

Key to future

'New productive forces' can help drive momentum, experts say

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# CHINA DAILY

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## Xi encourages more US youths to visit China

Iowa high school students build bonds through exposure to Chinese culture, peers

By ZHANG YUNBI in Beijing and MAY ZHOU in Houston

Sienna Stoneking, a freshman at Muscatine High School in the US state of Iowa, could not conceal her excitement when recalling her first trip to China, which she made last month with the encouragement of President Xi Jinping.

"If anyone is thinking of taking a trip there, it's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and go for it!" she said. More than 20 students from the high school, including Stoneking, participated in an exchange visit to Beijing, Shanghai and Hebei province from Jan 24 to 30.

After wrapping up their tour of China, the students wrote a letter to Xi, sharing their joy during the trip and thanking him for the invitation.

"More than ever now, this trip motivated me to take a deeper dive into the culture, and someday I hope to become fluent (in Mandarin) and take many more trips," Stoneking said. Xi replied to the young US visitors on Saturday, which was Chinese Lantern Festival, which marked the first full moon of the Year of the Dragon. Xi also sent them Lunar New Year cards.

In his reply, Xi noted that Lantern Festival has long been an important moment for the Chinese people to express their hope for a better life. He extended holiday wishes to the teachers and students of the school, and encouraged more US youths to come to China for exchanges and study.

The young visitors became the first group of United States high school students to visit China under a program that aims to invite 50,000 young people from the US to go to China in the next five years for exchanges and study. Xi announced the program in San Francisco in November during his visit to the US.

Xi welcomed the school's students to be part of the program when he replied last month to Sarah Lande, one of his "old friends" from Iowa. Lande had hosted Xi in the Iowa city of Muscatine when Xi first visited the US in 1985 as a county-level official from Hebei province.

When the US students arrived in Beijing, one of their gifts to Xi was a school flag written with Chinese characters that said "Grandpa Xi, here we are". The students' letter addressed to Xi featured beautifully written Chinese characters as well as vividly hand-painted dragon, Great Wall and giant panda depictions.

In his reply on Saturday, Xi said

he was happy that the students had visited several Chinese cities, where they saw pandas, tasted Chinese delicacies, experienced Chinese culture and had a lot of fun.

Learning that the US students had made many Chinese friends during the trip and had invited them to visit their hometown in the US, Xi said he was touched by their friendship.

Stoneking told China Daily: "I feel honored to have the opportunity to communicate with President Xi Jinping. It's still so shocking to me the connection we share with China."

She added that she and a classmate "agreed that if we were given the chance to go to college there, we would take a plane in a heartbeat".

Dan Stein, chairman of the Muscatine-China Initiatives Committee and a native of Muscatine, accompanied the students for much of the China trip.

"It was the first time for the students to leave the United States or, for a lot of them, even to travel on an airplane," he said.

"It's one thing to see in a video or on TV about another country. But to go there firsthand and taste the food and see the sights and smell the air, feel the culture, I think that was what the trip accomplished," he said.

"I'm hopeful that we can continue to have more exchanges. And at the same time, we want more Chinese people to also come visit us in the US so they can see the same thing and feel it firsthand," he added.

### 'Seeing is believing'

In 1985, Xi visited Muscatine as secretary of the Communist Party of China Zhengding county committee in Hebei province.

In his reply letter on Saturday, Xi cited a Chinese saying that "seeing is believing", noting that the warm and friendly people he met in the US in 1985 left an indelible impression.

Likewise, it is believed that through this exchange visit, the students can gain a more intuitive and in-depth understanding of China and the Chinese people, Xi said.

Xi encouraged the Muscatine High School students to revisit China, and he encouraged more young people from the US to come to China for exchanges and study.

He added that they can get firsthand experience of the real China in a multidimensional and comprehensive manner, foster genuine friendship with Chinese youths, and learn from one another so that they can jointly contribute to a stronger friendship between the people of the two countries.

See Letter, page 3



Students from Muscatine High School in the US state of Iowa learn a traditional way of paper-making at Fudan University in Shanghai during their visit to China in January. WANG XIANG / XINHUA

## Founder of beverage giant Wahaha passes away at 79

By FAN FEIFEI fanfeifei@chinadaily.com.cn

Zong Qinghou, the founder and chairman of Hangzhou Wahaha Group, China's leading beverage manufacturer, passed away on Sunday at the age of 79.

As one of the most respected representatives of China's first generation of entrepreneurs since the country embarked on reform and opening-up, Zong's down-to-earth style and innovative spirit greatly impressed the public.

Experts said Zong's rags-to-riches life story will surely inspire more Chinese entrepreneurs to focus on the real economy and run their businesses in a pragmatic and steady manner.

Born in 1945 in Suqian, Jiangsu

province, Zong took over a small grocery store at a school in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in 1987, and worked as a distributor of soft drinks and popsicles for children.

In 1989, he founded Hangzhou Wahaha Nutritional Food Factory, which became Hangzhou Wahaha Group two years later after the acquisition of a local canned food factory on the verge of bankruptcy.

In 1996, Zong launched Wahaha AD calcium milk, which became a great hit with Chinese consumers.

The company's products now cover more than 200 categories, including purified water, milk and yogurt drinks, carbonated drinks, fruit and vegetable juice, tea and coffee drinks, with its sales revenue reaching 51.2 billion yuan (\$7.11 billion) in 2022. It has nearly 30,000

employees and 81 production bases nationwide.

As one of the most iconic figures in Chinese business history, Zong was ranked as the country's richest person in 2010, 2012 and 2013 by business magazine Forbes.

However, Zong led a simple and thrifty life. He once said, "I am an ordinary person, but luckily I was born in such an era." He said that Wahaha would not exist without

public welfare activities, contributing to the country's economic and social development.

Zong was a deputy to the 10th, 11th and 12th National People's Congress, China's top legislature.

Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School, said, "As a representative of the first generation of Chinese entrepreneurs after the launch of reform and opening-up, Zong always focused on the real economy and was not involved in finance and property."

See Wahaha, page 3



Zong Qinghou

## Praying for peace



Local residents attend a memorial event under a damaged bridge in Irpin, northwest of Kyiv, Ukraine, on Saturday as the Russia-Ukraine conflict reached its second anniversary. ROMAN PILIPEY / AFP See more, pages 6, 11

## Country, ASEAN build bridge from heart to heart

WORLD WATCH By Hou Yanqi

People Exchanges is aimed at tightening cultural ties, consolidating the foundation of public opinion and providing lasting momentum for the development of China-ASEAN relations. Under the theme of "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience", Laos, which holds the rotating chairmanship of ASEAN for 2024, has prioritized "promoting the role of ASEAN culture and the arts for inclusion and sustainability", which is in line with this.

Under the framework of the ASEAN-China Year of People-to-People Exchanges, the two sides will carry out a series of exchange and cooperation activities in the fields of youth, women, education, culture, tourism, sports, science and technology, and media.

The ASEAN-China Youth Campus, the ASEAN-China Educational Exchange Week, the ASEAN-China Cultural Forum, the tourism exhibition during the ASEAN-China

See Exchanges, page 3

China and member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations kicked off the 2024 ASEAN-China Year of People-to-People Exchanges on Feb 2 with a high-standard, high-level launching ceremony in Fuzhou, Fujian province.

It is only through friendship of the heart that a long-lasting relationship can be established. In more than 2,000 years of friendly exchanges, China and ASEAN have jointly created a diverse and splendid Asian civilization and written a magnificent poem of civilizational integration.

The agreement of China and ASEAN to designate 2024 as the ASEAN-China Year of People-to-

## ACCESS TO CAMPUSES SPARKS FIERCE DEBATE

Some universities have kept restrictions on public entry while others are letting people in

By ZHAO YIMENG zhaoyimeng@chinadaily.com.cn

Despite campuses being discouraged to lift pandemic-related restrictions on public access more than a year ago, some universities still have limits in place while others have thrown their gates open to the public.

The different approaches to campus access have sparked fierce online debate, with many arguing that universities have a responsibility to interact with the public and share their facilities. However, other netizens believe some controls are necessary to ensure the smooth running and security of the institutions.



Xiong Bingqi, director of the 21st Century Education Research Institute, said a "suitable degree of openness" should be balanced with maintaining a healthy learning environment and the orderly operations of universities.

"Unrestricted openness of universities can potentially affect the normal order of educational and teaching activities, increasing the management pressure on campus security and introducing potential safety risks," Xiong said.

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INSIDE Global South should play part in facilitating WTO reform Global Views, page 13



## PAGE TWO



**Left:** Visitors take photos in front of a building at Yunnan University in Kunming, capital of Yunnan province, on Feb 1. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Center:** Visiting school students use microscopes at a laboratory of Harbin Medical University in Heilongjiang province on Jan 19. LIU YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY **Right:** Children wearing doctoral gowns pose for a photo on Jan 30 at Tsinghua University in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

*Finding inspiration under the embrace of academia*



Reporter's log  
Zhao Yimeng

## Opening: Prestigious universities already allowing 'outsiders' in

From page 1

Top higher learning institutions like Peking and Tsinghua universities face pressure to open to the public, however, their campuses could be inundated with an influx of curious visitors, he said.

"The facilities of universities located in busy urban areas might be stretched to meet demands if universities are fully opened to the community as local residents might flock to campuses for recreational activities," Xiong said.

### Different degrees

Ma Liang, a researcher of the National Academy of Development and Strategy at Renmin University of China, last year conducted surveys on the openness of 147 higher education institution campuses nationwide.

The evaluation by his team, published in December, showed that 52.4 percent of the surveyed institutions had to varying degrees opened their campuses to the public. The majority stated that any member of the public could enter, while a small number said they only opened their campuses to limited groups such as high school students and parents.

In January last year, many universities started announcing their gradual reopening. The number reached a peak in July, when the Ministry of Education released a circular encouraging colleges to open for public visits during the summer vacation.

Local education authorities also released policies promoting the gradual opening of campuses, which accelerated the process in places such as Shanghai and Gansu province, Ma said.

Despite these measures, only 13 percent of the universities surveyed by Ma's team, such as Hunan University, have fully opened to the public. In addition, many universities are still placing conditions on outsiders entering their campuses such as checking ID cards, reserving visiting times and placing time limits on visits.

In December, a wave of online discussion about the issue erupted when an associate professor from Peking University said in an online post that he was chased by a campus security guard after he bypassed a checkpoint to avoid a facial recognition device over privacy concerns.



Visitors enter Peking University's campus after it was opened to the public during the winter vacation. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The public has also been calling for further openness because of limited daily entry quotas and requirements for checking ID cards.

### Measured responses

In recent months, many prestigious universities in China have declared they will further open their campuses to the public in response to calls for a comprehensive lifting of the restrictions.

Since the start of the year, Tsinghua University has expanded campus accessibility to the public. The number of daily visitor registrations at weekends and on public holidays has increased by 50 percent to more than 12,000 people, according to a notice released by the university.

People from outside the university can be invited on campus to watch performances and attend activities. The public is also allowed broader access to exhibitions, lectures and sports events held at the university as part of efforts to open up more educational resources, the notice said.

During the winter vacation, Peking University opened its museum of art and archaeology as well as the Weiming Lake ice rink to registered visitors. Six research paths on the campus were designated for students and social groups, while parts of the university canteen were also opened to the public, said the university's latest notice.

Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture rents ice skates and sleds to visitors wanting to use their facilities, while Beijing Sport University has opened its outdoor sports facilities to the public including the Yingdong athletic field.

Other higher education institutions such as Renmin University of China, Zhejiang University, and Tongji University in Shanghai have also opened their campuses to registered visitors.

While allowing visitors to enter their campuses, the universities also emphasize visitors' orderly behavior and urge them to follow management rules and avoid going into teaching or office buildings without permission.

### Divided opinions

Although the majority of public opinion seems to support opening public access to university campuses, some people are worried about order and management issues. Concerns have also been raised that "scalpers" might turn limited entry into a "business", which could pose a threat to campus security.

Many supporters of fully reopening campuses often compare the situation in China with Western countries where most universities are depicted as having no walls or gates.

Xiong said although the public has free access to some universities in the United States and European

countries, the degree of openness varies according to the circumstances.

While institutions allow visitors to enter their campuses, restrictions remain on getting into teaching buildings and facilities such as libraries and laboratories. An entry card is usually needed to gain access to these places, striking a balance between an open campus and maintaining orderly education.

"It is essential to adopt a tailored approach by formulating a plan based on opinions of the entire faculty, students and residents in the community," Xiong said.

For instance, opening the university's sports facilities to the public must not interfere with students' physical education classes and workouts, he added.

### Students' thoughts

Chen Bingzhe, a 21-year-old student at Tsinghua University, believes campuses should be open to the public with a daily limit on visitors to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for the faculty staff and students.

"For individuals outside universities, touring a campus is a good way to understand higher education institutions and experience the academic atmosphere, especially for young people. Universities are expected to provide a channel for external communication," Chen said.

However, during the pandemic shutdown students had more resources and space for activities, which improved the quality of school life and removed any security risks, he said. "The university should set a specified limit and give access to visitors without unduly affecting life on campus," Chen said.

Wang Chenyang, a student at Capital University of Economics and Business in Beijing, said blocking access to campuses results in a waste of resources, such as use of activity areas and cafeterias. "Most universities are equipped with activity areas and sports facilities. Properly opening them to the public can contribute to the promotion of nationwide fitness," the 22-year-old said.

"But opening them up should not cause chaos or disrupt students' normal academic and daily lives because campuses primarily serve students and are places where they study and live," he said.

Reasonable plans to open up campuses should be based on a university's capacity and improved management, Wang added.

Zhao Yingwen, a 60-year-old Beijing resident, said he used to take a walk after dinner in Beijing Normal University, which is located in his neighborhood. However, even before the imposition of the pandemic-related restrictions his access was stopped on the pretext of the university improving campus security.

"The closing of access to the campus had an impact on my daily exercise. I could no longer enter the campus without a faculty card or a meal ticket," Zhao said. The campus still remains closed to the public, he said.

Ma, the researcher, said university campuses could be opened in stages in a way that suits the requirements of different universities. "For instance, the process could begin by first allowing access to a university campus, followed by access to buildings such as libraries," Ma said.

Policies should also be developed to protect the rights of each university in the reopening process in case they encounter problems, he said.

Visitors should adhere to school orders and not damage the environment or interrupt campus management, he added.

Yan Zhongqian contributed to this story.



Students and faculty staff move around the Beijing Institute of Technology campus on Dec 28. The institute also allows the public to enter the campus after checking ID cards. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## TOP NEWS

## China unveils new names for space vehicles

Manned moon lander is called Lanyue, crew spaceship is Mengzhou

By ZHAO LEI  
zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

China unveiled on Saturday the names of its manned lunar lander and new crew spaceship.

A news release from the China Manned Space Agency said the lunar lander that will carry Chinese astronauts to the moon's surface has been named Lanyue, or Embracing the Moon, a term that first appeared in a poem written by the late Chairman Mao Zedong in 1965.

The term *Lanyue* symbolizes the Chinese people's aspirations for and confidence in exploring the universe and the moon, it said.

The new crew spaceship has been named Mengzhou, or Dream Vessel, which represents its responsibility for fulfilling the Chinese nation's dream of landing on the moon to start a new journey of space adventure, the agency said.

It noted that there will be two models of the Mengzhou — one will be used to transport astronauts to the moon while the other will replace the current spaceship Shenzhou to ferry crew members between Earth and the Tiangong

space station, which has been orbiting around the planet for nearly three years.

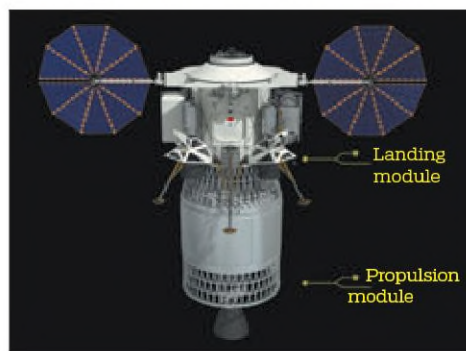
The names were picked by a group of experts from nearly 2,000 proposals solicited from the public.

Currently, the research and development of the Lanyue, the Mengzhou and the super-heavy-lift carrier rocket Long March 10 are progressing well, the release said.

