles from China, 4.91 million units last year to be precise, is an electric car, which contributes significantly to the world's green and low-carbon transition.

These moves of the US and the

EU, which also damage their own interests, should prompt the Chinese new energy vehicle manufacturers and automakers to further increase their input in research and development and enhance their management and marketing efficiency at home and abroad.

Chinese companies are the main innovators in the NEV industry in the world today. Competition in the domestic NEV market is about technology rather than price. The NEV industry, characterized by electrification and intelligent technology, is a new track for the automotive industry, which means there are potential opportunities for all participants, including traditional auto parts companies.

The core of the NEV industry is electric systems, intelligent software and various sensors. In order to control the autonomy of relevant technology iteration,

many car manufacturers emphasize full-stack self-research or full-stack self-control. This will be a long-term process featuring quick technological iteration and fierce competition.

The Chinese NEV manufacturers can subsidize their R&D with more profits from the foreign market so as to avoid brutal price competition. The Chinese NEV companies should take advantage of the window of opportunity created by their technological and price advantages over foreign competitors to vigorously promote their internationalization strategies and strive for a larger global market by setting up factories overseas and increasing exports.

That can also help them shun the unfair China-targeted trade restriction measures of some developed economies.

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COMMENT

Wang Yiwei

EU's China policy should avoid lose-lose trap

The 60th Munich Security Conference's annual report, titled "Lose-Lose?", marks a significant shift from the "best times" of globalization to what is now being called the "worst times". The transition signifies a departure from the focus on absolute gains and mutually beneficial cooperation among economies to an era dominated by relative gains and geopolitical competition. The concept of "lose-lose" encapsulates this shift in the international system's underlying logic.

For more than a decade, the MSC has set its theme in its annual reports, with recent years' reports highlighting themes such as "post-truth, post-West, post-order". However, this year's report delves deeper into the global dynamics, emphasizing the "lose-lose" dilemma that stems from the flawed postwar order.

It reflects the discontent of the countries of the Global South and the Global North, as the former have not received their due benefits and the developed Western countries resent their shrinking share in the global economy and diminishing say in global governance. This narrative draws from the cultural roots of Western civilization, which considers human nature and power as inherently evil, leading to a zero-sum mindset and a lose-lose outcome.

The rhetoric employed by the conference's organizers mirrors the strategy of predicting the worst possible outcome while reluctantly accepting the reality of the case, akin to a physician's prognosis. By using global concerns to advantage and resorting to rhetoric, the MSC aims to promote peace through dialogue amid growing geopolitical rivalry and economic uncertainty, the MSC Ambassador Dr. Christoph Heusgen thus stated.

However, behind the creation of terminologies lies the intent to generate momentum. Cold War-era narratives of "democracy vs authoritarianism" have resurfaced, seeking to unite the West against perceived adversaries such as China, Russia and Iran. The MSC's increasing focus on China is an open secret, with concepts like the "Global South" and "de-risking" being popularized to deny China its developing country status and force it to follow stricter terms of competition.

Allegations and probes against China's industries, such as investigations into Chinese electric vehicles and rumors of China using "forced labor" in industries in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, are aimed at destabilizing China's economy.

Recent MSC sessions have seen discussions on "democracy vs authoritarianism", which are aimed at not only disrupting China-Europe relations but also politicizing the conference, and portraying NATO and the European Union as organizations and economic blocs against authoritarianism.

The tragic consequences of misinterpretation of international dynamics in the past, as evidenced by major events such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict, underscore the importance of avoiding self-fulfilling prophecies and misjudgments. Instead, there is a need to engage in meaningful



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

dialogue and understand the complexities of international relations.

The creation of discourse, the Western powers claim, is aimed at uniting the West, targeting opponents, and promoting a "rules-based international order". I was present at the conference and highlighted China's significant role in the global supply chains and the global fight against climate change. However, Western concerns over the security of the global supply chains and attempts to decouple from China risk disrupting global trade and forcing the economies into a lose-lose situation, as emphasized in this year's conference report.

Western accusations — that China's "win-win" strategy is actually "China wins twice" — have now shifted to a nar-

rative of "lose-lose". However, these actions ultimately lead to losses for Western countries, as evident in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Such irresponsible behavior of Western politicians disrupts market rules and undermines the future of globalization, posing a risk to global stability and prosperity.

Addressing climate change requires global cooperation, recognizing China's significant role as the world's factory. However, the West's efforts to reduce their reliance on China's supply chains will increase costs and carbon emissions globally. China's per capita emissions are still low despite the country being the "global factory", something which the Western countries cannot achieve.

In conclusion, the West's limited understanding of global realities, influenced by politicians' rhetoric, underscores the need for a more comprehensive understanding and collaborative approach to address global challenges. By avoiding misjudgments, fostering dialogue and promoting cooperation, the international community can navigate the complexities of the evolving global landscape and work toward a more stable and prosperous future for all.

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Tian Feilong

Taiwan's missteps will only hasten reunification

On Tuesday, Taiwan's "coast guard" reportedly "repelled" a mainland coast guard boat numbered 8029, potentially exacerbating tensions following the recent boat incident on Feb 14. If Taiwan continues to provoke the mainland, its authorities may face significant consequences.

The Spring Festival celebrations have been marred by the tragic incident in the waters off Kinmen island: on the pretext of so-called prohibited or restricted waters, the violent law enforcement actions of the "Taiwan coast guard" caused a mainland fishing vessel to capsize, in which two of the four fishermen on board died, heightening tensions across the Taiwan Strait.

It is within the lawful rights of the Chinese mainland to carry out regular patrols and law enforcement operations in the waters between Xiamen and Kinmen to ensure the safety and livelihoods of fishermen and uphold order in the region. On Monday, the mainland's coast guard boarded a tourist ship from Kinmen, which was carrying 11 crew members and 23 passengers, to conduct a "routine check" that lasted approximately half an hour.

The measures are similar to the mainland's patrols and law enforcement moves following former US House of Representatives speaker Nancy Pelosi's reckless visit to Taiwan in August 2022,

and they signify not only the mainland's assertion of sovereignty in accordance with UN Resolution 2758, but also the gradual establishment of a new normal in governance and institutional progress toward cross-strait reunification.

Taiwan has accused the mainland fishermen of "crossing the line", while the mainland's official response highlights the illegitimacy of Taiwan's violent law enforcement. In reality, it is the "Taiwan coast guard" that crossed the line. Taiwan has failed to recognize the inherent illegality and excessive violence of its law enforcement process, which is not only a rejection of the mainland's policy of "people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait are one family" and the integration of Fujian and Taiwan, but also a brutal attack on mainland fishermen.

Taiwan fails to acknowledge that its so-called regulations are not valid under the internationally recognized legal framework, and the mainland has tolerated its law enforcement actions in the past merely out of goodwill.

Taiwan should accept Beijing's new normal law enforcement process in the waters between Xiamen and Kinmen and refrain from further encroaching on the lawful rights of mainland fishermen. In fact, Taiwan should change its law enforcement practices and review the aggressive approach of its "coast guard".

More important, it is futile on the part of Taiwan to use external intervention to

oppose Beijing's new normal law enforcement measures. The Taiwan authorities and external forces trying to interfere in the country's internal affairs must know that the new normal in cross-strait relations presents a big challenge to the recently elected island leader Lai Ching-te and his administration. Cross-strait relations are now in transition, with the US using Taiwan as leverage to target Beijing.

However, the pro-independence agenda of Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party — and its collusion with anti-Beijing external forces — have led to internal divisions in Taiwan.

Besides, Beijing cannot accept any new cross-strait discourse which deviates from the 1992 Consensus that there is only one China and Taiwan is an integral part of China, and it will respond accordingly to any "Taiwan independence" rhetoric and action that undermine the one-China principle.

As a matter of fact, the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council's categorical rejection of the island's unilateral earmarking of the "prohibited or restricted waters" and condemnation of its violent law enforcement means Beijing has progressed a lot on the way to realizing national rejuvenation. The Taiwan Affairs Office's move also affirms that the waters between Xiamen and Kinmen are the traditional fishing grounds of fishermen from both sides of the

Strait whose legitimate rights are protected by mainland laws. As such, law enforcement by the mainland coast guard in the waters between Xiamen and Kinmen is the best institutional guarantee to prevent similar incidents.

Also, the new normal governance arrangement need not be subject to cross-strait negotiations and instead should be implemented directly by the mainland based on the principle of sovereignty.

The DPP has refused to acknowledge the 1992 Consensus ever since outgoing island leader Tsai Ing-wen took office in 2016, seriously undermining cross-strait relations. That has made it impossible to hold talks to resolve cross-strait disputes. Making matters worse is the DPP's hostile stance and "de-Sinicization" policy, which incidentally led to the tragic Kinmen incident.

The "further actions" can extend beyond the current law enforcement by the mainland's coast guard and include criminal prosecution and sanctions against personnel, ensuring that those responsible for the Kinmen tragedy pay a heavy price.

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Adnan Akfirat

Spring Festival gala showcases Xinjiang's prosperity

What is the world's most watched television show? Perhaps *Chunwan*, or the Spring Festival Gala produced by China Central Television. The Spring Festival Gala has a magical effect on the Chinese people, just like the Super Bowl has on Americans.

This year's gala, which lasted four hours, was filmed in Beijing; Shenyang, Liaoning province; Xi'an, Shaanxi province; Changsha, Hunan province, and Kashgar, in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

In previous years, only Uygur music and dances were included in the gala. But this year, for the first time in 40 years, part of the Spring Festival Gala was filmed in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. That *Chunwan* was filmed in Xinjiang is a historic event in itself.

In fact, part of the gala was filmed in the heart of protected "Ancient Kashgar". The cultures of the Uygur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and some other ethnic communities were showcased in the world's most watched program.

The impressive 8-minute show of the Uygurs was the most-talked-about episode of this year's *Chunwan*. In the more than 2,000-year-old city of Kashgar, which has houses and other structures made of clay and adobe bricks, innovative, state-of-the-art equipment was set up to film the program. Artists performed on eye-catching stages built on the roofs of 12 ordinary houses in Kashgar. Local artists from different ethnic groups sang and danced amid interplay of light and shadow.

The country has been confidently demonstrating the superiority of socialism with Chinese characteristics when it comes to governance and economic development.

The program in Kashgar brought together artists from different generations and ethnic backgrounds from across this culturally rich region. A group of prominent artists who grew up in Xinjiang including singer Wang Hongwei, actress Dilraba Dilmurat, and rapper Air also took part in the program.

Rapper Air said many musicians in Xinjiang are exploring the path of cross-cultural integration with Uygur music, while making continuous efforts to preserve and develop ethnic music. Actress Dilraba said she is proud of the progress and development of her hometown.

Dilraba has about 80 million followers on Weibo, China's answer to Twitter (now called X). No wonder the Uygur people were delighted to see Dilraba at the center of the 8-minute show filmed in Xinjiang. By integrating Kashgar's rich cultural heritage with modern elements, the gala showcased the new face of the ancient city in the new era.

The fact that the most striking element of China's most important TV program was Uygur culture made the United States and the "East Turkestan Islamic Movement" separatists very uncomfortable. As a result, they began claiming the Chinese government was "destroying" the region's culture, which is a blatant lie. In fact, the opposite is true: the Chinese government has helped preserve and develop ethnic minority groups' cultures, languages and practices.

Kashgar has been a cultural center since the times when the ancient Silk Road was flourishing. With its unique customs and traditions, Kashgar has become a national talking point in China. Kashgar, China's westernmost city, is about 4,000 km by road from Beijing. Despite this distance and sub-zero temperatures in winter, statistics show that in the just-concluded Spring Festival, from Feb 10 to 17, Kashgar received 988,500 tourists and achieved a tourism income of 807 million yuan (\$112 million).

In the past decade the country's traditional cautious, defensive stance in international relations has changed. The country has been confidently demonstrating the superiority of socialism with Chinese characteristics when it comes to governance and economic development.

Indeed, there is a need to publish detailed texts to defend the government's steps to eradicate the evils of terrorism, religious extremism and separatism from Xinjiang and safeguard the lives and livelihoods of the Uygur people. But there is also a need to more effectively explain the development the Uygur people have made and the role good governance has played in helping them make those achievements. This way of solving ethnic problems is unique to China.

As a matter of fact, the central government has shown the world how much importance it attaches to the Uygur people. And the fact that there has not been a single terrorist attack in Xinjiang in the past seven years shows the government's measures have been effective and have helped the Uygurs freely develop their culture and advance the regional economy.

I am writing these lines from Urumqi, and I can say China has succeeded in solving the ethnic problems in Xinjiang. China has shown that the best way to solve ethnic problems is to win the hearts and minds of ethnic minority groups and the shortest way to do so is to involve them in the governance of the country.

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GLOBAL VIEWS



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

HORST LOCHEL

Fitness test and opportunities

Digitalization and green transformation of economies are long-term developments that offer great scope for China and Germany

The economic relationship between Germany and China has been mutually beneficial for both countries for many decades. It is a classic win-win situation for the companies and citizens involved. Trade and investment are the driving forces.

Already in 2022, China was Germany's most important trading partner for the seventh consecutive year, although the volume has declined due to the mediocre performance of the global economy and geopolitical tensions. The value of goods traded between Germany and China rose from 25.8 billion euros (\$27.8 billion) in 2002 to 64.7 billion euros in the first quarter of 2023.