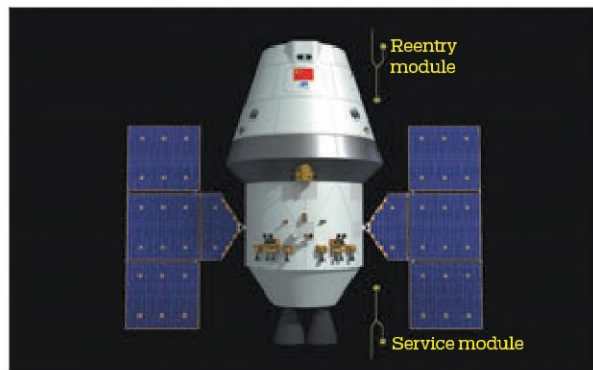
China has announced its plans for conducting its first manned mission to the moon around 2030.

According to mission planners, the Lanyue lunar lander will have two parts — a landing section and a propulsion section — and will weigh nearly 26 metric tons. It will accommodate two astronauts and a 200-kilogram rover.

The Mengzhou spacecraft will also consist of two major components — a reentry module that will house astronauts and serve as the control center for the entire craft during spaceflight, and a service module that will contain power and propulsion systems. The vehicle will be nearly 9 meters long and 4.5 meters in diameter, and will weigh 22 metric tons.



Simulated photos of the manned lunar lander (left) and the new crew spaceship. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



## Letter: Visits help open up channels of communication

From page 1

The students visited Beijing Zoo to see giant pandas and listened to briefings about wildlife protection. While in Beijing, they also joined local high school students at a cultural experience center to learn about traditional Chinese medicine and the evolution of Chinese characters, and they tried on Peking Opera costumes.

During their trip to Shijiazhuang, the provincial capital of Hebei, they toured Shijiazhuang Foreign Language School, tried the Chinese folk art of paper-cutting, and made dumplings together with their Chinese peers.

"All of the facilities that they had at the school were really great. In the US, we have a lot of opportunities, but here there were so many sports and extracurriculars," said Arabella Fournau, another freshman at Muscatine High School.

"The city was amazing, and the people were so friendly to us," she added.

In Shanghai, the students explored the city with local teenagers, tried calligraphy, visited Fudan University for a photo exhibition about China-US exchanges, and toured the Shanghai Tower skyscraper for a bird's-eye

view of the Lujiazui financial district. "It's just opening up channels of communication," said Aaron Smith, a teacher at Muscatine High School. "Like right now, I'm having conversations with faculty members that I met, with some students that I met, just sharing ideas."

"When you have these open channels of communications, it just strengthens the line of friendships," Smith added.

Apollo Haye, a junior at Muscatine High School, said: "China was a beautiful place, and I was stunned by the history and modern advances they had. The architecture and art were amazing. I would like to study more on China after returning from this trip, and I hope to get into an exchange program for it."

Stein, the chairman of the Muscatine-China Initiatives Committee, said the trip was "a life-changing experience" for the young visitors.

"I think they're more open and more interested in China. They want to know more and meet more Chinese people. Overall, the trip met the vision of President Xi that he laid out in San Francisco to get people to actually come and see," Stein added.

Contact the writers at zhangyumbi@chinadaily.com.cn

## Farmers vent fury



French riot police push back agitated farmers on Saturday at the Salon de l'Agriculture, also known as the 60th International Agriculture Fair, in Paris. The incident took place during French president Emmanuel Macron's visit to the Porte Versailles exhibition center.

PQR / SUD OUEST / MAXPPP

## Research marks a step toward carbon-neutral future

By HOU LIQIANG in Beijing and LIU KUN in Wuhan

A Chinese-led team has developed a carbon dioxide electrolysis system whose equipment has a longer life span and higher conversion efficiency. This could not only help tackle climate change but also dispose of hazardous spent lead-acid batteries.

Electrolysis that reduces carbon dioxide to useful chemicals can help the world struggling to cope with climate change embrace a carbon-neutral future, but workable solutions are needed to ensure the stability of the process.

Conventionally, alkaline feedstock is used as the electrolyte, which is a key agent in the process. However, byproducts generated through chemical reactions result in precipitates, which adversely affect the conversion efficiency and life span of the

electrolysis equipment.

Following five years of efforts, researchers at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, the University of Science and Technology of China and the University of Auckland have found an electrolysis system that could address the problem.

The new method, which is designed to convert carbon dioxide into formic acid, can carry on non-stop for at least 5,000 hours with a conversion efficiency of more than 93 percent, according to the team's study that was published in the journal *Nature* on Jan 31.

"Compared with previous technologies, the biggest breakthrough achieved by our process is that it has resolved the problem of instability," said Xia Baoyu, one of the lead researchers of the study.

The high conversion efficiency and the stability of the equipment significantly dwarf the other ones

that previously received media attention, said Xia, a professor with the School of Chemistry and Chemical Engineering at Huazhong University of Science and Technology, which is based in Wuhan, Hubei province.

Formic acid has a wide range of uses in chemical, energy and agricultural sectors. It can, for example, work as a preservative in animal feeds, or be used for tanning leather.

The Chinese-led team's method also indicates that spent lead-acid batteries could be recycled in a better way. "The catalyst used in the method is derived from electrode materials present in used lead-acid batteries," Xia said.

About 3 million metric tons of spent lead-acid batteries, which are officially recognized as hazardous waste in China, are generated annually in the country, according to China Industrial Association of Power Sources.

China is the world's largest manufacturer of lead-acid batteries, which are widely used to power electric bikes and supply the ignition spark for conventional automobiles. If improperly disposed of, the batteries could result in leakage of lead and acid into the environment, causing air, soil and water pollution that are costly to remedy.

Traditionally, the recycling of spent lead-acid batteries needs a smelting process that heats the lead plates to a high temperature in a furnace. This melts the lead and separates it from other impurities.

"We completely recycle the lead in the batteries and directly place it in the electrolysis system. This is a very favorable way to further promote the recycling of lead-acid batteries," Xia said.

Contact the writers at houliqiang@chinadaily.com.cn

## Wahaha: Zong's spirit inspiring for entrepreneurs

From page 1

Zong turned a small drinks business into a beverage conglomerate, and his down-to-earth entrepreneurial spirit, perseverance and courage to face difficulties will encourage further generations of Chinese entrepreneurs to expand their businesses step by step, Pan added.

"Zong's management philosophy has set an example for the development of China's private economy," he added.

Guo Tao, deputy head of the China Electronic Commerce Expert Service Center, said Zong's deep understanding and insightfulness regarding the real economy not only laid a solid foundation for the company's development, but also made a contribution to the development of China's manufacturing sector.

Moreover, Zong attached great importance to technological innovation, which was conducive to ensuring the quality and diversity of Wahaha's products in a highly competitive beverage market, and providing strong impetus to the company's sustainable growth, Guo said.

"Zong's management philosophy has set an example for the development of China's private economy," he added.

## Exchanges: Youths are direct beneficiaries

From page 1

Expo, the ASEAN-China Martial Arts Competition, and the ASEAN-China Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition, among others, have been scheduled and are being intensively prepared.

We hope that more and more colorful activities will be included on the list of activities for the ASEAN-China Year of People-to-People Exchanges, and that more people from China and ASEAN countries will participate in these activities.

We believe that the most powerful driving force for strengthening people-to-people exchanges between China and ASEAN countries comes from the people, and the most practical benefits will be enjoyed by the general public.

Taking tourism as an example, in 2023, China's outbound tourism experienced a strong recovery, with 3.42 million Chinese tourists traveling to Thailand and 1.4 million to

Malaysia, ranking second and fourth, respectively, among those two countries' source markets.

China and ASEAN countries are also taking measures such as facilitating visas and increasing flights, and China has announced mutual visa exemptions with three ASEAN countries — Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore. The two sides are also exploring various policy initiatives, including strengthening the 10+1 tourism cooperation mechanism.

Driven by various activities of the ASEAN-China Year of People-to-People Exchanges, two-way tourism will surely usher in faster development, bringing more employment opportunities and greater economic benefits to people from both sides.

The majority of young people are direct beneficiaries of China-ASEAN people-to-people exchanges. In the 2021-22 academic year, ASEAN students accounted for approximately 30 percent of the total number of international

students in China. The ASEAN-China Young Leaders Scholarship and other programs have been steadily expanded.

We will continue to support Chinese local governments in providing targeted scholarships for ASEAN students, and encourage well-known Chinese universities to open their doors to more outstanding young people from ASEAN countries. We will also continue to expand cooperation in the fields of vocational education and professional training, and implement projects such as the "Plan of Training for 10,000" to provide stronger talent support for China-ASEAN cooperation.

People-to-people exchanges are all-encompassing, and there are many more achievements waiting to be realized together. We look forward to everyone's participation.

The ASEAN-China Year of People-to-People Exchanges will build a "heart-to-heart bridge" between

China and ASEAN countries. It will not only help Laos, as chair, to enrich the theme of the meetings, but also promote higher-quality development cooperation through people-to-people exchanges.

We will also take practical actions to advocate the inheritance, innovation, exchange and mutual understanding of civilizations, promote Asian values centered on peace, cooperation, inclusiveness and integration, and promote the transformation into reality of the vision depicted in the China-proposed Global Civilization Initiative.

In this sense, the ASEAN-China Year of People-to-People Exchanges is the latest practice in building a closer China-ASEAN community with a shared future, and it reflects the joint contributions made by China and ASEAN in promoting world peace, security, prosperity and progress.

The author is ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary of the People's Republic of China to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## CHINA DAILY USA

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

Telephone: 212-537-8888  
Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com  
readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899  
Advertising: 212-537-8916

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WASHINGTON  
National Press Bldg, Suite 1106  
539 14th Street NW  
Washington, DC 20045  
Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

SAN FRANCISCO  
255 Montgomery Street, Suite 900  
San Francisco, CA 94104  
Tel: 415-348-8288  
Fax: 415-348-8388

SEATTLE  
800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100  
Seattle, WA 98104  
Tel: 206-922-2868

HOUSTON  
1001 South Dairy Ashford, Suite 100  
Houston, TX 77077  
Tel: 713-595-7660

CANADA | TORONTO  
4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8  
Tel: 416-481-9706

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## CHINA

# Plan sets 'red line' for key river basin

Comprehensive protection of Yangtze to be basically in place by next year

The first national-level territorial space plan tailored to a specific river basin was recently approved by the State Council, China's Cabinet, a senior environmental and territorial planning official said on Thursday.

"The plan provides comprehensive guidance and oversight for the protection, development, utilization and restoration of the spatial area in the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the Yangtze River Basin, acting as an important basis for local authorities to lay down and carry out spatial plans at all levels," Miao Ze, deputy director of the Ministry of Natural Resources' territorial space planning bureau, told a news conference.

The plan covers the land territory, inland waters and related territorial waters of the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the Yangtze River Basin. The land area of 2.4 million square kilometers includes 11 provinces or municipalities in the Yangtze River Economic Belt and some county-level administrative regions in eight other provincial-level regions in the Yangtze River Basin. In total, it covers 1,173 county-level administrative regions.

Upholding the principle of China's first national territorial space plan, issued in 2022, Miao said that management of the ecological environment, arable land, permanent basic farmland, and urban and rural development should be subject to a "red line" to protect food production and the area's ecological, geological, cultural and historical features.

The plan said that by 2035, the ecological conservation red line in the Yangtze River Economic Belt and the Yangtze River Basin should cover an area of no less than 806,600 sq km, and the area of arable land should be no less than 400,000 sq km, with a minimum of 330,000 sq km designated as permanent basic farmland. Urban development should be confined to an area of 79,700 sq km.

Miao said the comprehensive protection of the Yangtze River will be basically in place by next year, with inter-regional coordination along the river notably improved. By 2035, China is expected to establish an economic belt that is healthy, tranquil, beautiful, well-connected, pros-

perous, habitable and distinctive.

The development of the Yangtze River Basin should be tailored to local conditions to establish modern, efficient and high-quality agricultural areas, making it a key region for national food security and a model area for agricultural modernization and rural vitalization, the plan said.

One area of focus is the protection of prime farmland in areas along the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River and in the Sichuan Basin to consolidate the proportion of arable land in the Yangtze River Basin in the national total and reinforce its role as a cornerstone of the nation's food reserves. The plan also encouraged the leverage of regional characteristics to develop a diverse food supply system, such as fostering distinctive agricultural practices in hilly and mountainous areas, and developing marine ranches based on fishery resources.

The region's population and economic output account for about half the national totals, and Miao said the plan would help drive the coordinated development of the Yunnan-Guizhou-Sichuan-Chongqing region, the middle reaches of the Yangtze River and the Yangtze River Delta region.

The plan called for the creation of a high-tech industry hub based on urban clusters, metropolitan areas and central cities to advance the establishment of a new development pattern, with strict restrictions to be imposed on the establishment of new chemical industries along the river.

The plan also incorporated the protection and inheritance of the Yangtze River culture, proposing the exploration of multiple natural heritage values and the integration of the Yangtze River's natural landscape, historical culture and urban-rural living spaces.

"The enactment and execution of the plan will undoubtedly be instrumental in furthering the high-quality development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, assisting in the establishment of a new development pattern, and promoting the comprehensive construction of a modernized socialist nation," Miao said.

CHINA DAILY

## Bridge brings revelers



People gather at the Taiping bridge in Quanjiao county, Anhui province, to watch a parade and folk cultural performances on Sunday. The traditional folk event, called *zoutaiping*, kicks off on the 16th day of the first lunar month. It features a procession crossing the bridge, along with a splendid array of folk performances. LIU YUCAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Park forum exemplifies democracy

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai  
zhouwenting@chinadaily.com.cn

A recent public discussion in southwest Shanghai's Minhang district, where more than 300 community representatives gathered to talk about preparations for the district's largest park to be open around the clock, was the latest example of whole-process people's democracy in the city.

The discussion on Jan 29 focused on how to enable 24-hour access to Minhang Culture Park, which is nearly the size of 120 soccer fields. Issues addressed included how to designate the park areas to be open at night, how to ensure visitors' safety and how to provide the best visitor experience at nighttime.

Along with local legislators and political advisers, participants also included representatives from the district government, media, the park authority and academia. Some representatives of nearby residential areas, schools and commercial areas also took part in the three-hour discussion.

It was organized by the district's legislative body and political advisory body with the aim of putting whole-process people's democracy into practice and collecting people's ideas and wisdom to better make decisions related to public affairs.

Shanghai Mayor Gong Zheng said in late January that becoming a park city is not simply a matter of building more parks, but means

turning the city into a large-scale park and striving to realize the unbounded integration of parks and urban space.

Shanghai opened another 162 parks — including pocket parks — last year, bringing the city's total to 832. It aims to have 1,000 parks by the end of next year.

Parks have been encouraged to better integrate sports, culture and tourism functions, and to extend opening hours. More than 60 percent of the parks in the city are now open around the clock.

Many participants looked forward to the nonstop operation of the park in Minhang in the near future.

"A large proportion of the enterprises in our industrial park are internet businesses, where employees usually work overtime," said Zhang Baoqin, from the asset operations department of the Qibao Ecological Business District. "After getting off work, they have a strong fitness demand to keep healthy in both mind and body."

"When I go to a park at night, I feel it's quite different from the daytime. It is quieter when I run, and the smell of plants and trees is fresh. I feel like I'm deep in a natural environment."

Liu Jun, deputy head of Qibao town, where the park is located, said: "A park is like a furniture piece in a city, similar to a chair or a table in someone's home. It's abnormal that the duration of our use of a fur-

niture piece is limited every day."

Guidelines released by the Shanghai Landscaping and City Appearance Administrative Bureau in December advocated 24-hour access to parks to benefit residents.

Qin Chang, who hosts a Shanghai Radio Station program that regularly discusses civic topics, said that tearing down parks' walls and lifting time limits "means a shift from the mindset of public administration to community governance".

To boost safety and convenience at night, some participants in the discussion suggested adding lights and fences around lakes, and said restrooms needed to be accessible at night.

"Amusement facilities must be powered off and boats must be locked on the shore after sunset, and relevant notices need to be clearly shown at park entrances," said Lu Weirong, a manager from Shanghai Shenzhou Greenery Co, which supports the operations of multiple parks.

"Park visitors at night must also maintain good public order. Activities that produce noise and disturb residents nearby, such as square dancing, must be refrained from."

In October, Yangpu became one of the city's first districts to operate its 18 district-level parks around the clock. To strike a balance between the needs of park visitors and nearby residents, parts of the parks close to residential areas are closed from 6 pm to 6 am.

### Briefly

#### Yellow alert renewed for low temperatures

A yellow alert for low temperatures in vast areas of the country was renewed by China's national observatory on Sunday. From Sunday morning to 8 am

Wednesday, the lowest daily temperatures in some regions, including parts of Guizhou province, the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and the Sichuan Basin, will be 5 to 7 C lower than the historical average for this time of year, according to the National Meteorological Center. Other areas, including parts of the provinces of Hubei and Hunan and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, will see their minimum daily temperatures drop over 7 C below the historical average for late February, according to the center.

#### 4 rescued after boat sinks off Zhejiang

Four people were rescued after a Chinese fishing boat sank near the coast of East China's Zhejiang province on Saturday morning, local authorities said. The vessel, carrying 12 people, sank in the East China Sea at around 1 am on Saturday, the East China Sea Rescue Bureau of the Ministry of Transport said. Search and rescue operations are continuing.

XINHUA

### FROM THE FRONTLINE

## Young artist helps further inner painting tradition

By YANG ZEKUN  
yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

Seated at her desk and holding a brush in her right hand, Li Shaoyue completes an exquisite miniature ink painting on the inside of a glass bead.

The 30-year-old from Zibo, Shandong province, has been working as an inner painter since 2015.

Inner painting, a traditional art in China that involves painting in reverse, is a national-level intangible cultural heritage that uses materials such as glass, crystal and amber as a base. Artists use special, fine brushes that can enter tiny containers to create their paintings.

With a history of over 200 years, inner painting is mainly divided into four major schools: Beijing, Hebei, Shandong and Guangdong. Li, a fifth-generation inheritor of the Shandong or Lu school, learned the skills from her father, Li Huitong, a master of traditional Chinese arts and crafts.

An introverted child, Li Shaoyue started learning how to sketch in primary school. In college, she majored in traditional Chinese painting in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province. After graduation, she decided to focus on inner painting after giving it considerable thought. She said that besides her love of

drawing, her father's artistic career had a significant influence on her pursuit of painting.

"I saw my father doing this since I was a child and knew that his journey was not easy because he couldn't hear since childhood due to illness, making many things inconvenient," she said. "I also particularly wanted to inherit his profession because I knew that fewer young people were continuing to learn inner painting, and if it were to be discontinued here, it would be a pity."

Li Shaoyue said inner painting is different from other forms of painting. Even with a foundation in painting, one must start from scratch with line practice when transitioning to inner painting.

With a background in traditional Chinese painting, she helped with some color work in her family's studio while she was at college, and her study gave her a relatively strong wrist, the key to ensuring smooth lines in inner painting.

Li Shaoyue started to create some relatively simple finished products that could be sold in stores after about four months of intense practice.

Zhang Luhua, a fourth-generation inheritor of the Lu school of inner painting from Zibo, said the production of inner painting is

demanding, requiring extremely high precision. During painting, there is no sketching or room for corrections. Only those skilled and confident in their abilities can handle it proficiently.

Zhang, 45, began learning inner painting in 1992. His father, Zhang Guangqing, also a master of traditional Chinese arts and crafts, had a significant impact on his painting career.

Zhang said inner painting relies on wrist strength, because a trembling hand leads to mistakes.

"Training was very tedious," he said. "When my hand trembled, I would bite my wrist. If it hurt, it would stop trembling. It took me about a year of training before my hand stopped trembling, and then I began drawing various lines."

As he learned more about inner painting, Zhang realized he needed further education in painting. Over the next two decades, he pursued studies at the Nanjing University of the Arts, the Central Academy of Fine Arts, the China National Academy of Painting, Tsinghua University and Renmin University of China.

Both inner painting and Chinese painting have similar standards, but they have different forms of expression, he said.

"The Shandong school of painting

did not arise from one person but a group of people," Zhang said. "To truly become a school of painting, the group had to incorporate Shandong's inherent culture into its landscapes."

Inner painting has its advantages due to its uniqueness, he said, but also has disadvantages in the lack of a market and a shortage of learners and talented artists to drive its development.

One peculiar inner painting phenomenon is that only snuff bottles have foreign collectors and collector groups. Many collectors contact artists directly to purchase and collect high-quality works. The remaining mid- to low-end works flow into the mass market, he said.

Li Shaoyue now works in her father's studio. She can create up to five pieces a month for sale in the store, and spends the rest of her time conceiving and creating exhibition pieces.

The studio's operation was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but when large numbers of tourists flocked to Zibo to eat barbecue last year, its business improved.

The first artwork Li Shaoyue sold was a complex figure painting. Her mother helped her sell it for over 2,000 yuan (\$278) at an exhibition in Jinan, Shandong, in 2016. Li Shaoyue was delighted to have her



Li Huitong exchanges insights into inner painting with daughter Li Shaoyue in Zibo, Shandong province, on Jan 24. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

work recognized by the market.

"I want inner painting to be more integrated into our lives," she said. "It originated from snuff bottles, and it has passed its peak period. Now, I am sharing the painting techniques via social media platforms to make more people aware of inner painting, trying to make everyone recognize inner painting as the main focus, rather than just recognizing it in the form of snuff bottles."

The most marketable patterns are landscapes, followed by flowers and birds. Flowers and birds are priced lower than landscapes and figures because they are easier to paint. Figures mainly focus on auspicious themes, she said.

The process of creating inner painting products is relatively long,

and their price is usually higher than other handmade products, ranging from hundreds of yuan to tens of thousands. Without prior fame, an artist's works may not be readily accepted by the market, she said.

Building upon traditional inner painting mediums, Li Shaoyue has also ventured into creating inner paintings on accessories. Many of the bead accessories she paints are purchased and worn by enthusiasts of *hanfu*, traditional Chinese-style clothing, resulting in high market acceptance.

"I hope that more young people will join inner painting, such as starting it on campus as an elective course," she said. "I wish the market would put more focus on such techniques."

## CHINA

## Villagers aim to make splash on big screen

NANCHANG — In Hengfeng, a small county in East China's Jiangxi province, residents have a new way of greeting each other: "Have you applied for a film acting role?"

The county is the site of an ongoing movie production, and filmmakers are expecting to hire more than 400 extras to serve as background actors. Many villagers have been eager to apply for the role.

Local villager Ke Xiufa, 67, has already served as an extra three times on the production.

"I can earn 100 yuan (\$14) plus three meals a day, excluding overtime pay," said Ke, adding that more than 40 villagers like him acted on the very first day when the movie started shooting.

The county's film and television program production base is located at a former coal mine site.

The mine, built in 1958, witnessed declining production and financial losses after its peak production period in the 1990s. With a deserted colliery, a 5-kilometer railway line for coal transportation, and its vacant offices and dormitories, the mine was designated as a provincial-level industrial heritage site last year.

Located at the east end of Jiangxi, Hengfeng is near Hengdian, a film and television program production center known as "China's Hollywood" in neighboring Zhejiang province. "Many tourism and film and TV production companies favored our beautiful environment and well-preserved industrial heritage, which strengthened our determination to build a base for a film and television program production here," said Pan Li, Party chief of the county.

Two years ago, a Zhejiang-based cultural company invested 200 million yuan to turn the former coal mine into three filming locations in three different historical settings, developing a comprehensive base for both film and TV production and tourism.

Gan Xia'er, a director who is filming a movie there, said he was thrilled to learn that many kinds of old trains can be moved inside the base, achieving an ideal shooting effect. "The scenes of moving vintage trains are rare at other shooting venues in China. The breathtaking rural landscape is also perfect for filming movies," Gan said.

The base has also injected vitality into rural revitalization efforts, bringing additional income to locals.

Since November, the base has brought on five camera crew teams and has hired more than 3,000 extras from villages in the area, said Zhou Zhongliang, who is in charge of the base's operations.

XINHUA



Li Hao works in his workshop on the Luban lock in Tengzhou, Shandong province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Luban lock maker finds success

Inheritor of special technique transforms ancient toy into creative cultural product

By ZHAO RUIXUE in Jinan  
zhaoruixue@chinadaily.com.cn

While demonstrating how to disassemble and reassemble a Luban lock, Li Hao, an inheritor of Luban lock-making techniques in Tengzhou, Shandong province, shared the history of this traditional Chinese folk educational puzzle and the ancient wisdom embedded in its structure.

"It's easy to take apart but challenging to reassemble, and that is the major feature of it," said Li, 39.

The Luban lock is believed to have been created by Lu Ban, a structural engineer known as the "father of carpentry" in China who lived during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC).

The design of the Luban lock incorporates concave and convex parts that interlock seamlessly, drawing inspiration from the mortise and tenon joints used in ancient Chinese wooden architecture and furniture, Li said.

After dedicating 10 years to developing the Luban lock by blending tradition with innovation, Li has transformed it into a creative cul-

“As our country increasingly values the preservation and inheritance of traditional culture, I believe the future of the Luban lock is promising.”

Li Hao, an inheritor of Luban lock-making techniques

tural product that has contributed to the local cultural and tourism industry.

His company has created over 100 variations of the toy and has provided employment for more than 100 villagers in Jisuo town, with orders coming in from overseas as well.

In addition to the traditional six-rod lock, Li's team has designed a 24-rod lock adorned with patterns depicting elements of Tengzhou culture. By utilizing hardwoods such as

rosewood and incorporating techniques such as inlaying silver wire, they have transformed the puzzle into a trendy cultural and creative product.

Despite encountering challenges and setbacks in his innovations, Li said the experience he has gained from his determination to overcome those obstacles has enriched his life. His journey to establish his company began in 2009, when he started working as a village official in Jisuo with a mission to enhance the lives of the residents. The inspiration to develop the Luban lock as an educational toy struck him in 2010 when he saw a large one at the Shanghai World Expo.

"Tengzhou is the birthplace of Lu Ban, so why don't we develop the Luban lock as a toy that will not only educate villagers, but also serve as a way to preserve the wisdom of our ancestors?" he thought at the time.

He went to Jia Fuming, a local master woodworker, to learn carpentry techniques. Being skeptical of a college student's interest in learning this traditional craft, Jia rejected Li, believing his enthusiasm would be short-lived.

But Li was persistent and visited Jia several more times before eventually winning him over.

Starting from scratch, they worked together to produce a Luban lock within six months.

With support from the Jisuo government, Li secured a 50,000 yuan (\$7,000) loan and established a woodworking company, marking the beginning of their efforts to produce the Luban lock on a mass scale.

After finding initial production success, he encountered new challenges related to marketing and working capital, and the first batch of Luban locks made sat unsold in a warehouse. "We had been focusing on developing the product, but we ignored the marketing work," he said.

Li began participating in several trade fairs where the Luban lock was more well-known, and it soon became a sought-after product.

To further expand the company's production scale and create more employment opportunities, the town government helped him secure a 2,000-square-meter workshop.

He also obtained another loan for 300,000 yuan and raised over 1 million yuan to purchase woodworking equipment and high-quality wood materials, and to hire professional technicians to enhance the production process.

By 2011, the company was able to double its production capacity. Last year the sales reached 30 million yuan.

The impact of this initiative is evident in the lives of villagers like Kong Lingmei, who is responsible for polishing the wood used at Li's company.

By working at the company, Kong earns a stable income of around 3,000 yuan per month.

Recognizing the cultural significance of the Luban lock, the Zaozhuang government, which administers Tengzhou, has been organizing competitions focused on the design assembly-disassembly of the puzzle to promote its ancient wisdom and expand its reach.

"As our country increasingly values the preservation and inheritance of traditional culture, I believe the future of the Luban lock is promising," Li said.

## School gardens may spark children's interest in nature

KUNMING — It is widely known that children's interest in nature is crucial for their mental health and biodiversity conservation efforts.

But how can parents and teachers foster children's interest in nature in the first place? The answer may lie in a garden.

Chinese researchers have recently revealed that a school garden with abundant natural components can be used to cultivate the interest of primary school children in nature while helping to alleviate their study-related stress.

In a study published in the journal *People and Nature*, a research team from Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden of the Chinese Academy of Sciences analyzed the impact of natural observation and inquiry-based learning activities in a school garden on the development of children's interest in nature.

The researchers conducted a series of teaching interventions over a semester in a campus garden of a primary school in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province. The program involved 24 fourth graders taking part in three 40-minute activities that were held weekly: natural observation with assigned tasks, natural observation with open-ended tasks and inquiry-based activities.

Participants maintained individual portfolios consisting of questionnaires, nature journals, observation descriptions and interviews. Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed to categorize children into three categories: those who developed an interest, those who developed an enhanced interest, and those not affected by the activities.

After four months in the program, the results showed that more than two-thirds of the 24 students were classified as either "interest initiated" or "interest enhanced," indicating a generally favorable outcome, according to the study.

The results revealed that the school garden, with its unique and safe environment, played a significant role in stimulating children's curiosity about the creatures in the garden. It also empowered children to learn and explore independently.

Given the current trend of children spending more time in front of screens and less in front of nature, school gardens offer potential solutions, the study said.

"Implementing a diverse school garden with informative labels and explanation boards, along with teacher support, represents a promising approach to cultivating children's interest in nature, par-



Students tend the garden at Gucheng Central Middle School in Gucheng township in Bozhou city, Anhui province, on Nov 7.

YANG ZHONGQIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

ticularly during the critical developmental stage of 9 to 11 years of age," said Chen Jin, a researcher at the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden.

"We recommend implementing

mini botanical gardens and club activities in schools to bridge formal and informal education," Chen added.

XINHUA

## Hotline helps youth cope with mental, legal woes

In June 2022, a visually impaired youth surnamed Chen encountered difficulties in navigating train travel. To seek help, he called the 12355 hotline.

The hotline promptly contacted social workers to help Chen arrange his trip, and to address the young man's distress caused by his disability, the hotline also offered counseling from a psychiatrist.

Chen said that the service has greatly boosted the confidence of disabled people like him who need to arrange long trips.

Since its establishment by the Communist Youth League of China Central Committee in 2006, the hotline has helped hundreds of thousands of young people in China by providing much needed counseling for mental health and legal problems.

The 12355 platform has 115 hotlines across the country, offering legal and mental health consultations to about 600,000 people annually. These services can also be accessed around the clock through the 12355 online portal, which was established last May.

Catering to the needs of young people, the platform has diversified its services. In addition to offering counseling, it organizes special activities aimed at enhancing their psychological well-being.

For instance, during the senior high school and college entrance exam period last year, the platform organized a series of stress-relieving activities to ease the anxiety students have about taking the exams and boost their confidence.

The platform has also forged cooperation with various departments to protect the rights of young people in China.

In July, the 12355 platform in Shanghai received a distress message from an individual surnamed Ma who had been abducted and taken to Myanmar. Acting on guidance from the CYLC Central Committee, the mental health counselor maintained contact with Ma, gathering crucial information that contributed to the successful rescue of the youngster.

Meanwhile, regional authorities are adopting measures to maximize the platform's functionality, enabling it to play a more significant role in initiatives such as preventing delinquent behavior and enhancing the health and well-being of youths.

Moving forward, the platform plans to persist in innovating its service methods and enhancing its capacity to cater to the evolving needs of young people.

XINHUA

# WORLD

Editor's note: As the Russia-Ukraine conflict marked its second anniversary on Saturday, China Daily takes a look at gains and losses from the conflict as well as the possibility for peace, which has remained elusive so far.

## Peace still elusive for Ukraine crisis

Two years after the conflict broke out, analysts warn of growing fatigue

MOSCOW/KYIV — As the full-scale fight in Ukraine reached its second anniversary on Saturday, Russia appears to have the upper hand with the capture of Avdiivka, a strategic stronghold in the Donetsk region, leaving Kyiv and its backers in an even harder situation than before.

The weariness caused by the two-year-long conflict has been dubbed by some analysts as "Ukraine fatigue".

In recent months, Russia and Ukraine have both focused on the strategic importance of Avdiivka, about 20 kilometers from Donetsk. According to Russia's Defense Ministry, Russian troops have taken full control of Avdiivka.

Sean Bell, a British military analyst, said the fall of Avdiivka has given Russia its most important battlefield victory since it seized Bakhmut after months of grueling attritional warfare.

Many analysts believe the balance of war is tipping in Russia's favor but not to the point where Ukraine is at risk of a full-scale collapse.

The front lines of the conflict have barely moved since 2023 as Ukraine's midyear offensive failed. This also holds true even after the fall of Avdiivka.

"Militarily, it's not a big loss," said Rob Bauer, chair of the NATO Military Committee, concerning the fall of Avdiivka.

"They destroyed the whole infrastructure. So, you don't have a city. You have another couple of hundred meters," he said of Russia's territorial gains.

As the former commander-in-chief of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, Valerii Zaluzhnyi, said recently, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has now entered a phase characterized by stalemate and attrition.

According to analysts, it is seemingly difficult for both sides to achieve a major breakthrough on the battlefield this year, but the intensity of the conflict may decline.

Ukraine will probably switch



Firefighters work on the site of a burning building destroyed during an attack in Odesa on Friday. UKRAINIAN EMERGENCY SERVICE VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS



Ukrainian emergency service employees help a resident board an evacuation train in Donetsk on Saturday. ANATOLI STEPANOV / AFP

from offensive to defensive, while Russia will also find it hard to expand its territory beyond the four areas it controls.