Around 1 million jobs in Germany depend on exports to China, and imports from China help Germany's domestic economy in two ways: they support lower price levels for consumers and high value-added production for companies. For China, German imports contribute to the development and upgrading of Chinese industry, especially in the manufacturing sector.

German companies in China have been deeply involved in the Chinese market for many decades in terms of investment, production, and sales. According to the data from Deutsche Bundesbank, Germany's central bank, German companies continued investing in China in 2022, with their total investment reaching 11.5 billion euros, with over 5,000 German companies active in China. As an emerging middle-income country with around 400 million well-off citizens, the Chinese market has also become attractive as a sales market and no longer just as a production location for cheap labor.

The Chinese car market is a good example. As the largest market in the world, it has been generating high sales and profits for the leading German car manufacturers for many years. The same applies to other sectors such as electronics, chemicals, sports and software.

The growing innovative power of Chinese companies is also important for the business development of German companies in China. While competition gets

tougher, it is also an incentive to become more competitive themselves. In a way, China is a kind of fitness test for German companies. And it pays off. In 2023, for example, German companies sold almost 50 percent more electric cars in China than in the previous year, according to a study by global accounting company PricewaterhouseCoopers.

The case of Volkswagen is instructive for the innovation approach. At the Shanghai auto show last year, the company announced that it would invest around 1 billion euros in an electric car development and business center in Hefei, Anhui province. This was followed by the acquisition of a 4.99 percent stake in Xpeng worth \$649 million euros. The two companies have agreed to jointly develop and produce two mid-size electric cars for China.

Such innovative joint ventures are expected to shape the future of Sino-German business cooperation. They also have the advantage of local branding. Seeing the attractiveness of the Chinese market, German companies are increasingly pursuing a localization strategy, not only in terms of supply chain but also in terms of setting up legal entities.

A recent business confidence survey conducted by the German Chamber of Commerce in China showed that more than 90 percent of the companies surveyed have no plans to leave China. On the contrary, 54 percent plan to increase their investment in China over the next two years. This was particularly the case in the automotive and electronics industries, as well as in the business services sector. The majority of German companies see China as an innovative market where they need to be present.

Although geopolitical tensions are still high, the risk of investing in China is actually not that high. Experience shows that most investments pay off within a few years. Moreover, the reputation of German companies and German products and services is still very good in the Chinese market. It seems that the biggest risk for German companies is to not invest in China.

Digitalization and green transition are the most important

areas for the future of China-Germany business cooperation. Both German and Chinese manufacturers are in the process of digitalizing and automating their production. In addition, the financial industry is also digitizing its services. The most prominent example is FinTech. The successful third China-Germany High-Level Financial Dialogue held in Frankfurt last autumn underlined the importance of Sino-German cooperation in this field.

This also applies to the development of sustainable finance to support the green transition in both countries. At the meeting between German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Chinese Premier Li Qiang in Berlin last summer, both sides agreed to place the fight against climate change at the heart of China-Germany cooperation.

A core element for business is the development of green energy technology and industrial upgrading, especially for the "new three": solar cells, batteries, and electric vehicles. There are already many Sino-German deals underway in this area. For example, a huge solar park near Berlin, which produces emission-free photovoltaic energy, uses inverters from a Chinese company to ensure stable and efficient operation of the energy system. And just at the end of last year, Beijing E-Town signed a strategic cooperation agreement with the Steinbeis Global Institute in Tübingen, Germany, on Sino-German cooperation in the green energy industry.

The digitalization and green transformation of economies is a long-term development that will take decades. It is the biggest economic change in the past one-hundred years or so. The digitalization and the transition toward an emission-free economy offer new opportunities for German businesses in China.

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DING LONG

Solving the security dilemma

Middle East countries should make development the priority of their national strategies

The Middle East has long suffered from a serious security deficit due to geopolitical conflicts and interference from outside powers. The region has been mired in turbulence as a result of intertwined traditional and nontraditional security threats, deteriorating development deficit and governance deficit, and hostilities among regional countries.

Since the so-called Arab Spring swept the Middle East in 2011, countries including Yemen, Syria, and Iraq have been plunged into chaos and civil war triggered by intensifying sectarian and ethnic clashes. The latest flare-up in the Israel-Palestine conflict has cast a shadow over the security situation in a region which had witnessed a wave of rapprochement catalyzed by the Iran-Saudi Arabia reconciliation.

The latest war between Israel and Palestine, the most deadly conflict between the two sides over the past five decades, stems from the failure to implement the two-state solution owing to intervention from outside powers. The recent outbreak of the Israel-Palestine frictions, a fundamental problem plaguing the region for decades, clearly exposes the vulnerability of the security architecture of the Middle East.

Internally speaking, the security deficit in the region has complex reasons, including inefficient governance, a regional economy highly dependent on Western countries, and immature nation building. The state system of the Middle East is a legacy of colonialism, and regional countries have been highly dependent on the West in political and economic terms.

The United States is to blame for the security dilemma in the Middle East. The US gives one-sided support to Israel and ignores Palestinian people's rights to survival and statehood. By seeking to broker peace deals between Arab countries and Israel, the US eyes forging an alliance against Iran in the region while containing Russia and China, which has led the Middle East peace process onto a wrong path. The ongoing Israel-Palestine war is the very consequence of the failure of the US' Middle East policy.

In March 2023, Saudi Arabia and Iran reached a deal to resume diplomatic ties under the mediation of China. The foreign ministers of the two countries met in Beijing in April and announced the restoration of diplomatic relations after seven years of estrangement. The rapprochement between the two Middle East rivals demonstrates China's positive role in solving security problems in the region, and shows that

the Global Security Initiative holds immense significance in addressing the security dilemma besetting the Middle East.

First, the traditional security concept advocated by the US-led West mainly serves their own interests, which only aggravates the turbulence and chaos in the Middle East, as can be seen from the latest Israel-Palestine conflict. The Global Security Initiative breaks the Western monopoly on Middle East security issues by advocating respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries and building a security architecture that conforms to the reality of the Middle East.

Second, the Global Security Initiative helps establish a new security concept in the Middle East. By offering a new solution to solving the security problems of the Middle East, the peace and security concept proposed by China and the actions it takes to promote peace in the Middle East have won recognition from the international community and regional countries.

Third, the China-brokered rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran triggered a wave of reconciliation in the Middle East, which facilitated the settlement of security issues in the region, and provided opportunities for countries such as Yemen and Syria to solve their domestic problems. As a result, solidarity and development have become the trends of the times in the Middle East.

While the new wave of Israel-Palestine conflict has cast a shadow over the prospect of security situation in the Middle East, the diplomatic interactions between Saudi Arabia and Iran demonstrate that the wave of reconciliation in the region has withstood the test of geopolitical turbulences and has a sustainable future. The fact that Middle East countries have changed the priority of their national strategies from security to development means it is not an expediency but a long-term policy for them to seek rapprochement.

Going forward, Middle East countries should focus on development, seek to solve problems through dialogues, boost their strategic autonomy, and create a new path to security that meets their own conditions.

First, promote peace through development. In 2016, President Xi Jinping put forward the concept of "promoting peace through development" in a speech made at the headquarters of the Arab League. Overcoming the development deficit is the only way for the Middle East to enjoy lasting peace and stability.

Second, promote peace through dialogue. The history of the Middle

East shows that wars and sanctions are not the right way to settle conflicts. The root of the security crisis can only be eliminated by enhancing strategic communications and boosting trust among Middle East countries. The reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran has set a good example of solving conflicts and demonstrated that dialogue is the right path to lead the region out of its security dilemma.

Third, build a security architecture with strategic autonomy. Despite the positive changes and peace dividend brought by the restoration of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran to the regional geopolitical landscape, there are still many security problems to be solved before regional countries can enjoy lasting peace. To build a more sustainable security architecture, Middle East countries need to enhance their strategic independence.

Fourth, properly manage differences under the guidance of de-securitization. Some Middle East countries have come to realize that securitization will only lead to a lose-lose result, and de-securitization is the correct approach to solving conflicts, a lesson the region has learned from the wave of reconciliation. Seeking common ground and properly managing differences is the important way for regional countries to break out of the security dilemma.

As the Israel-Palestine conflict is raging into its fifth month and spilling over to other parts of the region, including the Red Sea, Lebanon and Iraq, it has severely disrupted global shipping and supply chains. The US' military actions in retaliation against Houthi and other militia groups in the Middle East have added fuel to the fire in the region. At such a critical moment, all parties should cherish the sound security environment brought by the Saudi-Iran reconciliation, promote and implement the Global Security Initiative, and strive to build a new security architecture in the Middle East.

The region will only enjoy lasting peace when fundamental problems besetting the region such as the development deficit, the lack of independent national strategies, and the Palestine-Israel conflict are solved through development and dialogue.

The author is a professor of the Institute of Middle East Studies at Shanghai International Studies University. The author contributed this article to China Daily, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

CULTURE



Left: Bronze bells and other artifacts at *The Exhibition of Cultural Relics and Ancient Books on Forging a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation*, an ongoing exhibition at the Museum of National Palace of Ethnic Cultures in Beijing. **Middle:** The exhibition hall at the Museum of National Palace of Ethnic Cultures. **Right:** Some of the musical instruments on display. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A cultural crossroads across time

A remarkable event in China's history that heralded the solidarity of different ethnic groups was Princess Wencheng's marriage to Songtsen Gampo, ruler of the Tibetan Tubo regime, which lasted from the seventh to the ninth centuries, during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The story has become a household tale.

Tang emperor Li Shimin (599-649) arranged for the princess to travel from what is now Xi'an, Shaanxi province — the Tang capital — to what is today the Xizang autonomous region, to marry Songtsen Gampo, significantly increasing the closeness between the Han and Tibetan ethnic groups. She brought with her tools, seeds, grain, books, medicine, musical instruments and musicians.

An ongoing exhibition at the Museum of National Palace of Ethnic Cultures in Beijing displays a drum and a *guqin* (a seven-stringed Chinese zither) that belonged to the princess nearly 1,400 years ago.

This *guqin* has a special bent shape. The museum's director Tao Ying says this style was popular during the Tang Dynasty, but few examples have survived. They are mostly seen in murals or ancient paintings.

"The drum and *guqin* were kept at the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, Xizang, and were passed down until they became part of our museum's collection. This is the first time they're being exhibited," says Tao.

The Exhibition of Cultural Relics and Ancient Books on Forging a Strong Sense of Community for the Chinese Nation, organized by the National Ethnic Affairs Commission, is a display of more than 1,500 artifacts and ancient books that tell how China became a united multi-ethnic country.

"The exhibition takes the development of Chinese civilization as its main thread. The exhibits bear witness to the long history of Chinese culture, and the communication and integration between different ethnic groups during this historical process," says Tao.

"They show the strong cohesion and centripetal force of the Chinese nation."

Tao explains that the exhibits were chosen from 150,000 artifacts and 510,000 ancient books at museums affiliated with the commission. These items include tools, seals, coins, costumes, ritual items, calligraphy and paintings. The texts are about political governance, the histo-

An ongoing exhibition connects the stories of the societies and ethnic groups that have come together over millennia to create a cohesive Chinese civilization, **Wang Ru** reports.

ries of China's ethnic groups, cultural integration and religion, she adds.

Taking shape

Painted clay vessels from the Chinese National Museum of Ethnology, which were typical prehistoric artifacts produced in the northwestern region under the influence of the Yangshao Culture that dates back to between 7,000 and 5,000 years ago in China's Central Plains, are one of the highlights.

Yangshao is known as a "painted ceramics culture" since these items have come to symbolize the civilization, according to He Chen, a researcher at the museum.

For example, one clay bottle on display that was made between 5,100 and 4,700 years ago witnessed the spread of the Yangshao Culture to what is now Northwest China and its evolution into the Majiayao Culture, which dates back 4,000 to 5,000 years.

He says studies show that the patterns of salamanders on the bottle originated in the Yangshao style of painting birds on pottery, but have their own characteristics. This shows Yangshao influence on the northwestern area and regional features.

"After the birth of Majiayao Culture, Yangshao Culture continued to spread to what is now Southwest China's Sichuan province and Xizang, and even today's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region," He explains.

"Then, the 4,000-year-old Qijia Culture — a continuation of Majiayao Culture — continued influencing other cultures established by the ancient Qiang tribe in the northwestern area during the Bronze Age."

In this way, Yangshao Culture continued to spread and deepen. And the



From top: *Xinan Yi Zhi* (Chronicles of the Yi Ethnic Group in Southwest China), a Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) book about the society of the ancient Yi ethnic group on show. The drum and *guqin* brought by Princess Wencheng to the then Tibetan Tubo regime during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) are part of the exhibition.

artifacts on show are important witnesses to interactions between ancient cultures in different regions, that possibly led to the origin and formation of a pluralistic and integrated Chinese civilization, she adds.

Fancy footwear

She also highlights shoes with "toe springs", or upward curves at their tips.

The researcher says that since the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC), people in China's Central Plains often wore this kind of shoe. The long robes or skirts they wore would drag on the ground, and the shoes would support their hems and prevent tripping. Over time, this became a characteristic of ancient Chinese footwear.