In the two years of the conflict, the US defense industry has experienced a boom in orders for weapons and munitions. The Wall Street Journal reported recently.

Business is coming from European allies trying to beef up their military capabilities as well as from the Pentagon, which is both buying new equipment from defense manufacturers and replenishing military

stocks depleted by deliveries to Ukraine, it said.

The year 2023 started with high hopes for Ukrainian troops planning a counteroffensive against Russia, but ended with disappointment on the battlefield.

"Whatever else the war may be achieving, it has not been good for Ukraine," said Charles W. Freeman, a retired US diplomat and writer, adding that Ukraine's bargaining position against Russia has been greatly weakened.

Both Russia and Ukraine have

repeatedly said they want the conflict to end, but on their terms.

In January, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky warned that a cease-fire then would only give Russia a chance to regroup and replenish its units and weapon stocks.

The Kremlin said in December that it saw no current basis for peace talks, and called Kyiv's peace plan an "absurd process" as it excluded Russia.

For most analysts, a negotiated solution in 2024 does not look promising at this point.

A survey conducted in January across 12 EU countries found that pessimism about the conflict's outcome was being fueled by Ukraine's failed counteroffensive, a potential US policy shift and the possibility of Donald Trump being reelected president.

Though support for Ukraine among Europeans remains high, some form of "compromise settlement" is seen as the most likely solution in the survey of more than 17,000 respondents by the European Council on Foreign Relations. However, it marks a shift in sentiment, as a majority of Europeans said upon the first anniversary of the conflict that Ukraine must regain all of its lost territory.

XINHUA

## Russia applauds 'heroes', marks patriotic holiday

MOSCOW — Russia's President Vladimir Putin on Friday hailed Russia's "heroes" fighting in Ukraine on the eve of the second anniversary of its special military campaign, with Moscow bolstered by gains against Ukrainian troops.

Putin's message came on the Defender of the Fatherland Day, a Russian national holiday that celebrates those who are and were serving in the armed forces.

"You are our true national heroes," Putin said in a video message addressed to troops and veterans.

Putin has spent recent days flying in bomber planes, handing out medals to troops and hailing a "turning point" in Ukraine.

He has referred to Ukraine's "chaotic flight" from Avdiivka, a stronghold that Russia has claimed control of.

Ukraine, meanwhile, has been weakened by the blocking of US aid, its failed counteroffensive and worsening ammunition shortages. Agence France-Press reported.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has acknowledged an "extremely difficult" situation on the front.

Two years of fighting has taken its toll on Ukraine's stretched forces.

"It's extremely hard," Ukrainian

infantryman Oleksiy told AFP in eastern Ukraine, caked in mud after returning from the trenches.

"We don't have weapons like they have. You know, they have factories for production, and us? We beg for weapons. That's the way it is," said Oleksiy, 32.

In Moscow, Putin laid flowers at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier outside the Kremlin walls.

"We glorify today the feat of soldiers who are heroically fighting on the borders of Russia, defending its sovereignty and independence," Orthodox bishop Patriarch Kirill said in a letter to Putin.

"I feel pride for our men," resident Nadezhda told AFP. "In the last two years that (pride) became even stronger."

The Russian army said last week it had also captured the eastern village of Pobeda and that its troops were "moving westward" after capturing Avdiivka.

Oleksiy said that while the fall of the industrial hub affected morale, troops were ready to fight on.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu said that "in terms of the ratio of forces, the advantage is on our side."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Western leaders extend financial aid, weapons

KYIV — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky welcomed Western leaders to Kyiv on Saturday to mark the second anniversary of the Ukraine conflict, as Ukrainian forces run low on ammunition and foreign aid hangs in the balance.

A somber mood hangs over Ukraine as Kyiv's troops face mounting challenges on the front line amid dwindling supplies and personnel challenges.

Allies from the European Union and the G7 countries rallied around Kyiv to express solidarity with Zelensky joining a virtual G7 meeting on Saturday and four world leaders traveling to Ukraine's capital.

Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni, Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen arrived in Kyiv to show their solidarity with Ukraine.

Hours later, Zelensky's office announced the signing of 10-year bilateral security deals with Canada and Italy, with Ottawa committing to send Kyiv C\$3.02 billion (\$2.2 billion) in military and economic aid this year while Rome promised much-needed long-range weapons.

Meloni also chaired a G7 video-conference from Kyiv that produced a joint statement on Saturday reaffirming the commitment to "supporting a comprehensive, just and lasting peace", tightening sanctions on Russia and sending Ukraine military and economic aid for "as long as it takes".

Russia's former president Dmitry Medvedev said on Saturday Moscow will seek "revenge" for massive Western sanctions.

A day earlier, US President Joe Biden announced yet more sanctions against Russia.

"The reason (behind the sanctions) is clear — the worse it is for Russian citizens, the better it is for the Western world," Medvedev said on social media.

"We all just need to remember this and take revenge on them wherever possible. They are our enemies."

Medvedev called on Russians to "create difficulties in the economy for (the West) and foment public unhappiness toward the incompetent policies of Western authorities".

In the US Congress, Republicans have stalled \$60 billion in military aid for Kyiv.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## London shuts down family visa program for Kyiv refugees

By JULIAN SHEA in London julian@mail.chinadailyuk.com

A British government visa program allowing people from Ukraine to join family members who are already in the United Kingdom has been closed to new applications.

More than 200,000 people have come to the UK since the outbreak of the conflict, with new arrivals initially given three-year visas.

The government announced in mid-February an 18-month visa extension for those already in the country, a move which it said would provide "certainty and stability", and which was described by Eduard Fesko, the charge d'affaires at the Ukrainian embassy in London, as "a clear signal of the continuous support". But last week, at short notice, the family program was closed.

Previously, it had allowed about

72,000 people to join family members already in the UK, or to extend their stay here, but now only permanent UK residents or people permanently settled will be able to act as sponsors, meaning Ukrainians in the country on visas cannot bring in family members through the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship program.

"The lack of options for Ukrainian and other families separated by war and persecution is already a huge

problem," said Enver Solomon, chief executive of the Refugee Council.

Tom Cottam, head of policy for the British Red Cross, called the decision "concerning", and Stephen Kinnock, the opposition Labour Party's shadow immigration minister, said it "sends the wrong message" to the people of Ukraine.

The Home Office said the plan aims to adapt the system to make it "as efficient and sustainable as possible".



# CARE FOR LIFE FIRST AID BY YOUR SIDE



## WORLD

## Israel discusses truce as Gaza desperation deepens

GAZA/JERUSALEM — Israel's cabinet organizing its campaign in Gaza has discussed the next steps for negotiations toward a hostage deal and cease-fire in its fighting with Hamas, as concern deepens over the increasingly desperate situation that civilians in the devastated Gaza Strip face.

An Israeli delegation that had traveled to Paris for fresh talks on a hostage deal returned to brief the cabinet on the conflict on Saturday night, an official and local media reports said.

National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi said in a televised interview shortly before the gathering that the "delegation has returned from Paris, there is probably room to move toward an agreement".

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the meeting would discuss the "next steps in the negotiations".

Local media later reported that the meeting had concluded with the cabinet agreeing to send a delegation to Qatar in the coming days to continue the talks.

As with a previous weeklong truce in November in which more than 100 hostages were freed, Qatar, Egypt and the United States have been spearheading efforts to secure a deal.

Domestic pressure on the government to bring the captives home has also mounted, with thousands gathering in Tel Aviv on Saturday night at what has come to be known as "Hostages Square" to demand swifter action.

After more than four months of shortages inside the besieged Gaza Strip, the World Food Programme said last week its teams had reported "unprecedented levels of desperation", and the United Nations warned that 2.2 million people were on the brink of famine.



A vendor waits for customers along a street in Gaza City on Saturday amid the conflict between Israel and the Hamas movement. AGENCIE FRANCE-PRESSE

In Jabalia refugee camp in northern Gaza, bedraggled children held out plastic containers and battered cooking pots for what little food was available.

Supplies are running out, with aid agencies unable to get into the area because of bombing, and trucks that do try to get through face frenzied looting.

The health ministry said on Saturday that a two-month-old baby identified as Mahmud Fatuh had died of malnutrition in Gaza City.

Israel has defended its record on allowing aid into Gaza, saying that 13,000 trucks carrying relief supplies had entered the territory since hostilities broke out.

The conflict began after an attack by Hamas on Oct 7 that resulted in the deaths of about 1,160 people in Israel, according to an Agence France-Presse tally of official figures.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed at least 29,606 people, mostly women and children, Gaza's health ministry said on Saturday.

Warplanes of the US-led coalition struck the Yemeni capital Sanaa late on Saturday in the latest round of military action against the Houthis.

"The American-British aggression aircraft again launched a series of raids on the capital," Houthi-run Al-Masirah TV reported.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the strikes were meant "to further disrupt and degrade the capabilities" of the Houthis.

AGENCIES — XINHUA

## Bilateral trade and investment expansion eyed

Chinese and EU banks explore new avenues for economic partnership

By CHEN WEIHUA in Luxembourg  
chenweihua@chinadaily.com.cn

Chinese and European Union banks hope to tap the opportunities to help expand bilateral trade and investment, such as through green financing and cross-border RMB business.

Speaking at a seminar on cross-border RMB and beyond in Luxembourg on Friday, Xu Chen, chairman of the Bank of China Europe SA, said the great progress in RMB internationalization in recent years not only symbolizes the global stage, but also offers new avenues for economic partnership between China and Europe.

"The RMB's journey from a national currency to one of the world's leading currencies for trade, investment and reserves reflects our shared commitment to fostering a more diversified and resilient global financial system," said Xu, who is also chairman of the China Chamber of Commerce to the EU, or CCCEU.

The CCCEU unveiled its finance working group on Friday, in addition to the two existing digital and green groups.

Xu said there is great potential for cooperation between China and the EU in areas such as green economy, technological innovation, and addressing global challenges.

"Our cooperation, therefore, is not just beneficial but essential, for sustainable growth and stability worldwide," he said.

The 2023-24 CCCEU annual report showed that Chinese companies' overall rating of the EU business environment had declined for the fourth year. But Chinese companies still remain largely "optimistic and enthusiastic" in their operation in the EU and see huge potential in cooperation in green and digital areas.

Xu said the adoption of the RMB in cross-border transactions presents unparalleled opportunities for European and Chinese businesses.

"It offers a more direct, cost-effective, and efficient means of conducting trade and investment activities, reducing the dependency on third-party currencies and enhancing financial efficiency," he said.

He also noted the challenges ahead for deeper financial integration and collaboration between the two sides, such as regulatory differences, market access restrictions and the need for enhanced financial infrastructure.

Hua Ning, China's ambassador to Luxembourg, said China has created the world's biggest banking sector and second-largest insurance market.

"That means expanding financial opening-up not just helps drive the high-quality development of China's economic growth, grow its financial sector, and create a new paradigm of development, more importantly, it is a way for the international financial industry to surmount challenges and sustain growth," he said.

He gave a long list of China's efforts in recent years in high-standard financial opening-up, such as the removal of various quota restrictions for various foreign financial firms.

At the 10th China-EU High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue held in Beijing in September, the two sides proposed setting up a ministerial-level finance working group and agreed to strengthen cooperation on green finance, two-way financial opening-up and financial regulation, and to work together to respond to global economic and financial challenges.

## High-standard opening-up

"We'd like to see more companies from Europe, including Luxembourg, make their way to China's high-standard financial opening-up and share development opportunities," Hua said.

Qiu Yunping, president of Deutsche Bank (China), said the RMB has gained popularity, citing the fact that the RMB surpassed the US dollar for the first time in March 2023, and became the dominant currency in China's own cross-border payments.

He said China's transition to a sustainable economy is an opportunity for companies and investors, a core part of Deutsche Bank's sustainability strategy, adding that the bank is active in participating in green financing in China.

"We believe continued business ties between these two geographies are mutually beneficial to the development of the global economy," he said via video link.

Liang Jian, head of China market at the Banque Internationale in Luxembourg, said the bank has set up a China market team, focusing on building a bridge for Chinese clients coming to Europe and vice versa to help European clients enter the Chinese market.

"We are willing to be a gateway to Chinese and European markets for our clients," she said.

## Sports envoy sees hope for refugees in Olympic dreams

By WANG XIAODONG

in Nairobi, Kenya

wangxiaodong@chinadaily.com.cn

Sports can play an important role in supporting and empowering refugees worldwide, and greater effort is needed to support those living in refugee camps to gain access to sports activities, says Yang Yang, China's first-ever Winter Olympics gold medalist, and a goodwill ambassador for the United Nations' Refugee Agency.

"Sports can bring positive impact to refugees and give them dreams," Yang said. "Through engaging sports they may not become Olympic champions, but they can win confidence, have the courage to overcome the worst times in their lives, and are better positioned to integrate with and contribute to local communities."

After visiting the Kakuma refugee camp, in Kenya's northwest, Yang said in Nairobi on Saturday that there are more than 114 million refugees worldwide, and that the number is rising because of war and conflict.

"The issue of refugees is not distant from us, and it may affect everyone."

In a three-day visit to the camp, which ended on Friday, Yang met refugees engaged in sports, including women soccer players, a girls' chess club, and organizations working locally on disability and sports.

The camp, established in 1992 and near the border between Kenya and South Sudan, is one of the biggest refugee camps in the world and is home



Yang Yang, goodwill ambassador for the UNHCR, meets soccer players near Kakuma refugee camp in Turkana County, Kenya, on Wednesday. PHOTO PROVIDED BY UNHCR

to more than 270,000 refugees and asylum seekers from more than 20 countries, mainly Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Somalia and South Sudan, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Refugee Agency says.

Yang said that despite harsh living conditions, including food rations for many refugees being sparse because of a lack of funding, many people in the refugee camp are optimistic and enthusiastic about sports, such as basketball, soccer and chess. She saw people doing weightlifting using crude equipment that they made themselves, and visited a sports library for the

first time at the camp, she said.

"They have a girls' soccer team that is very organized and has won some competitions in the region already. They have their dreams hoping one day they can play in international events."

## Useful tool

Sports can also be a useful tool to help promote the development of communities in refugee camps, such as promoting environmental protection and gender equality, she said.

"It's not just basic support like tents or food, it's more. Refugees don't want to be left behind; they want their lives to develop too. They

seek better educational opportunities, better health support, and ways to build their futures, so they can contribute to their communities and ultimately find solutions in their lives."

Referring to the Summer Olympics that begin in Paris in July, Yang, who is also vice-president of the World Anti-Doping Agency, said she will cheer for all athletes, especially the special refugee Olympic team, a team that exemplifies what refugees can contribute and achieve.

"My hope is that some of the refugees I met playing sports in Kakuma will someday find their way to an Olympic stadium, or to another sporting event or venue, to compete and participate. I'll be there to cheer for them when they do. But they need support. They need training and equipment and facilities."

The refugee Olympic team, established in 2016, expresses the spirit of a shared humanity, which is what the Olympic Games is about, and the commitment to include everyone, and leave no one behind, Yang said, adding that the team for the Paris Games is training in France.

In addition to sports, refugees need support in areas such as education, health and livelihoods, Yang said, calling for a combined effort to give more opportunities to refugees.



Online

See more by scanning the code.

## Trump cruises to victory in race for Republican nomination

CHARLESTON, South Carolina — Donald Trump cruised to a lightning victory on Saturday in South Carolina's Republican primary, blitzing rival Nikki Haley in her home state and continuing his march to the nomination and a White House rematch with Joe Biden in November.

Trump completed a sweep of the first four major nominating contests, converting a year of blockbuster polls into a likely insurmountable lead going into the "Super Tuesday" 15-state voting bonanza in 10 days.

Haley had vowed to fight on regardless of the outcome but Trump, seeking to move quickly from the primary to the general election, did not mention her during a victory speech in which he turned his fire on Biden.

"We're going to be up here on Nov 5 and we're going to look at Joe Biden. ... and we're going to say, Joe, you're fired. Get out," Trump said to cheers at his victory party in the state capital Columbia.



Former president Donald Trump (right) on stage with South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster at a primary election party at the South Carolina State Fairgrounds on Saturday. ANDREW HARNIK / AP

Biden reacted to the South Carolina result with a brief written statement referring to "the threat Donald Trump poses to our future as Americans grapple with the damage he left behind".

Haley reminded supporters as she congratulated Trump in her concession speech that she had already vowed to fight on, regardless of the outcome.

She has repeatedly questioned the

77-year-old former president's mental fitness and warned another Trump presidency would bring "chaos", but her efforts appeared to do little to damage his standing among Republicans.

The margin of victory was not immediately clear, but US networks felt able to call the race within seconds of the polls closing, suggesting that there was little doubt over the outcome.

David Darmofal, a politics professor at the University of South Carolina, said the speed of Trump's projected victory confirmed him as "effectively the presumptive Republican nominee for president".

Haley, a popular governor of South Carolina in the 2010s and the only woman to have entered the Republican contest, was looking to outperform expectations in her own backyard and ride into Super Tuesday with wind in her sails.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Briefly

CAMBODIA  
Ruling party wins senate election

The ruling Cambodian People's Party, or CPP, won a sweeping victory in the fifth election for the senate, or the upper house, on Sunday, a party's spokesman said. CPP's spokesman Sok Eysan, citing preliminary results, said the CPP won the most votes in the election, with at least 50 of the 58 seats up for grabs, or more than 80 percent of the total votes. He confirmed that former prime minister Hun Sen, the 71-year-old president of the CPP, will take over as the president of the senate, giving him the role of factoring head of state when the king is overseas.

JAPAN  
Man dies after stabbing in convenience store

A man has died and two other people were injured on Sunday in a stabbing incident in a convenience store in Sapporo in Japan's northern island of Hokkaido, the broadcaster NHK reported. A Seicomart convenience store employee in the regional capital Sapporo said a man was behaving aggressively with something looking like a

kitchen knife before 7 am, according to NHK. Three employees were stabbed and injured, with a man in his 40s taken to the hospital, where he later died. An unemployed 43-year-old local was arrested on the spot on suspicion of attempted murder.

UNITED KINGDOM  
Tories suspend MP over 'Islamophobia'

Britain's ruling Conservative Party suspended its former deputy chairman from the parliamentary party on Saturday after he refused to apologize for saying London's Labour mayor Sadiq Khan "was controlled by Islamists". Pressure had been growing on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Tories to act following lawmaker Lee Anderson's contentious remarks on Friday, which have been condemned as racist and Islamophobic. It comes as incidents of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism have risen across the UK. On the right-wing GB News channel, Anderson claimed "Islamists" had "got control" of Khan, who was the first Muslim mayor of a Western capital when first elected in 2016.

AGENCIES — XINHUA

## BUSINESS

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## Fresh priorities define 'future industries'

'New productive forces' gain currency as drivers of high-quality development

By CHENG YU  
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

"New productive forces" has become China's newest buzz-phrase ever since it was frequently mentioned by the Chinese leadership and the authorities concerned like local governments in their new-year economic growth plans.

Compared with traditional productive tools that are driven by elements like labor, land and capital, new productive forces refer to a new form of productive forces that are led by technological innovation and new elements like data.

At a time when China's economy has been rattled by the ailing property market, decreasing private investment and aging population — all of which are traditional productive tools — as well as rising external geopolitical tensions, new productive forces could help sharpen focus on the ways and means of finding economic momentum, industry experts said.

They said they believe that China's emphasis on new productive forces can accelerate the development of future-oriented industries and key technologies, and thereby promote modern industrial development and help advance the world's second-largest economy on the global value chain.

In a study session of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, presided by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, Xi emphasized that developing new productive forces is an endogenous requirement and a pivot of high-quality development, and that efforts should be kept up to promote innovation and faster development of new productive forces.

Xi pointed out that scientific and technological innovation can generate new industries, new models and new momentum, and is the core element for developing new productive forces.

It is a must to strengthen scientific and technological innovation, especially original and disruptive innovations, accelerate the efforts to build high-level self-reliance and strength in science and technology, and do a good job in making breakthroughs in core technologies in key fields, so that original and disruptive scientific and technological innovations can emerge one after another, and foster more momentum for the development of new productive forces, Xi said.

Wei Jianguo, former vice-minister of commerce, said: "If China wants to follow the path of rapid development, the country must plan ahead on new productive forces to seize the opportunity."

Wei, who is also vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, predicted that new productive forces will be key to competition for global economies over the next five to 10 years.

"The top priority is to establish as soon as possible a unified and open technology factor market with orderly competition, com-

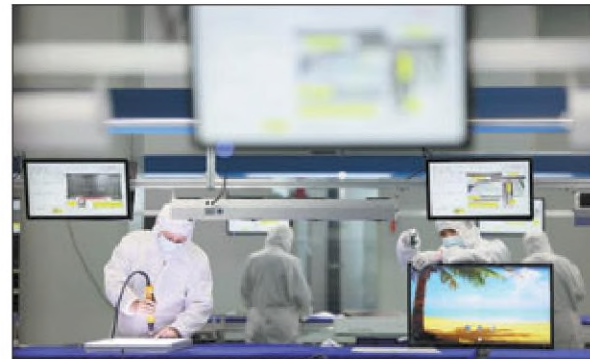


Intelligent production robots are seen at a workshop of the Volkswagen Anhui MEB (Modular Electric Drive Matrix) plant in Hefei, East China's Anhui province, on May 29.

DU XIAOYI / XINHUA



An employee from a participating enterprise demonstrates a pilotless remote cockpit during the 2023 Global Industrial Internet Conference in Shenyang, Liaoning province, on Oct 18. CHEN WEI / XINHUA



Employees work on a smart display screen production line at a science and technology company in Hefei, Anhui province, on Nov 16. XIE CHEN / XINHUA

plete systems and sound governance," Wei said.

Wei further said the biggest difference between traditional productive forces and new productive forces is that the latter get rid of the need to make investment of a large amount of resources; instead, they place more emphasis on the leading role of scientific and technological innovation, which mainly includes strategic emerging industries and future-oriented industries.

Huang Qifan, former mayor of Chongqing, expressed similar views. He said at a conference focused on new productive forces in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in December that China's biggest choke point in modernizing its economy lies in limitations in developing productive services.

Productive services refer to sectors and technologies primarily designed to enhance traditional manufacturing, such as cloud computing, financial and legal advice.

"If you have a large manufactur-

ing sector but the proportion of productive services is low, you can only produce middle- to low-value manufacturing products," Huang said.

"We are able to manufacture the latest equipment for the 5G network, but we cannot make use of it. This is like building a port but having no one to run it, fixing a road but having no cars," he said.

The remarks of both Wei and Huang delineate what new productive forces are and stress that the key to developing them lies in the development of future-oriented industries.

In an interview last month, Jin Zhuanglong, minister of industry and information technology, highlighted the need to develop new productive forces and coordinate technological innovation, large-scale development and application scenarios.

Artificial intelligence, humanoid robots, metaverse, next-generation internet, 6G, quantum information and deep sea, deep air and deep

space figure among China's new priorities for future-oriented industries, he said.

"China's blueprint for future industries is becoming clearer this year. Fields like brain-like intelligence, quantum information and genetic technology will likely gain greater support," said Luo Zhiheng, chief economist of Guangzhou-based Yuekai Securities.

"Future industries may enter a new phase as detailed policies or action plans are expected from various ministries and commissions concerned," Luo said.

Till the end of January, all provincial-level regions had unveiled their growth targets for 2024 in local government work reports. Besides the usual economic goals, the development of new productive forces has become a common goal for them this year.

Guangdong in South China, for instance, said it will ramp up efforts to boost new productive forces in industries like integrated circuits,

new energy storage and commercial spaceflights. It also plans to foster future industries like 6G technology and humanoid robots.

East China's Anhui province, which is known as an emerging center for technological innovations, said it will drive new industrialization and build an internationally competitive advanced manufacturing cluster this year, besides focusing on the development of emerging sectors like new energy.

Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School, said the reason why new productive forces are high on the agendas of local governments this year is that China has sent a clear signal that it will veer toward a growth model focused on "quality" over "quantity".

"Against a background of economic transition, local governments also face great pressure in finding new economic engines. New pro-

ductive forces came at just the right time, and if developed well, they are expected to greatly help them win over regional competition and drive the country's economic growth as a whole," he said.

Industry experts, however, noted that to develop future-oriented industries into new productive forces, it is essential to enhance both research and development of key technologies and fundamental research.

China aims to scale up its R&D budget by more than 7 percent annually during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25). Consultancy McKinsey & Co said in a report that such a growth target will make China the world's largest R&D spender.

"Although the R&D intensity of China has been continuously increasing, the country's investment in fundamental research is insufficient, which directly leads to a relative lack of innovations based on complex, underlying supporting technologies and scientific research," said Liu Qiao, dean of the Guanghua School of Management of Peking University, in a note.

Liu said China's position index in the global value chain or GVC in 2018 was 0.01 while the US index was 0.29. Thus, the US continues to be at the absolute upstream of the GVC, with strong control over core technologies and raw materials. This gives it the power to create constraints downstream on other countries and economies in the GVC.

"To change this situation, China must increase investment in fundamental R&D and promote Chinese industries to move upstream in the global value chain. Only when breakthroughs are achieved in fundamental research can we truly break developed countries' vice-like grip on key technologies," he said.

## Is AI China's critical new productive force?

## REPORTER'S LOG

By Cheng Yu

What GPT maker OpenAI from the United States stepped up the global artificial intelligence race in mid-February when it unveiled its text-to-video generation tool Sora. That made me wonder — how long before China develops its own Sora? And, will AI become China's critical new productive force?

According to OpenAI's explainer, Sora is capable of generating com-

plex scenes with a very high degree of accuracy, including multiple characters, specific types of movements, themes and backgrounds. It understands not only what the user requests in the prompts, but also how these things exist in the physical world.

On Feb 16, Zhou Hongyi, founder of cybersecurity firm 360 Security Technology, said Sora may bring a huge disruption to the advertising industry, movie trailers and the short-video industry; what's more, the realization of generative AI may be shortened from 10 years to one or two years.

"Although the development level of large-scale models in China seems to be close to GPT-3.5, there

is still an 18-month gap compared to GPT-4.0. OpenAI should still have an ace or two up its sleeve, whether it is GPT-5.0 or machine self-learning to generate content," Zhou said, adding that it is worth paying attention.

According to a report by the Beijing Municipal Science & Technology Commission, China had developed at least 254 AI large language models by October last year. Currently, most domestic large models still have a huge gap with GPT-4.0.

But the country could leverage such frontier AI technologies in more industry-specific scenarios. Or, to put it simply, China needs to apply such technologies to real use, to develop them into productive forces and nar-

row the gap between itself and the US.

Jia Jiaya, founder of smart manufacturing company SmartMore, told me that GPT-4.0 is less efficient in the industrial sector and that's where Chinese companies found opportunities. His company developed industry GPT, one of the first in the industrial sector, which aims to leverage the LLM to drive the efficiency of industrial sectors.

"No large language model in the world can serve high-end manufacturing currently, and we hope that Chinese companies can develop such large language models to enable frontier technologies to empower industries," he said.

Now, China is the only country in the world that has developed all the

industrial categories listed in the United Nations industrial classification. China's supply and industrial chains offer comprehensive services from raw material supply, component production, distribution, assembly, processing and logistics to final delivery to consumers.

It means that any technology will have its best application scenario here in the Chinese market, and without application or commercial use, technology means zero.

Though China still has a gap with the US in such a large model, Chinese AI startup ModelBest Inc launched last month its latest lightweight large model, an emerging less expensive AI technology that aims at more targeted commercialized scenarios.

Dubbed as MiniCPM-2B, the newly launched large model is embedded with a parameter of 2 billion,

which is much smaller than 1.7 trillion parameters of OpenAI's massive GPT-4.0.

Li Dabai, CEO of ModelBest, said the new model has very close performance when compared with Mistral-7B on open-sourced general benchmarks with better ability on Chinese, mathematics and coding.

"If the model is compressed, the inference cost of running such a model can be reduced greatly," Li said.

"With the popularity of such end-side models, the inference cost of mobile phones will further decrease in the future," he said.

When such smaller models need fewer calculations to operate, it could also mean less powerful processors and less time to complete responses. Wouldn't it be a good opportunity for China to catch up, and harness such a productive tool without wasting too many resources?

# BUSINESS



Visitors try virtual reality solutions of Cloudsky in a VR conference in Qingdao, Shandong province, in July. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Foreign firms tap into China's emerging sectors

BEIJING — Upbeat about the business opportunities in China's new energy sector, global industrial gas supplier Air Products has been scaling up its presence in the country.

Last year, the company established its Asia hydrogen application technology center in East China's Zhejiang province, where it is also building China's first commercial-scale liquid hydrogen plant. In addition, it is also working to advance the local production of liquid hydrogen storage tanks in Shanghai and local liquid hydrogen industry standards.

"The growth potential of innovative green technologies will be tapped further as China promotes the development of new productive forces," said Saw Choon Seong, president of Air Products China.

As new productive forces underscore scientific and technological innovation and green growth, they are expected to generate new industries, models and growth drivers, analysts say. For foreign investors, these forces mean increased demand and a bigger market.

Air Products' ongoing commitment to China epitomizes how foreign enterprises are digging into opportunities brought on by the country's pursuit of these new productive forces.

On the back of government policies, China's strategic emerging industries have seen rapid expansion in recent years, and high-tech industries have also become hot spots for foreign investors.

Last year, the country's high-tech industries drew in foreign direct investment totaling 423.34 billion yuan (\$58.9 billion), accounting for a record-high 37.3 percent of the national total, said the Ministry of Commerce.

Cai Wei, chief strategy officer of KPMG Advisory (China), said that China will create multiple opportunities for foreign firms while developing new productive forces.

"In emerging sectors such as new materials and advanced manufacturing, we have seen demand for high-quality industrial gases and advanced application technologies rise in recent years," Saw said.

To better leverage innovation

trends, explore market opportunities and meet the needs of consumers, an increasing number of foreign enterprises have established research centers in China.

Take ResMed as an example. The medical device manufacturer has set up a local digital research and development team in China, along with an independent production base and product lines targeting the Chinese market.

Scientific and technological innovation will play a key role in China's future development, said Tony Liu, general manager of ResMed China. He said that enterprises in China have accelerated digital transformation and industrial chain upgrades, striving to move up the value chain.

With a supersized market, high-quality talent pool, stable social environment, solid infrastructure and improving government services, China boasts a comprehensive competitive edge and holds "strong appeal" to foreign enterprises, Liu said.

Cai noted that China's complete industrial chain and strong industrial support capabilities have provided a solid foundation for foreign companies to collaborate with their Chinese peers.

"Foreign enterprises can cooperate with local companies, share resources, and facilitate technological exchanges and industrial upgrades, enhancing their overall competitiveness," he said.

While fostering new productive forces, the country has rolled out a raft of policies and cultivated a more open and friendly environment for foreign investors, Cai said.

On international cooperation, he said that China has taken the initiative to integrate into the global innovation network and enhance its technological and industrial innovation capabilities through opening-up and cooperation over the past 10-plus years.

With the development of new productive forces, such cooperation will be strengthened further, especially in the research, development, application and promotion of disruptive and cutting-edge technologies, he said.

XINHUA

# Prospects bright for cloud computing amid tech leaps

### Nation's digital infrastructure aims to reach globally advanced level by 2025

By CHENG YU  
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn



Crusoe Mao

Forward-looking Chinese companies are seeing a "sunny" future of global expansion via the "cloud", amid China's sharpening focus on new productive forces like cloud computing and artificial intelligence, said a company executive.

"Cloud computing has developed fast in China in recent years. Chinese cloud computing firms have their own unique advantages on the global stage," said Crusoe Mao, founder and chairman of Cloudsky, a leading provider of cloud computing infrastructure and services.

Mao, who has been a tech veteran previously working in Silicon Valley and has led Sony's PlayStation VR project, said that Chinese authorities, from top to down, have put cloud computing high on the agenda, betting it to become a new productive force to compete on the global stage.

In China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), the country made it clear that the capabilities of its digital infrastructure, including cloud computing, 5G, internet of things,

and industrial internet should reach "globally advanced levels".

"On the one hand, such intensified efforts will unleash great potential of the vast Chinese market that boasts rich digital application cases. As needs for digital life are common worldwide, Chinese companies are able to bring the most efficient computing power solutions implemented in China to other countries and regions, such as AI, cloud games, virtual reality and augmented reality," Mao said.

On the other hand, he noted that China's 5G network and other digital infrastructure have gained a leading position in the world.

"It will offer a higher foundation for the development of cloud computing and related digital application industries, so that Chinese companies able to expand our global reach with faster speeds and better solutions," he added.

Founded in 2016 with over 350 global employees currently, Cloudsky mainly offers real-time deci-

sion-making and rapid response capabilities leveraging cloud computing technology solutions. It has partnered with leading cloud service providers, telecommunications carriers, large well-known internet platforms and gaming developers.

Last year, Cloudsky inked a strategic partnership with Saudi Excellence Co, an investment company under AI-Ramez International Group, in digital transformation. It has also established a partnership with Saudi Telecom to advance the development of a 5G edge cloud infrastructure.