Although the prevalence of these shoes gradually declined during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, people in paintings made at the time were often depicted wearing them.

"This reflects cultural notions. When people think of ancient people, they think of them wearing these kinds of shoes," says He.

The examples on display are not from ancient times but rather are contemporary pairs made by the Zhuang, Miao, Sui and Yao ethnic groups.

"This indicates that although shoes with toe springs are not commonly worn by the Han ethnic group today, other ethnic groups in Southwest and Northwest China have preserved this style that's typical of ancient China's Central Plains," says He.

"It also demonstrates that non-Han ethnic groups have likewise inherited the aesthetics of the Central Plains and forged a shared aesthetic perspective."

Precious pages

Many of the books on display are extremely special, and some are on the list of national-level precious ancient books issued by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

One example on display is part of a copy of *Pearl in the Palm* printed in the early 20th century.

It's a bilingual glossary of the Chinese and Tangut languages written by a scholar of the Western Xia Dynasty (1038-1227), a powerful regime that ruled Northwest China until it was conquered by Genghis Khan. It has become the key to decoding the Western Xia's written characters, which faded from use with the end of the dynasty.

"The book was written in 1190 and is one of the oldest bilingual textbooks in China," says Sun Bojun, a researcher at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

"The writer says in the preface that learning the languages of other ethnic groups was an important way for people of the Central Plains to cooperate with non-Han people, and learning Chinese was an important way for other ethnic groups to learn about the culture of China's Central Plains, which could help them to develop," says Sun.

The writer believed the purpose of compiling this book was to ultimately become a "man of virtue" by learning from other cultures, she adds.

Other precious ancient texts on display include *Xinan Yi Zhi* (Chronicles of the Yi Ethnic Group in Southwest China), a Qing-Dynasty book about the ancient Yi people's understanding of human origins and the universe, and political, economic and cultural aspects of ancient Yi society.

"This is the only existing copy of the book now," says Tao. "As a paper artifact, there are strict requirements for its exhibition, so we rarely display it."

Another rare exhibit is the bilingual Tibetan Buddhist canon, *Kangyur*, printed in the Tibetan and Mongolian languages in the Qing Dynasty. Only eight Mongolian copies exist worldwide, and it has been on the national-level precious ancient books list since 2008, Tao says.

"In the past, only researchers read it when they carried out studies," Tao says. "This is the first time for it to be displayed to the public."

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Diversity powers ancient Silk Road hub's modern development

URUMQI — At the northwestern edge of the Taklimakan Desert, China's largest desert, a modern oasis city has emerged over a period of two decades.

About 10 kilometers north of the downtown area, the ruins of an ancient city sit on a mountain, with beacon towers on the peak and shrines among the cliffs.

The 20-year-old city and the ancient ruins dating back some 2,000 years are both part of the city of Tumxuk in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. Envoys, merchants, farmers, Sinologists and archaeologists have all left their footprints in Tumxuk, and their contributions have powered the city's modern development.

Local residents call the ancient ruins Tangwangcheng (meaning "Tang King City"), as records show they found coins there dating back

to the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Ramparts, columns and ancient river courses can be seen among the ruins, which cover more than 700,000 square meters.

According to Lin Meicun, a professor at the School of Archaeology and Museology of Peking University, the site bears witness to the ancient Silk Road. Having studied documents and relics found at the site, such as ancient chariot accessories unearthed in Tangwangcheng and its surroundings, Lin believes that the ruins are those of "Pantuo City", which is mentioned in official historical texts.

Envoys and merchants from the central part of China used the ancient Silk Road to transport silk and spread iron-smelting and well-digging technology westward, at the same time adopting the grapes and alfalfa of the country's western

region, according to archaeologists.

However, Tangwangcheng may no longer have been habitable during the Song Dynasty (960-1279), says Li Zongqian, director of Xinjiang reclamation history museum in Tumxuk. "At that time, as natural conditions deteriorated, the river near Tangwangcheng stopped flowing, and people could no longer farm or live here," says Li.

In the late 19th and early 20th century, explorers from countries, including France, Britain and Germany, took relics away from China, but they also aroused the world's interest in the ancient culture of Xinjiang and the Silk Road civilization. Meanwhile, Chinese academics were also becoming interested, and generations of Chinese archaeologists have investigated relics in Xinjiang, including at Tangwangcheng, since then.

Tangwangcheng was placed under national-level protection in 2001. In the past two years, national and regional institutions have jointly conducted two phases of investigations and excavations of the site of Tangwangcheng.

In the first phase, archaeologists unearthed over 500 objects, such as bronze mirrors, monkey-shaped Buddha statues, pottery and coins from the Tang Dynasty, some 40 items of which are exhibited at the Xinjiang reclamation history museum.

"Tangwangcheng is a rare, comprehensive relics site. It provides important information for us to explore the social life, religious beliefs and cultural exchanges between the East and the West in Xinjiang," says Yang Rui, the archaeological excavation team leader for Tangwangcheng.

Yan Panning, a resident of Tumxuk, started working as a guide at the Xinjiang reclamation history museum last year. She says the job has deepened her understanding of Tumxuk's long history.

"The cultural relics, such as Gandhara sculptures and colorful murals, represent Tumxuk's importance. I hope to tell the story of Tangwangcheng to more people," she says.

The ancient Silk Road hub has ushered in a new chapter in modern development in recent decades. Since 1949, the central government has mobilized people to develop Xinjiang's desert regions, which nowadays includes Tumxuk and its surrounding area. People gradually reclaimed land, dug canals, built houses and roads, and planted crops and trees.

Around 50 percent of the city's

land consists of urban green areas, while water is provided by six reservoirs with a designed total storage capacity of 830 million cubic meters in 2022. The population has grown from 110,000 when it was established in 2004 to over 300,000.

Xie Jiagui, dean of the Research Institute of Tangwangcheng History and Culture, says he could hardly have imagined the city's fast-track development when he witnessed the birth of Tumxuk 20 years ago, and he is still engaged in the research of Tangwangcheng and Tumxuk.

"Tracing the history of Tumxuk is important to understanding the people who once lived on this land and what happened here," the 62-year-old says. "I hope to seek experience from the past to serve Tumxuk's modern development."

XINHUA

LIFE



Actress Dilraba Dilmurat, clad in her ethnic costume, performs a vibrant Uyghur dance at a party in Croatia.

No fuss, just free mind, as divas hit the road

A popular celebrity travel show's fifth season dives deeper, exploring countries and cultures off the beaten path for most Chinese viewers, **Xing Wen** reports.

The fifth season of the travel reality show *Divas Hit the Road*, which chronicles a 23-day trip by seven Chinese celebrities across Saudi Arabia, Croatia and Iceland, wrapped up recently, leaving a lasting impact on audiences.

The new season, boasting a stellar 8.9 out of 10 rating on the review site Douban, has become the most acclaimed season of the long-running reality show. It has racked up more than 4 billion views on the video-sharing platform Mango TV, according to the box-office tracker Maoyan.

The season was produced to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative last year in an effort to enhance cultural exchange between China and the three countries involved in the BRI. The thematic focus stood out as a highlight, providing viewers with an insightful perspective into the landscapes and traditions of the countries visited.

“We hope the show serves as a window to the lives of people in different countries. Our route ... focused more on history, culture and in-depth exploration.”

Li Chao, director

For instance, before embarking on their journey to Saudi Arabia, participants were given an opportunity to undergo a pre-trip course at the embassy of Saudi Arabia in China. During this session, cultural counselor Ahmed Al-Zahrani introduced them to the language and customs of Saudi Arabia. He also introduced some of the Sino-Saudi cooperation projects that are under the BRI framework, such as the Haramain High-Speed Railway, which is also known as the Mecca-Medina Railway.

Upon arrival in Saudi Arabia, participants had the chance to ride the railway for themselves, and learn from the train crew about the impact high-speed rail travel has had on the lives of residents following its inauguration. One woman invited the group to visit her home, where the participants were able to enjoy homemade delicacies and exchange gifts.

Since Sept 28, 2019, Saudi Arabia has been granting tourist visas to citizens from 49 countries and regions, including China.

“Saudi Arabia is relatively unfamiliar to the participants and many Chinese viewers. The more unfamiliar and unknown a place is, the more surprises it can bring,” says Li Chao, the season's director.

“We hope the show serves as a window to the lives of people in different countries. Our route differed greatly from typical travel itineraries, and focused more on history, culture and in-depth exploration,” he adds.

Following the airing of the episodes in Saudi Arabia, there was a remarkable 772 percent increase in searches for “Saudi” and “Saudi Arabia” on the online travel services provider Qunar.

In Croatia, the group attended a



From top: The seven Chinese celebrities who have participated in the travel reality show *Divas Hit the Road* pose in front of the Peljesac Bridge in Croatia, a project built under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. Actresses Xin Zhilei (in red) and Qin Lan perform *errenzhuan*, a type of folk singing and dancing popular in Northeast China, for global audiences. Actor Hu Xianxu performs *kuaiban* (a traditional Chinese spoken-word genre with rhythmic bamboo clappers) at a party in Croatia. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Actor Wang Anyu, a participant in the travel show, wears a Chinese tunic suit, or Zhongshan suit.

masquerade party on a cruise ship. Members, adorned in traditional Chinese attire, sang and danced alongside European tourists.

They performed Peking Opera, *errenzhuan* (a Northeastern Chinese song-and-dance duet), and *kuaiban* (a traditional Chinese talk show with rhythmic bamboo clappers). Notably, Uyghur actress Dilraba Dilmurat wore traditional attire and performed a vibrant Uyghur dance that engaged the enthusiastic audience.

“I felt very relaxed at that moment. I hoped to offer them a glimpse into the diverse ethnic cultures in China and help them know more about my home, Xinjiang (Uyghur autonomous region),” she says.

Qin Hailu, who performed an excerpt of Peking Opera, adds: “In just one afternoon, the party turned strangers into friends, bridging cultural backgrounds. In the process, I was happy to feel that our hearts had come closer.”

As the adage goes, “It's not where you go, it's who you travel with that counts”, and the show's success can also be attributed to the chemistry among its seven celebrities.

Actresses Qin Hailu, Qin Lan, Xin Zhilei, Dilraba Dilmurat and Zhao Zhaoyi, and actors Wang Anyu and Hu Xianxu, created a group dynamic of inclusivity, humor and mutual support that connected with the audience.

During the trip, the participants were required to take turns organizing accommodation, meals, transportation, and travel itineraries on a limited budget. With seven individuals of different age groups who didn't initially know one another, conflicts and misunderstandings could easily have arisen in the face of the unfamiliar environments and uncertainties of travel.

“However, when these seven people encountered difficulties, they communicated efficiently, adopted a positive approach, and focused on solving problems together rather than blaming one another. Every time I watch this show, it feels like a boost of energy,” says Li Tuzi, an avid viewer.

During the episode filmed in Hofn in Iceland, the group encountered a storm warning. To avoid it and finish the rest of their journey, they had to pack their bags during the night, leave early in the morning, and travel quickly to Reykjavik.

“Faced with this unexpected situation, everyone remained calm and considerate of each other. When they drove out of the storm that morning, the dawn was visible through the car windows, and showed a vast and boundless land. That moment truly moved me,” Li says.

In the final episode, as the trip is about to conclude, 46-year-old Qin Hailu, the eldest member of the group, expressed her feelings: “This team gives me a sense of security, and makes me feel free. As an adult, feeling free is difficult. When I am at home, I have to be a wife, daughter and mother. At work, I have to be an actress, a boss, a director, and sometimes a scriptwriter. However, during this trip, everyone allowed me to be myself. It wasn't easy for me to let down my defenses and open up, but this time, I did it. I cherish this experience and the bonds I've made with everyone.”

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Poetry in motion from the silver screen to the museum

By ZHANG KUN in Shanghai
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An immersive exhibition at the Powerlong Museum in Shanghai is bringing to life the most glorious chapter in Chinese poetry. *Chang'an* is a spinoff event associated with the animated film of the same name, and tells the stories of renowned Tang Dynasty (618-907) poets.

The film, produced by Light Chaser Animation Studio and directed by Xie Junwei and Zou Jing, premiered last summer and raked in box-office revenues of 1.8 billion yuan (\$251 million). It also won the award for the Best Animation film at the 36th Golden Rooster Film Awards, as well as other prizes and recognition in China and abroad.

Chang'an, the ancient name of Xi'an, Shaanxi province, was China's national capital during the Tang Dynasty.

The plot follows elderly marshal poet Gao Shi as he reminisces about his experience spending time in the company of other poets such as Li Bai, Du Fu, Wang Wei, as well as the artist Wu Daozi and calligrapher Zhang Xu, when he was younger. Filled with talent and ambition, the young creatives constantly face disillusionment, and in venting their passion and disappointment, end up writing some of the greatest poetry in Chinese literature.

The exhibition re-creates the settings of five important scenes from the film during which poets and artists are seen drinking and composing poetry together. Actors have been hired to play the roles of the leading characters from the movie, and guide visitors to the exhibition through milestone events in the poets' lives.