Sheikh Abdullah Zaid Al-Meleihi, CEO of AI-Ramez, said: "This alliance marks a significant step in our mission to assist Saudi Arabia in developing a comprehensive digital economy ecosystem. It will catalyze and transform the future of emerging technologies in the entire region."

Since ChatGPT maker OpenAI from the United States stepped up the global artificial intelligence race last year, and unveiled its text-to-video generation tool Sora in mid-February, Mao said that it will prompt cloud computing firms.

"The demand for computing power in emerging application scenarios such as AI is the fundamen-

tal reason for competition in computing power and cloud computing power. It is also the reason why computing power heavily relies on the semiconductor industry," Mao explained.

But the development of cloud computing can directly alleviate the pressure on advanced chips through diverse cloud solutions, and help companies boost computing power.

According to a plan unveiled by ministries including the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology last year, China will step up efforts to build its computing power, which will give the country an edge in building up its digital economy and injecting new vitality into the intelligent transformation of its industries.

The plan said the country aims to have its total computing power reach 300 Eflops by 2025. Eflops is a unit of the speed of computer systems. It equals to one quintillion floating-point operations per second.

"As China and global demands for computing power continue to soar, cloud computing will be widely accepted and used on a global scale. Chinese companies will have a market as broad as the sky," Mao said.



Staff members pose for a photo at the booth of Air Products during the third China International Import Expo in Shanghai on Nov 7, 2020. FANG ZHE / XINHUA

Taking the subway for a family outing is a ticket to happiness.

Leave the car at home one day a week. Feel the joy of green transport.

blue 何蓝 WILDAID

## BUSINESSINSIGHT

## Why China is rebalancing growth drivers

## EAGLE EYE

By China  
Macroeconomy Forum

Against the backdrop of an uncertain global economic recovery and rising geopolitical tensions, the Chinese economy showed signs of improvement in 2023. Last year, the nation's GDP grew 5.2 percent, reaching its annual target and exceeding growth rates of various developed economies.

However, it is worth noting that the overall compound growth rate over the past two years stood at 4.1 percent, pointing to a state of "moderate recovery". Furthermore, the recovery pace fluctuated, with relatively low nominal growth, supply-demand imbalances and lackluster price performance in both goods and asset markets.

China's economy will continue to be influenced by the aforementioned variables in 2024. Normalizing economic processes necessitates several essential rebalancing actions in sectors such as investment, consumption, real estate and government debt.

Looking ahead, China's economy is expected to continue its positive trajectory this year, supported by multiple factors, which indicate a growth rate of around 5 percent.

China's economy successfully emerged from the depths of the pandemic-induced downturn in 2023, marking a complete year of post-pandemic recovery.

While China's return to normalcy came slightly later than some overseas counterparts, such as the United States, Japan and South Korea — which began their recoveries in early 2022 — China's current economic growth rate still outperforms that of most developed economies.

The service and consumption sectors, which were severely affected during the pandemic, experienced a significant recovery in 2023. Both sectors contributed to overall growth, with consumption surpassing prepandemic levels.

That said, it is equally important to mention that key macro indicators, including industrial output, retail sales, fixed-asset investment and private financing, remained below 2019 levels.

China's output gap, a measure of the difference between actual and potential economic output, gradually narrowed throughout the year, falling from 940 billion yuan (\$131 billion) in the first quarter to 390 billion yuan in the fourth quarter.

However, the foundation of the ongoing economic recovery remains fragile, primarily due to the fluctuating pace of economic restoration. Quarterly GDP growth rates revealed a notable slowdown in the second quarter, followed by a significant rebound in the third quarter, and a slight decline in the fourth quarter.

In 2023, China's nominal GDP growth stood at 4.6 percent, representing the total value of economic output without adjusting for inflation. However, the actual growth rate, which takes into account inflation and measures real economic



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

expansion, was 0.6 percentage point higher than the nominal figure.

The lower nominal growth rate creates a perception gap among microeconomic entities because businesses' direct revenue, profits and individuals' direct incomes are measured in nominal terms.

They do not typically account for the GDP deflator, which adjusts for inflation, when assessing the real income situation. Consequently, the nominal growth rate tends to underestimate the actual economic growth experienced by microeconomic entities.

China's economic recovery in 2023 faced various downside drivers, especially disruptions in real estate investment and exports. Property investment fell month after month last year, resulting in a 9.6 percent decrease in 2023. The current pace of housing construction and new project startups remains slow. Furthermore, exports saw substantial swings, resulting in a 4.6 percent decrease for the year.

Meanwhile, China's economy

demonstrated resilience and growth on the production side, while facing certain pressures on the demand side. The imbalance between supply and demand has resulted in low inflation levels and an overall decline in asset prices since 2023.

The consumer price index, a main gauge of inflation, recorded a year-on-year increase of 0.2 percent in 2023, while the core CPI, which excludes food and energy, rose 0.7 percent. On the other hand, the producer price index, which measures costs of goods at the factory gate, contracted by 3 percent.

Residential property prices in major cities experienced continuous declines last year, particularly in the secondary housing market, which reflects current market conditions more accurately.

This combination of lackluster price levels and declining asset prices has been a significant factor in the negative GDP deflator, indicating that persistent deflationary pressure has yet to be fully eliminated.

As China faces multiple challenges

in 2024, the key to overcoming and addressing these challenges lies in achieving a crucial rebalancing within key sectors of the economy. This rebalancing needs to be accomplished at an optimal level, enabling the economy to achieve a balanced and growth-oriented trajectory on a relatively sturdy foundation.

China's fixed asset investment growth has remained below prepandemic levels, highlighting the need for a rebalancing of investment demand and structure. Investment in high-tech manufacturing and high-tech services has shown faster growth rates, and the proportion of high-tech industries in fixed asset investment continues to rise.

However, there is still a need to further leverage high-tech's role in driving and spurring upstream and downstream industries. Investment demand unleashed during the process of industrial upgrading and equipment renewal presents room for further growth.

In 2023, China's infrastructure investment maintained a growth

rate of 5.9 percent, significantly higher than the prepandemic level of around 4 percent. Infrastructure investment continues to be a crucial factor supporting the economy.

However, the infrastructure investment structure still requires further optimization. While existing projects have reached saturation levels, the marginal efficiency of "new infrastructure" investments has shown signs of decline. It is essential to prioritize investments in areas that directly impact people's livelihoods and address weak links such as eldercare facilities.

In 2023, China's consumption recovery exhibited a structural characteristic of weaker momentum in goods while showing stronger performance in services, stressing the need for rebalancing the structures of consumer demand and supply to foster sustainable economic growth.

In the short run, there were signs of weak consumption in industrial goods and real estate-related sectors. To address this, measures such as issuing consumer subsidies and

stabilizing real estate expectations were implemented to alleviate the situation.

Looking at the medium to long term, unmet demand for eldercare, healthcare and upgraded lifestyle-related consumption — influenced by factors such as changes to population structure — requires greater attention. Structural reforms on the supply side should be accelerated in areas of weakness and livelihood improvements, ultimately driving a positive interaction between supply and demand.

Moreover, China's economy should seek to rebalance its growth drivers, smoothly transitioning from traditional industries to new sectors. China's new growth drivers are experiencing rapid growth, but there is still ample room for further improvement.

The new energy sector serves as an illustrative example as the country has witnessed a significant increase in exports of the three major tech-intensive green products, or the "new three" — new energy vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaic products. However, despite the high growth rates, these products account for only around 4.5 percent of total export value, indicating substantial potential for expansion.

China's real estate sector is undergoing a crucial transformation as the old model characterized by high debt, leverage and turnover becomes unsustainable. To ensure long-term stability and sustainable growth, the industry is shifting toward a new model focused on safe leveraging, efficient operations and greater specialization.

The country has experienced a major shift in supply-demand dynamics within the real estate market, with oversupply becoming apparent in various regions. However, there remains a notable lag in the construction of government-subsidized housing, particularly in first- and second-tier cities.

To address the imbalances in the market and ensure a more sustainable and inclusive housing environment, a dual-track approach is being emphasized, which involves the simultaneous development of commercial and government-subsidized housing.

China's local governments are facing a challenging financial landscape as declines in land revenue lead to reductions in comprehensive financial capacity. Resolving local debt risks remains a top priority for 2024. The leveraging ratio of the central government is only about 21 percent, which is relatively low by global standards.

Against this backdrop, the central government can appropriately increase borrowing, undertake more countercyclical macroeconomic regulation responsibilities, and implement reforms to better clarify the division of administration and expenditure responsibilities between the central and local governments.

*The China Macroeconomy Forum is a Beijing-based think tank. This article is an excerpt from the CMF's monthly analysis of China's macroeconomy in January. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## Consumption, investment must promote each other to boost economy

## MAIN STREET

By Fan Zhiyong

According to the Central Economic Work Conference held in December, China will further ramp up efforts this year to drive its consumption revival from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, thus boosting the economy. Against such a backdrop, the country needs to form a virtuous cycle in which consumption and investment promote each other. It cannot focus solely on increasing the share of consumption in the GDP.

## Challenges

Currently, China's household consumption, as a percentage of its GDP, is not only lower than that of developed countries, but even lower than that of most developing coun-

tries. This has always been recognized as a structural problem that hinders the sustainable economic development of the country.

As a result, some people believe that if the share of consumption in GDP is increased, China's economic growth rate can be largely increased as well, but this is not entirely correct.

Global practices have proved that there is no linear relationship between the share of consumption in GDP and income growth.

According to the World Development Indicators published by the World Bank, household consumption accounted for 73.9 percent of low-income countries' GDP on average in 2019, while the proportions in high-income and middle-income countries were around 58.8 percent and 51.6 percent, respectively.

Instead of simply increasing the share of consumption in GDP, what China should do is to increase the income of its residents and thereby improve both the quality and quantity of household consumption.

Since China implemented its reform and opening-up policy, its final consumption expenditure as a share of GDP has been negatively correlated with the economic growth rate. That means, when the country's economic growth rate increases, the share of final consumption expenditure in GDP will decrease.

To explain the causes of this phenomenon, the relationship among economic growth, consumption and savings needs to be clarified first.

Savings are the portion of income that is not consumed, part of which is used for investment, while the other part is for net exports. In real life, enterprises first make decisions about investment and net exports, and then the remaining products will be used for final consumption.

Over the past few years, with the Chinese economy growing rapidly, both investment and net exports have greatly increased. As a result, the demand for savings is on the rise while consumption as a share of GDP has declined.

## Solutions

According to the Central Economic Work Conference, China expects to further unleash its consumption potential and promote investment with high returns this year. It will also strive to shape new consumption patterns and drive new forces of consumption.

The country needs to foster positive interactions between consumption and investment activities. The increased consumption should be able to raise the rate of return for consumer product manufacturing companies and service-based companies, which will increase both investment in the consumer products industry and the gross national income.

There are currently many homogenized products in China that do not have enough sales channels — and Chinese people's needs for medical care and senior care services have not yet been fully met.

Therefore, having entered a post-industrial era, which mainly relies on the services sector to boost the

economy, China needs to keep an eye on the service industries, especially those related to medical care and senior care. It should further promote the digital transformation of the services sector and use 5G technologies to develop more high-tech products concerning key areas such as digital health.

Besides, the country needs to ensure an effective supply of community-based medical care and senior care services, as well as reduce relevant institutional costs. While effectively meeting the needs of the elderly, such moves can also help alleviate Chinese people's burden in caring for older relatives and make senior care an emerging industry with strong endogenous power. This will lead to more job creation. Thus, China's economic recovery can be further advanced.

Promoting consumption not only means encouraging consumers to spend more, but also implementing preferential policies in relevant industries to help them grow and cultivate more famous Chinese

brands in the services sector.

Unlike the manufacturing sector, there is significant information asymmetry in most service industries, especially the high-tech service industries. Therefore, the government needs to set strict qualification standards for relevant enterprises and strengthen its supervision when practitioners enter the market.

China should also provide stronger support for the renovation and maintenance of necessary infrastructure in service industries closely related to people's daily life. By providing preferential treatment in terms of tax and rent, the country can better develop service industries and help deal with the major issues of its people, thus contributing to the sustainable growth of household consumption.

*The writer is a professor at the School of Economics, the Renmin University of China, and a main member of the China Macroeconomy Forum, a Beijing-based think tank. The article was first published in Beijing Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## US deliberately turns deaf ear to China's call for it to stop prolonging the Ukraine conflict

In partnership with the United Kingdom and the European Union, the Joe Biden administration announced more than 600 sanctions and penalties on Russia and its military industry on Friday — the largest round of sanctions since Russia launched its “special military operation” in Ukraine two years ago.

That John Kirby, a spokesman for the National Security Council of the United States, said the sanctions were devised to “hold Russia accountable” for the Ukraine crisis should serve to lay bare the fact that the US does not want to put an end to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. A key objective of the sanctions is to continue to prolong the fighting with the aim of weakening Russia while weaving the EU deeper into the US’ geopolitical stratagems.

Compared with previous US sanctions, the new sanctions mainly target entities in and out of Russia that the Biden administration claims are connected to businesses providing materials to the Russian military. For instance, Friday’s sanctions include 26 entities outside of Russia and people in 11 countries, including China, the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam and Liechtenstein.

That means the US will also continue to take the Ukraine crisis as a pretext to weaponize sanctions against other countries for its own narrow ends, despite the tremendous damage that has been done to the global industry and supply chains by the US’ practices.

The US’ sanctions against Russia, which are of

coercive, bullying and hegemonistic nature, are nothing but a unilateral multipronged geopolitical tool that actually has no support from the United Nations or any other country or international organization outside of the US club. Washington’s double standard in imposing the sanctions is evidenced by its open connivance with India importing large amounts of Russian oil and gas and then reselling the fuel around the world, including to the EU.

That being said, it is ridiculous that US Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns should point an accusatory finger at China, claiming Chinese companies “fuel Russia’s defense industrial complex” and try to smear it by claiming China provides support for “Moscow’s fundamental break with the United Nations Charter”.

China does not provide weapons to either side in the conflict, but carries out normal and legal trade with them both at the same time, which the US side has no ground at all for objecting to.

And it is the US that is taking advantage of the Ukraine crisis to profiteer, not only to maximize its own economic and geopolitical benefits, but also to justify its sanctions on Chinese entities and coerce others to shun China.

China has been one of the most outspoken and active major countries in pursuit of a workable, lasting and sustainable peace mechanism to settle the Ukraine crisis from day one. Contrary to Burns’ claim, it is the US’ silence in response to the widespread charges of its brazen hypocrisy in relation to the Ukraine and Gaza crises that is truly “deafening”.

## Playing Taiwan card is a high-risk gamble

The latest arms sales package to Taiwan approved by the State Department of the United States on Wednesday is further evidence that the Joe Biden administration continues to interfere in the Taiwan question despite its repeated pledges that it sticks to the one-China policy and does not support “Taiwan independence”.

According to the US Defense Security Cooperation Agency, the “Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office in the United States” has requested the purchase of military cross domain solutions; high assurance devices; global positioning system receivers; communications equipment; requirements analysis; engineering; technical services; and other related elements of logistics and program support at an estimated cost of \$75 million. The agency delivered the required certification notifying Congress of the possible sale the same day.

The move has been strongly condemned by Beijing, with a defense ministry spokesperson on Friday urging the US administration to stop arming the island with weapons in any form and to cut military contacts with the island’s secession-seeking Democratic Progressive Party authorities.

For years, US administrations have reneged on the US’ promise to scale down arms sales to Taiwan by approving colossal arms sales to the Chinese island. At the same time, to justify such an ill practice, they have been trying to sell the narrative that

the US is obliged to help heighten Taiwan’s defense capabilities in the face of the Chinese mainland’s increasingly “aggressive posture” toward the island.

This is a deliberate distortion of the truth. Beijing has reiterated time and again that although it does not give up the option of a national reunification by force, it always pursues the peaceful reunification of the island with the motherland.

The truth is US administrations have developed a penchant for playing the Taiwan card in an attempt to put strategic pressure on Beijing, with arms sales to the island being just one of the many gambits employed in this regard.

The US’ manipulation of Taiwan-related issues has emboldened the DPP to provocatively try to undermine China’s sovereignty over the island, stoking tensions across the Taiwan Strait and damaging relations between the Chinese and US militaries and Sino-US relations at large.

Washington hypes up the risks of a war breaking out in the Taiwan Strait as a result of Beijing opting to use force to realize Taiwan’s reunification with the motherland. But it is the US doubling down on its meddling in the Taiwan question that risks sparking a conflict with China.

The real spark for a conflict erupting will be from the US’ moves and its collusion with the DPP authorities. They are dancing on a tightrope that is being strained to breaking point.