The exhibition is interactive. Visitors will be able to recite poems with Gao Shi in the royal garden of Liang Yuan, learn new moves from a dancing lady in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province, a popular urban destination for poets that was known for its drinking and entertainment, and play the *guqin*, a traditional Chinese plucked-string zither, alongside Wang Wei, certain notes of which will cause digital imagery from his poems about nature and art to appear.

The final section of the exhibition is focused on Li Bai, arguably the greatest Chinese poet of all time. Famous for his love of wine, some of Li's most celebrated verses were composed as he drank, and often extol the joys of alcohol. A man of imagination with a romantic view of life, Li also wrote about friendship, solitude, the passing of time and the pleasure of nature.

Here, visitors will be able to learn about Li's celebrated drinking poem, *Qiang Jin Jiu* (Bring in the Wine) and will also have the chance to dub for themselves the scene from the animated film when Li recites the poem at a drinking party with friends.

Finally, an interactive screen permits visitors to interact with flying cranes, a bird that frequently appears in ancient Chinese literature, and which represents pastoral beauty, immortality and moral integrity.

“My son doesn't like it when his teachers tell him to recite a poem, but after seeing *Chang'an*, he became fascinated with Li Bai, so I brought him to this exhibition,” a young mother surnamed Lin says. Her 8-year-old son, Wenxuan, says that the movie and the exhibition made him feel closer to Li Bai, Du Fu and Gao Shi, “because the men and their poetry seem vivid and alive.”

The show opened on Jan 27 and runs until the end of March. The exhibition is expected to tour other cities in China afterward.



Children enjoy the immersive exhibition, *Chang'an*, at Powerlong Museum in Shanghai that will last to the end of March. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

If you go

Chang'an, an Immersive exhibition
Jan 27-Feb 8, Feb 12- March 31, 10 am-6 pm, Tue-Sun
Powerlong Museum No 8 Hall, No 3055 Caobao Road, Minhang district, Shanghai. 021-6221-9111.

LIFE

By MINGMEI LI in New York
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Hiking around tea plantations that rise and fall on gentle mountain slopes in China, John Smagula always used to carry his instant coffee flask. A former Wall Street lawyer and at present a law school dean who oversees international programs at Temple University in Philadelphia, Smagula has taught at many universities in China that had educational partnerships with Temple University. To say he was earlier addicted to coffee would not be absolutely wrong.

But something happened one day that prompted him to change his faith — and switch from the dark, strong, aromatic brew of coffee to the fine, delicately balanced, nuanced, refreshing fragrance of brewed tea.

"One day I was just traveling in China — I like hiking and being in the mountains — and I said (to myself): 'That's wrong. Why am I drinking (instant) coffee when I have the best tea in the world here?'" Smagula recalled the moment he first became interested in tea. It was a turning point. A point that motivated him to taste and test Chinese tea, and more deeply explore Chinese tea culture.

Having studied Chinese for more than 30 years, Smagula has also spent over a decade living in China and immersing himself in Chinese culture. He still returns to China every year, driven by the dual purpose of keeping the law school educational exchange program between China and the United States running, and exploring the different origins of unique, small batches of Chinese tea, each notable for its distinctive palette and aroma.

"I learned when I started drinking tea that there's more to tea than just the beverage. When I would go to a tea store, I would hear the stories behind each (type of) tea. It's interesting, it's accessible, and it also provides that cultural background," he said.

Smagula recalled connecting different types of tea with different impressions of the brew using his imagination. "It's a way of connecting with distant places in a meaningful way, and the people who were there. I remember those experiences and they give me a greater appreciation for the tea."

He said he likes the distinct flavors and aromas of different types of tea. That prompted him to dive into the history of each type of tea, its taste profile and the nuances of brewing and infusion. Thanks to his in-depth knowledge about and passion for tea, he became a certified tea

Yes, that's it, it's always tea time

A US law school dean has made tea a religion of the art of life as he connects with China's rich tea tradition and spreads its knowledge far and wide

specialist in the US and China in 2010 and 2012, respectively.

Tea is one of the world's oldest beverages, and it has been the favorite drink of the Chinese people for thousands of years. According to legend, Shen Nong, a mythical ruler known as the "Father of Agriculture" in China, serendipitously discovered tea, when leaves from a wild tea plant drifted into a pot of boiling water in his garden.

Initially, tea leaves were primarily used as herbs for medicinal purposes. The popularity and increasing consumption of tea during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-220) led to the development of tea culture in China. During the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) dynasties, tea became integral to Chinese culture, leading to increasing consumption, sprouting of teashops and inclusion of tea in poetry and art.

Scholars penned down detailed works (or manuals) on tea, such as *The Classic of Tea* by Lu Yu, written between 760 and 780. This treatise on tea provides comprehensive information on tea cultivation, preparation and the tea-drinking tradition, including classification of tea and the ideal water and its temperature for brewing different types of tea.

Derived from the same *Camellia sinensis* plant, different types of tea are produced depending on the processing method, from oxidation, wilting, bruising and crushing to fermentation. This results in a diverse variety of teas. Roughly, there are six types of tea: white, yellow, green, oolong, black and post-fermented (or dark), each with its unique aroma and flavor, appealing to different palettes.

Tea from China was first introduced to the Western world by Portuguese priests and merchants in the early 16th century. Over time, it became popular in other European countries. By the 17th century, it had become so popular among Britons that Britain was doing regular trade with China to meet the growing demand for tea. Eventually, tea became popular worldwide.

The global consumption of Chinese tea has been rising by the year. In 2022, the world consumed about 6.9 billion kilograms of tea, and nearly one-third of that



A tea master performs Chinese tea ceremony at the Tea for Harmony Yaji Cultural Salon event at the Chinese embassy in Washington on May 21. XINHUA



John Smagula (right) brews tea for guests at a United Nations culture exhibition. MINGMEI LI / CHINA DAILY

came from China, according to the market data provider Statista.

The appeal of Chinese tea extends beyond its taste. The entire brewing process, coupled with the cultural significance, stories and connotations associated with tea, captivates both Chinese and foreign tea lovers, enhancing their appreciation for this unique beverage and converting more people to the faith of *Camellia sinensis*.

"One thing about tea is that it's very equalizing everywhere I've gone in China," Smagula said. "Where(ever) I've drank tea, I've been with different kinds of people ... and I think that's historical in China, where we just have our tea, and whoever is sitting around the table, it doesn't matter where they're from, what their backgrounds are and what their economic circumstances are. Everybody is the same when we drink tea. And there's something very disarming about tea."

Blending the rich aromas of different types of tea in his teapot, he has infused those fragrant odors into the educational circles across China and the US.

During his visits to the tea plantations in

Dayan township of Hubei province, Smagula established a strong bond with the local people, particularly with children eager to learn English.

While teaching English to the kids in the tea plantations, Smagula loved combining the lessons with real-world experiences. He introduced children to basic tea-related terms. He was more than a teacher; he was a mentor, advising the children and their parents how to go about life.

Smagula said whenever he drinks tea from Dayan, it reminds him of the time he spent in the township. But more than anything else, he is reminded of the smile on the children's faces. "It's a reminder of the special relationship that I built with the people (there)," he said.

While at Temple University, Smagula established a tea club that attracted students from different departments, bringing together a diverse mix of youths and prompting them to interact in ways they might not have typically interacted otherwise. "That, I think, is also part of what tea culture is (about)," he said, emphasizing the club's role in promoting inclusivity.

"One of the beauties about tea is that there is no right or wrong answers in many cases. If a student doesn't like the West Lake Long Jing (a highly valued and appreciated green tea), maybe a different kind of tea will suit that student.

And so it's not right or

wrong, good or bad," he said.

"Students are free to judge each type of tea in a very relaxed and comfortable environment. There's something about tea that unifies people, that brings people together, and it disarms us in such a way that we feel like we can speak about anything we want (to) in a friendly and cordial setting."

Expanding his reach beyond students, Smagula manages his own social media platform, @laosaoahuo, to share his passion for tea culture. Leveraging his professional knowledge and expertise in foreign languages, he engages a broader audience, offering insights into Chinese culture from an international perspective.

"It creates a conversation, not about a country, not about a specific thing, but we're talking about tea, and how, what tea means to you. There's something about that environment where we have that exchange of ideas that will then allow us to supersede or transcend our national boundaries, so we can get to know each other as people and friends first, and then that, I think, will create a dialogue. It has been a great way of bringing down walls and barriers that may have existed," Smagula said.

Cultural ambassador

Tea, which originated in China, has transcended its humble beginnings to become a symbol of the country's evolution from feudal and colonial times to today's era of economic globalization. For China, tea acts as a cultural ambassador, bringing people together to savor a pot of hot tea and learn more about the country, its history, its culture.

Cindy Tuisku, 66, flew back to her home in San Francisco, California, from China in December after completing a six-week internship program in Mount Wuyi in Fujian province, where different kinds of tea, including Da Hong Pao, are grown.

"It was like a dream tea trip. Everything went so well. There was a beautiful tea garden right outside my door. From that experimental tea garden, you can walk up into the hills," she said.

"We went to the area where the six mother bushes of the Da Hong Pao trees are. ... I'd seen pictures of that place, and I'd heard of that place, and I love that tea. I was right underneath the tree at the national preserved area there.

"We were sitting there drinking Da Hong Pao ... surrounded by the tea gardens. I kept pinching myself, I can't believe I'm actually here, and then we took the bamboo raft trip down the Nine-bend River."

Tuisku has been studying Chinese tea culture for the past five years, but her first encounter with it was purely by chance when she unexpectedly took part in a "tea experience" through Airbnb.

"I was the only student in the class, and (the tea master) took me through the six categories of tea," she said. "It was amazing by the time I was done, (I had) already scheduled to come back with my niece, and she asked her husband, and I just got into it, and I started to look for tea opportunities near where I live."

Tuisku said she first started visiting tea vendors and teahouses in San Francisco. Then she began learning online about tea culture. Later, she joined many tea communities in the US, became part of the Global Tea

Volunteer Program and got a chance to visit China.

"Tea brings everyone together. We all took that opportunity to get together at a teahouse and have some good conversations. Now, it's four times a week, I get together with folks over Zoom who might be all over the world, ... in Austria or Australia, or in China or Germany, to have tea," Tuisku said, sitting in front of her tea table.

Tuisku has also taken part in several tea events in the US organized by tea communities. There are many little groups around the US learning about Chinese tea and culture, she said, such as the New York Tea Society, Global Tea Initiatives in California and the Northwest Tea Festival in Seattle, Washington.

The tea lovers' community in the US and the rest of the world is huge and interconnected, and Tuisku and her friends usually meet on platforms such as Kung Fu Tea Facebook page, or through tea culture apps or just in a teahouse, sharing their stories of Chinese tea, she said.

In addition to the existing tea culture in the US and other countries, the rising popularity of bubble tea has drawn the attention of people across many countries. Retailers and teahouses are now offering more authentic tea bases and flavors in their outlets, importing tea leaves from China for better taste, though some tea lovers look for authentic and traditional Chinese tea.

Duo Cafe is such outlet that blends traditional Chinese tea with locally popular beverages and combines them with snacks. The "new-style" teahouse has been drawing an increasing number of New York residents, including the younger generations, eager to explore authentic tea. People are drawn to the outlet "perhaps because I'm from Fujian province, and there is an abundance of tea in our region", said Ian Wang, the 28-year-old owner of the teahouse.

"I have been influenced by the tea culture since I was young. So, I thought that in New York, there might be a lot of Japanese matcha and sencha and afternoon teahouses, but there are relatively few places that offer traditional Chinese tea. I wanted to bring this part of our traditional Chinese culture, this tea culture, to this place — to introduce our Chinese traditions to the local community and ... (allow) more people to experience it."

Customers can immerse themselves in the entire process of tea-making, starting from selecting their tea from a hand-drawn menu, to savoring its aroma, and then personally brewing and steeping the tea, Wang said. Every step is a hands-on experience that allows guests to connect with the tea on a deeper level.

Developing curiosity

"For locals, they might initially find Chinese tea flavors like Tie Guan Yin quite 'robust' and perhaps somewhat bitter, so we also offer options like white peach oolong tea or fruit-infused teas as more approachable choices. However, as they continue to explore, they often develop a curiosity about authentic Chinese tea and an urge to better understand Chinese tea culture. Then, they might start asking about specifics, such as the age of our Pu'er tea, which shows they have a growing interest in the nuances of Chinese tea," Wang said.

"Our hope is to create a space ... where people can come together as friends, sit down and enjoy a peaceful chat while having tea.

"Tea holds a multitude of memories for me. As a younger-generation Chinese immigrant, it connects me to my homeland and reminds me of my identity," Wang said. "From childhood to adulthood, we have always had tea as a part of our lives. The older generation has already brought tea culture and Chinese traditions to the US. While I may not be running a 'grand cultural tea establishment', I hope to introduce more young Americans to Chinese tea culture in a fashionable and blended way, and help them to connect with this rich heritage."

The endeavors of Smagula, Tuisku and Wang will bear fruit because, as Lu Yu said in *The Classic of Tea*, tea tempers the spirit, harmonizes the mind, dispels lassitude and relieves fatigue, awakens the thought and prevents drowsiness.



A student from Columbia University in New York explores traditional Chinese tea art in Dujiangyan, Sichuan province, on Jan 8. WANG LEI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