## Washington at odds with international consensus

Speaking to the media in Brazil on Thursday, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said of the situation in Gaza that “we all share the same goals” and “everyone wants to see an end to this conflict as soon as possible”.

But thanks to a technical mistake that enabled a small group of journalists to listen in on the discussions of the G20 foreign ministers because the audio headsets were broadcasting their remarks, it is clear that many of the other participants were scornful of such claims.

With the US opposing a United Nations Security Council resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza on Tuesday, the third time it has done so, the US’ stance was widely questioned by the other participants in the session.

While the Hamas attack on Israel on Oct 7 triggered the Israeli onslaught on the Palestinian enclave, that does not justify the brutality of the Israeli offensive, which has already claimed the lives of over 29,000 Palestinians, many of them women and children.

Nor does Blinken’s claim that so many innocents are suffering and continue to suffer terribly, because they are caught in a cross fire of Hamas’ making, since agreement hasn’t been reached on the 100 hostages that are being held by Hamas.

Israel has occupied lands of Palestine for decades, during which, with the backing of the US, Israel has always taken an I-don’t-care approach

against calls from the international society for it to obey the international and humanitarian laws. In that time, it has acted against a growing number of UN resolutions, from No 194 about allowing refugees to return to their homes in 1948 to No 2720 about humanitarian issues in 2023. So while Blinken was right in saying everyone supports finding a way to end the conflict and move to the path of a durable solution, it seems that is effectively the whole of the international community bar the US.

Even the United Kingdom, a country that seems robotically programmed to toe the US line, while unable to show any suspicion of being disloyal, could not bring itself to vote in accordance with the US on the recent Gaza resolutions, and abstained.

Besides, the US’ unconditional support of Israel continues to make the situation worse. On Thursday, Australia’s representative in the G20 session called on Israel to “not go down the path” of carrying out its planned military campaign in the southern city of Rafah, where more than 1 million displaced Palestinians have sought shelter.

The US’ refusal to call for a cease-fire has also led to the whole regional situation becoming a mess threatening even its own interests.

The US should take a good look at itself and reflect on the consequences of its actions. It should join the rest of the international community in their efforts to rein in Israel and work with other countries to secure a cease-fire.

Shi Yu



## Opinion Line

## Advantages must be made the most of to develop AI

The central authorities have recently required State-owned enterprises to accelerate the construction of a number of intelligent computing centers, better leverage the role of collaborative innovation platforms, carry out artificial intelligence+ special actions, and accelerate emerging technologies’ empowerment of key industries.

The move is aimed at driving the deep integration of the digital economy and the real economy and empowering industrial upgrading through the application of AI technology. It is mainly to use the advantages of data resources and application scenarios brought by the deep digitalization of China’s economy and market scale to empower industrial upgrading and comprehensively improve economic efficiency.

US companies mainly use public data and invest in general large language models to achieve high-quality information integration, translation, video or text creation, problem-solving and planning.

Chinese internet companies have also launched a series of large model products. Unlike US capital, which is keen to invest in AI, Chinese internet companies or venture capital often have a strong adherence to “business model innovation” thinking. That is, if the technology does not have a mature or predictable business application model, they are unwilling to gamble on it, as they would rather become a follower rather than take the winner-or-loser risks.

That means Chinese internet companies are strong in business

model innovation, while AI requires strong basic research and technology development capabilities, and large-scale application is a later task. This has resulted in the certain weakness of Chinese companies in the development of large AI models.

China must see its weakness compared with the US, particularly its lack of creative high-end technology leaders and its lack of basic theory and original algorithm capabilities. With the restrictions on China’s access to the most advanced AI chips, the gap in computing power between China and the US may further widen.

All these problems need addressing, to give China’s advantages real meanings in its pursuit to become a major AI innovation center.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## Integration entails more regional coordination

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei integrated development initiative being upgraded into a national strategy.

The government work reports released by Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei at the beginning of this year, all show that further deepening coordinated development with the other two areas is high on their respective to-do list.

The region is located in the center of the Bohai Bay Rim region. Promoting its coordinated development is of great significance for adjusting and optimizing the economic structure, exploring new models for optimizing development of densely populated areas, building a world-class urban

agglomeration with the capital as the core, and radiating and driving the development of the whole Bohai Bay Rim region, which also includes Liaoning province in its north and Shandong province in its south.

Ten years ago, the region faced serious problems related to big-city diseases and its development gap. Most of these problems have been effectively alleviated or solved over the past decade thanks to the implementation of the strategy.

Relieving Beijing of its noncapital functions is an important step in promoting the coordinated development of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei. As Beijing seeks to divert more research, capital, manufactur-

ing and talent resources to the other two, Tianjin should further improve its business environment and pro-innovation support to further strengthen its linkage with Beijing while giving full play to its advantages, and Hebei should give strong support to the construction of Xiong’an New Area.

The three parties should jointly catalyze their cooperation by better tapping into the potential of their complementarities. It should be a process of deepening regional coordination that can help break institutional hindrances restricting the flow of capital, talents and technology, rather than merely an industrial relocation from developed regions to the less-developed ones.

— ECONOMIC DAILY

## What They Say

## Deadly fire sparks scrutiny of e-bike hazards

The municipal authorities in Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu province, have begun a citywide check of potential fire hazards, especially those related to e-bikes, after a fire in a high-rise residential building killed 15 and injured 44 early on Friday morning.

The fire was put out at 6 am the same day, about one and a half hours after it broke out, and the search and rescue work was concluded at 2 pm that day. The fire is believed to have been caused by electric bikes parked on the ground floor.

The 30-plus-storied building in Nanjing comprises about 400 apartments, and is one of six buildings of the same size in the government-subsidized neighborhood built in 2013 in downtown Nanjing. Like the other five buildings in the same neighborhood, the building’s ground floor area, which is not built with outer walls, was a public space that was turned into a parking lot for electric bikes, bicycles and motorcycles, where charging posts

for e-bikes are also installed. The State regulations strictly ban charging e-bikes or their batteries or even parking e-bikes in buildings, be they residential or office ones. But the builders and property managers still turned the ground floor of these apartment blocks into parking and charging sites for e-bikes. That the ground floor has no outer boundary walls does not mean it does not belong to the building.

To some extent, such an arrangement is even more dangerous as it puts all the residents living right above at risk. The broad open space and no-outer-wall structure of the ground floor, only acted as an air blower fanning the flames and blowing the deadly smoke up all kinds of corridors and pipelines upstairs. That’s an important reason why the fire could rapidly spread from the ground floor to the top of the building.

Statistics show that about 80 percent of e-bike fires, which happen in an explosive way in seconds,

making them almost uncontrollable, occur while charging, and more than half of them occur during charging at night. Not to mention the fact that modification of the batteries and e-bikes to raise their speed and load capacity far beyond national standards is almost an open business in many cities.

About 21,000 e-bike-caused fires were reported nationwide in 2023, an increase of 17.4 percent compared to 2022, in contrast with 18,000 fires caused by e-bikes in 2022, which was up 23.4 percent from the number in 2021.

As the largest manufacturer and consumer of e-bikes — one out of every four Chinese people has an e-bike on average — and a country that has moved the most people into high-rise buildings in fast expanding cities over the past decade, the authorities are obliged to take more concrete actions to prevent the commonest means of transport in the country from becoming a threat to life.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

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

China Daily UK  
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK  
+44 (0) 207 398 8270  
editor@chinadailyuk.com

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

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

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

## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | China's Fiscal and Tax Reform

**Editor's note:** China is expected to carry out a new round of fiscal and tax reform, in a bid to help promote high-quality growth and improve the well-being of the people. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Jia Kang

## Horizontal and vertical, tax-sharing reform

The Central Economic Work Conference of 2023 emphasized the need for a new round of reform measures, including new fiscal and tax reforms. Since the launch of reform and opening-up in the late 1970s, several significant reform measures have been initiated at the macro level, with fiscal policy being chosen as the "foundation and important pillar of national governance", and its institutional reform serving as the vanguard. The imminent implementation of the reform measures has once again placed the deepening of fiscal and tax system reform on the agenda.

A brief review of China's more than four decades of reform and opening-up shows a shift in the fiscal system toward serving the overall situation, starting from the early 1980s with the "division of revenue and expenditure, and graded contracting" ("separate kitchen for each family") system.

The most significant milestone in this transition from "administrative sharing" to "economic division" was the establishment of the "tax-sharing system" in 1994. This breakthrough reform, which essentially involved economic division, addressed not only the relationship between the central and local governments, but also that between the government and enterprises, the central and local governments, and various levels of government and taxpayers, thereby ensuring that these three major relationships were properly handled.

Following the establishment of the tax-sharing system framework, all enterprises, regardless of size, administrative level and economic nature, were treated equally when it came to tax laws. This key institutional reform established a "level playing field for fair competition" for all enterprises.

Subsequently, the administrative levels of State-owned enterprises became less important, allowing for mergers and reorganizations across different administrative levels and economic structures. This reform made possible the previously inconceivable mixed-ownership reform

of SOEs and non-SOEs, as well as cross-administrative-level mergers and reorganizations.

To move toward a modern tax system, the 1994 reform provided a relatively standardized framework, consolidating the previously fragmented individual income taxes (for foreign experts), personal income taxes for affluent Chinese nationals, and income taxes for individual industrial and commercial households into a relatively standardized personal income tax system. This could be further deepened through subsequent reforms.

In summary, the proper handling of the three relationships — between the government and enterprises, between the central and local governments, and between various levels of governments and tax payers — has been institutionalized since the 1994 reform which in



The author is former director of the China Academy of New Supply Side Economics.

turn has facilitated modernization.

However, due to various constraints, the 1994 reform had to compromise on several issues. The government has taken a series of measures to deepen fiscal and tax system reform since 1994, which have improved China's economic and fiscal conditions, and to this day, the tax-sharing system framework between the central and provincial governments remains intact.

However, the tax-sharing system below the provincial level is yet to be fully implemented. It is still complex and variable, and is subject to negotiation and bargaining, including dividing revenues.

To build a high-level socialist market economic system, as required by the central government, it is imperative to explore and timely introduce a new round of comprehensive fiscal and tax system reforms.

Therefore, there is a need to fully adhere to the basic institutional achievements of the 1994 tax-sharing system reform, recognize the root causes of the financial difficulties at the grassroots level, local hidden debts, and "short-term behavior of land finance", which are not due to the tax-sharing system per se but because of the inadequate deepening of the tax-sharing system reform both "horizontally and vertically," especially below the provincial level.

The overall approach for this new round of fiscal and tax system reform should be to rationalize the functions of the governments at all levels, help their transformation and standardization, and align them with the "flattening" of government levels by streamlining institutions.

The higher authorities should rationally allocate the powers and expenditure responsibilities of the central, provincial, municipal and county governments, and improve the transfer payment system.

The higher authorities should also deepen the reform of the budget management system, build a reasonable local tax system, promote tax reform for "structural adjustment and mode transformation", and strengthen and optimize comprehensive budget performance management. This approach will enable the fiscal and tax system, and fiscal allocation to play their rightful roles in helping realize the strategic goal of the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through modernization.

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



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Dan Steinbock

## Soft rebound paves way for policy transformation

As the Chinese economy moves toward a soft rebound, it may launch large-scale fiscal and tax reforms to facilitate and boost growth for years to come.

Citing a Japanese "financial journalist", US-based Newsweek recently reported that "China's economy not only expanded less than reported but also contracted in 2023". Apparently, Newsweek thought it had a scoop. Stunningly, dismissing all the growth figures of China by global development banks, the Newsweek report relied on Tamura Hideo of Sankei Shimbun that represents Japan's ultranationalist far-right.

It was déjà vu all over again. Last summer, when Shanghai began to rebound, Newsweek reported that it had turned into a "ghost town". Then its economic authority was a geopolitical hitman, who recently popped up again at a Texas border rally blaming the Hispanic migrants, based on conspiracy theories, for the United States' problems, according to the very same Newsweek. There is a pattern of methodical obfuscation among the leading global media outlets. Economic reporting is increasingly subject to geopolitical agendas.

However, without substantial official support to boost consumption, consumption growth would likely be moderate in 2024 given the current outlook on real estate and confidence. Hence, the impending push for a proactive fiscal policy, coupled with a new round of fiscal and tax reform, to boost consumption growth. Recently, this was coupled with the biggest-ever cut to the key mortgage rate by China's central

bank, to bolster the housing market.

Despite the real estate downturn, China met its economic growth target last year. With economic growth of 5.2 percent year-on-year, fiscal revenue exceeded \$2.9 trillion last year, an increase of 6.4 percent from the previous year.

In 2012, as part of the overall plan of deepening reform, China embarked on a journey to establish a modern public finance system. In the past decade, the fiscal and tax reform has been gradually moving toward a reformed system. These efforts are garnering greater momentum now, as evidenced by the key economic priorities of the Central Economic Work Conference in December.

Since January, there has been increasing global interest in China's reform efforts, in particular its rethinking of the incentives it gives its local governments to support the economy.

In the past more than four decades, China's impressive growth record has dramatically improved Chinese people's living standards and eradicated extreme poverty. But like in other industrializing countries, China's growth has been accompanied by widening imbalances. The current challenges have their origin in the 2008-09 Chinese economic stimulus package of \$586 billion — whose aim was to minimize the impact of the US subprime crisis-induced global financial crisis.

The stimulus did boost growth, helping the Chinese economy to recover from 6 percent to over 10 percent by mid-2009, and drive 50 percent of global growth, thus supporting the ailing West. But the stimulus also contributed to a great surge in local



The author is the founder of Difference Group and has served at the India, China and America Institute (US), Shanghai Institute for International Studies (China) and the EU Centre (Singapore).

government debt. In particular, investment in infrastructure and housing fostered rising debt among property developers, local governments and local government financing vehicles.

Over the medium term, the goal of the impending fiscal policy reform is to improve the risk-sharing mechanisms between the central government and the local governments, to close the fiscal gaps at the local level and reduce local governments' dependency on the sale of land-use rights, as the International Monetary Fund recently said.

The effort at fiscal consolidation is based on the reduction of off-budget investment and the execution of broad social security and tax reforms, including greater reliance on personal income tax, to foster equity.

After three years of deleveraging in the ailing property sector, the Chinese economy is moving toward a soft landing in 2024 and normalization by 2025. But China is neither Japan of the 1990s nor the US of 2008-09. Despite large-scale deleveraging in the sector, homebuyers in China are actually leveraging up, as Singaporean multinational bank, DBS Bank, has reported.

In other words, Chinese consumers do not lack purchasing power. They

are able to spend, and increase their spending. But being cost-conscious, they have been cautious to do so, consuming moderately and saving excessively.

Moreover, there is a great need for broad structural reforms and adequate support to cushion the impact of the adjustment in the property sector — and to unleash the pent-up consumption capacity.

China's structural potential remains high. In the West, the middle-class's real income has stagnated for four decades. In China, there are 400 million people in the middle-income group, and their number could double to 800 million in the next decade. And urbanization will likely create huge demand in sectors such as housing, education, medical and elderly care.

By 2030 an additional 240 million rural residents in China could migrate to cities. Among other things, that will translate to great secular potential for investments to upgrade urban transportation and telecom infrastructure. That means a substantial opportunity for domestic and global financial institutions.

By contrast, in the West, trade wars and geopolitics, coupled with xenophobia and unwarranted wars, have proved to be a costly distraction from requisite structural reforms in home markets.

What the world economy needs is successful growth transformation in China — and large-scale economic reforms within rather than futile foreign interventions by the West.

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

Yang Zhiyong

## Transfer payment system needs improvement

The 2023 Central Economic Work Conference proposed a new round of fiscal and tax system reform. Together with other major measures to further deepen reform, this will facilitate high-quality development and strengthen Chinese path to modernization.

The fiscal and tax reform of 1994 not only helped establish a fiscal and tax framework that basically adapted to a socialist market economy, but also promoted China's economic and social development. To be fair, the fiscal and tax system established in 1994 is still effective. But deepening of fiscal and tax system reform in the new era meets the requirements for the modernization of the national governance system and governance capability.

Now the reform, if conducted, should cover a wide range of aspects, with the two most important being the relationship among financing, the market and society; and the relationship between governments, especially the fiscal relationship between the central and local governments.

Handling the relationship between the government, the market and society requires a reasonable definition of the government's functions. Based on this, the relationship between financing, the market and society can also be defined. Under the socialist market economy system, the market plays a decisive role in resource allocation, and the government's role should ensure the fair and orderly functioning of the market.

All matters concerning government revenue and expenditure, government assets and liabilities, and the movement of government funds are fiscal matters. Hence, fiscal and tax reform requires the coordination of all fiscal resources.

The coordination of fiscal resources covers all aspects and requires breaking through various related interest patterns. The reform is a difficult process, but as long as the goal is clear and the direction correct, fiscal and tax reform will eventually be achieved.

In a vast country like China, handling the fiscal relationship between governments requires the adherence to the direction of the tax-sharing fiscal management system reform and the establishment of a tax-sharing fiscal management system with Chinese characteristics. The goal of the tax-sharing reform is to further regulate the fiscal relationship between the central and local governments.

Forming a hierarchical fiscal system under the leadership of the central government, in accordance with the principle of matching fiscal powers with expenditure responsibility, is of the utmost importance. Such a system ensures fiscal sustainability at all levels, and guarantees fiscal support for public projects undertaken by governments at all levels.

The economies of scale and scope in taxation determine that larger scale fiscal resources are concentrated with the central government. This is not a problem; on the contrary, it's a good thing for a country that needs to achieve equality in public services across regions. The central government thus has sufficient fiscal resources to provide transfer payments for financially weak regions in the central and western parts of the country, thereby promoting equality in public services.

Tax-sharing is not just about dividing taxes between the central and local governments but also about providing tax revenue for local governments in accordance with their respective functions. China has 18 types of taxes, and quite a few of them provide tax revenue for the local governments, but still those are not enough to meet the needs of local governments.

The main source of income for local governments is shared taxes — the taxes shared between the central and local governments. Value-added tax, corporate income tax and personal income tax revenues are the most significant sources of tax revenue for both the central and local governments. If China's tax system does not undergo fundamental changes, this pattern will remain unchanged. So we need to re-recognize local taxes.

Any tax that provides revenue for local governments, including shared taxes, can be considered as local taxes. Following this logic, improving the local tax system becomes feasible.

In reality, central-to-local transfer payments have promoted the "three guarantees" — guaranteeing people's basic livelihoods, wages and functioning of society — at the grassroots level. The role of transfer payments cannot be overemphasized.

But central-to-local fiscal transfer payments need to be further standardized. Without appropriate rules, transfer payments may breed laziness. This obviously needs to be prevented. Therefore, it's necessary to further improve the transfer payment system, appropriately determine the scale of transfer payments, and let transfer payments play their proper role.

General transfer payments and special transfer payments both have important roles, and neither should be favored over the other. In this regard, although special transfer payments have been criticized, they are more conducive to the implementation of central policy goals.

The task of establishing a modern fiscal and tax system with Chinese characteristics is difficult. It cannot be accomplished overnight; it requires careful planning and step-by-step progress. And this is the right time for planning a new round of fiscal and tax system reform.

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

## GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHANG JIANPING

## Push in the right direction

Global South should make concerted efforts to ensure a more equitable, reasonable and inclusive WTO through reform

The rise of unilateralism and protectionism in recent years has triggered an increasing number of trade disputes, bringing uncertainty to global trade and threatening global economic stability and the multilateral trading system.

As the primary international trade governance platform, the World Trade Organization plays a crucial role in maintaining a fair, open and sustainable environment, providing a solid foundation for the development of the global economy and trade.

The WTO also keeps a close eye on developing countries and actively promotes the development of the Global South. In the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations, the WTO established principles such as tariff reduction and service trade liberalization, which laid the foundation for developing countries to take part in international trade. With development in mind, in the Doha Round, the WTO proposed agricultural subsidy reductions and other actions that would benefit the developing economies, although agreement was not reached between the developed and the developing countries.

The Western countries, particularly the United States, have always put their own interests above others. They abide by international trade rules only when the rules meet their needs. They have even disrupted and obstructed the WTO's dispute settlement system, severely undermining the authority and effectiveness of the WTO. Without timely and effective measures, multilateral trade systems, including the WTO, risk losing their guiding role in global trade and their rule-making powers.

As a collective of emerging and developing economies, the Global South has played a significant role

in promoting WTO reform and safeguarding the interests of developing countries. China's WTO reform proposal firmly upholds the rules-based multilateral trading system, adheres to openness and cooperation, and supports the status and rights of Global South countries in international trade.

Reflecting the interests and needs of the Global South, the proposal aims to make the multilateral trade system more inclusive and sustainable. China's Position Paper on WTO Reform sets out three basic principles: WTO reform should uphold the core values of the multilateral trading system, safeguard the development interests of its developing members, and adhere to the mechanism of decision-making through consensus.

Based on these principles, the Global South can promote the reform of the WTO in the following ways.

First, collaborate to enhance negotiating power.

Globalization has increased the interconnectivity among countries and the overall strength of developing economies. However, with dominating powers in the world economy and politics, developed countries are attempting to impose various restrictions on the Global South to maintain and consolidate their own advantages.

The Global South should adhere to the principles of multilateralism and consensus, and strongly oppose the unilateralism and protectionism of developed countries that put



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

their interests above anything else.

It is essential to uphold the authority and effectiveness of the WTO. In particular, the WTO dispute settlement system needs to return to normal operation as soon as possible so that international trade disputes can be resolved within the WTO framework.

Additionally, the Global South should present a unified stance to urge developed countries to abide by the rules and fulfill their com-

mitments, while collectively promoting a greater role of the multilateral trading system in global governance.

Second, firmly uphold WTO preferential treatment for developing countries.

The special and differential treatment benefiting developing members is the most prominent disagreement between the Global South and developed countries. Developed countries prioritize their

interests and attempt to use the organization's rules and mechanisms to maintain and expand their advantages.

Although the Global South constitutes the majority of WTO members, its overall strength is relatively weak and it often lacks effective negotiation capabilities and influence, making it challenging to secure reasonable benefits and development within the WTO.

The Global South must defend the special and differential treatment of developing members, adhere to multilateralism, advocate the restoration of the Appellate Body, protect the legitimate rights of all members, and effectively utilize the WTO's functions of review, oversight and dispute settlement. This will make the WTO a more equitable, reasonable, inclusive and coordinated

organization.

The Global South should actively participate in discussions on multilateral negotiations and new issues, such as e-commerce, investment facilitation, the environment and climate change. This involvement should seek to achieve more consensus and agreements within the framework of the WTO while ensuring the openness and eligibility of the most-favored-nation treatment.

Third, proactively pursue initiatives in digital trade and green trade.

Digital trade can reduce costs, improve efficiency, expand volume, promote innovation and increase value. However, it also faces network and personal data security risks arising from cross-border data flows.

Green trade can reduce the adverse environmental impact of trade, enhance trade quality and efficiency, strengthen trade competitiveness and sustainability, promote trade transformation and upgrading, and make public interest. But it is also threatened by climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental pollution.

Therefore, the Global South should advocate the establishment of WTO rules that promote the development of digital trade and green trade, as well as to settle disputes in these areas. While maintaining openness and inclusiveness, efforts should be made to address the security risks and threats posed by these developments.

The global development of digital trade and green trade requires the collaborative efforts of the Global South and developed countries. Taking into full consideration the circumstances and interests of all parties, the Global South should cooperate with developed countries within the framework of the WTO with an open mindset, a spirit of cooperation, and innovative approaches, to jointly steer digital trade and green trade in a more fair and reasonable direction.

The author is deputy director and a researcher at the academic committee of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

ZHENG YU AND YE ZI

## Globalization not reversed

The resilience from developing countries' opening-up has become a critical force for resisting rather than driving the anti-globalization movement by some developed nations

Since the turn of the century, rising globalization and inequality have fueled anti-globalization sentiments. Events such as trade wars, geopolitical conflicts and COVID-19 have caused global trade declines, sparking concerns about globalization's reversal. However, the global trading system showed resilience, swiftly recovering from shocks.

In less than two years post-COVID-19, global trade rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, with developing countries leading a robust recovery, particularly in South-South trade.

Despite the growing outcry against globalization in developed countries including the United States and European countries, such calls are relatively weaker in developing nations. Over the past three decades, developing countries' weighted average tariffs have been declining, from nearly 40 percent to around 15 percent.

Why can developing countries display great resilience in crises?

To start with, participating in global value chains has reduced developing countries' domestic income inequality.

Global value chains have provided developing countries with a new means of industrialization and a new way of integrating into the global economy, which helps them elevate their level of economic development.

Developing countries can take part in the process of globalization without having comparative advantages in finished products or the entire industry — they only need to produce parts and components in certain production process.

Global value chain participation can create more job opportunities for workers and attract a large

**Countries should promote the re-employment of low-skilled workers, put in place social protection measures, and adopt long-term measures such as strengthening education and vocational training. In the meantime, they should adopt more flexible social protection measures to reduce the cost of inequality in the short run and prevent industrial transformation from further worsening income disparities.**

amount of foreign direct investment, thus helping developing countries "make the cake bigger". The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development has found that economies with fastest growing participation in global value chains have GDP per capita growth rates 2 percentage points above the average.

In the meantime, participating in global value chains helps increase the incomes of low-skilled workers and narrows the income gap in society. According to the World Inequality Database, over the past three decades, the average income inequality level of developing coun-

tries has increased during the first two decades and then declined in the past decade.

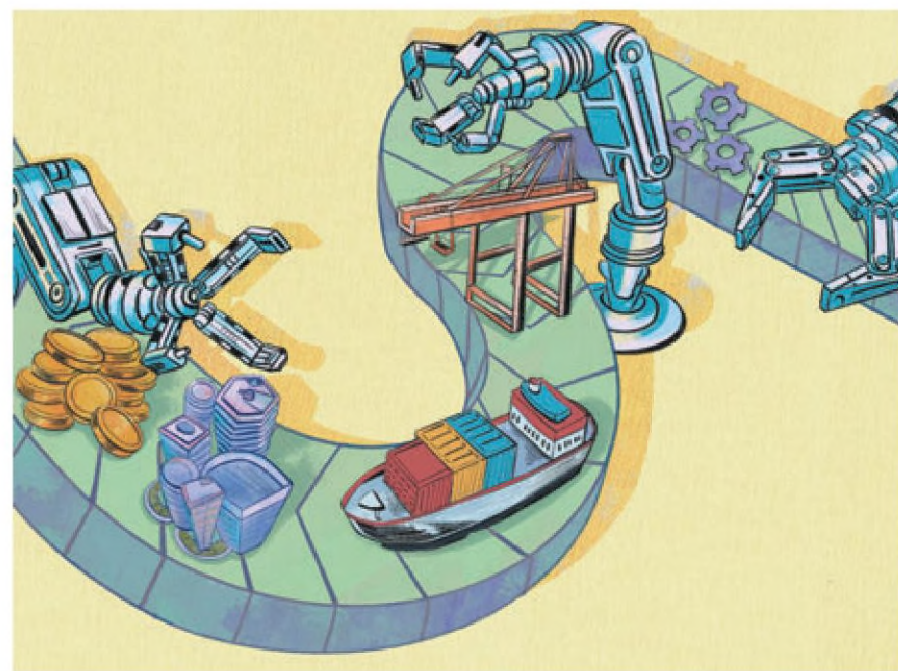
Second, the upgrading along the value chains will increase inequality within developing countries.

However, with their ascent along the value chains, the income gap between low-skilled workers and high-skilled ones has been widening, increasing domestic income inequality. Therefore, despite the enormous opportunities from global value chain participation, developing countries will face more difficulties in striking a balance between equality and efficiency as they seek to move up the value chain.

Third, overall, global value chain participation has reduced pressure within developing countries for protectionism.

Facing shocks from global value chain participation, developing countries are not inclined to resort to protectionist trade policies such as tariffs and import quotas. That's because developing countries face completely different situations from developed ones.

On the one hand, their economic opening-up brings more benefits to labor-intensive industries and low-income workers; therefore, they face less pressure in income distribution than developed countries, thus restraining the domestic outcry for protectionist policies. More importantly, as their global value chain participation advances, trade relations between countries are becoming increasingly complicated and protectionist trade policies can hardly protect the domestic market. It is because of the less-intense contradiction in domestic income distribution that the developing countries display a stronger desire for economic open-



TONG JIAHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

ing-up than developed ones.

On the whole, global value chains have not only enhanced economic interdependence between countries, but also consolidated the social foundation within developing countries for supporting economic opening-up, thus strengthening their resilience in economic crises and making them staunch supporters of economic globalization. Developing countries have become a critical force for defending globalization, rather than a driver of the anti-globalization movement, which greatly reduces the risk of globalization going into reverse.

That said, as developing countries climb up the global value chains, income inequality within these countries will continuously worsen, resulting in greater pressure for them to roll out protectionist trade policies. When facing growing pressure from globalization, developing countries should attach greater significance to the adjustment of domestic policies.

First, for labor-intensive develop-

ing countries, gains from global value chain participation outweigh the associated risks of losses.

Global value chain participation could enhance productivity, increase exports and create job opportunities, which help mitigate domestic contradictions and effectively maintain their economic stability and sustainable development.

Second, when pursuing upgrading along the global value chains, developing countries need to pay more attention to the adverse impacts of technological progress on low-skilled workers and its social impacts.

A country's efforts to achieve industrial transformation and value-chain climbing will likely worsen income inequality. Income inequality exerts a crucial impact on social cohesion and political stability, and is thus an important premise of whether globalization can advance.

Last, the conventional protectionist measures, such as tariffs, have a limited effect in tackling inequality — adjusting domestic social

policies will play a bigger role.

Countries should promote the re-employment of low-skilled workers, put in place social protection measures, and adopt long-term measures such as strengthening education and vocational training.

In the meantime, they should adopt more flexible social protection measures to reduce the cost of inequality in the short run and prevent industrial transformation from further worsening income disparities. By doing so, they could better adapt to globalization and steer its course in the right direction to achieve more sustainable and inclusive growth.

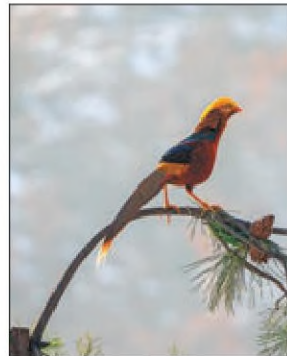
Zheng Yu is a professor at the School of International Relations and Public Affairs at Fudan University. Ye Zi is a PhD student at the School of International Relations and Public Affairs at Fudan University. The authors contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LIFE

# New flight trajectory for bird origins

Chinese and US scientists have teamed up to achieve breakthrough findings that dispel myths and explain how today's avian species came to be, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

Earth is home to about 11,000 bird species, accounting for the greatest diversity among terrestrial vertebrates. Yet question marks have long loomed over their origins and evolution. How closely are they related to dinosaurs? How did climate change influence their evolution? And how did they diversify biologically over time? Significant recent breakthroughs are helping answer these questions, thanks to genomic research on terrestrial vertebrates led by Chinese scientists, who collaborated with their US counterparts to make strides in unraveling the mysteries surrounding the origins of modern birds.



A golden pheasant at the Ganshan National Forest Park in Sanmenxia, Henan province. LI PEIXIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

"Using new approaches to mine genomic information among 124 species, covering most modern birds' diversity, we found that the main lineages first divided into two groups — one mostly land-based and the other containing waterbird species," says Wu Shaoyuan, a professor from Jiangsu Normal University in Xuzhou, who led the research team.

The waterbirds were found during the study to be of a new evolutionary lineage, named *Aquaterraves*, which include seabirds and their close relatives.

*Aquaterraves*, along with the previously identified land birds (*Telluraves*), constitute the two major lineages of *Neoaves*, a clade to which almost 95 percent of the roughly 10,000 known species of extant birds belong.

After four years of efforts, the team has also shown that modern birds date back further than previously assumed — much earlier than the dinosaurian extinction event, which seems to have had a limited impact on their evolution.

Instead, a global warming event around 55 million years ago appears to have triggered the diversification that produced today's seabirds.

The researchers extracted DNA-sequence data from 25,640 genetic loci, referred to fossil records from different geological periods, and reconstructed the evolutionary history and trajectory of modern birds through phylogenetic tree construction, molecular clock estimation and species diversity differentiation rate analyses.

The scientists estimated when the branches split into new lineages by comparing the mutations that accumulated along the branches. The older the split between two branches, the more mutations each lineage built up.

"Remarkably, these two major bird lineages diverged during the Late Cretaceous Period — long before the famous dinosaur extinction event," Wu says.

"Our study indicates that the radiation (divergence out from a central point) of modern birds was in remarkable lockstep with that of flowering plants and other organisms."

Traditional theories have long linked the evolutionary history of modern birds to the mass extinction event around 66 million years ago, suggesting that they evolved rapidly after the dinosaurs vanished.

However, the research indicates that the mass extinction event did not have a significant impact on the evolution of modern birds. Instead, the global warming event that occurred around 55 million years ago, known as the Paleocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum, led to the turnover of modern marine bird evolution, a process by which species in a particular ecological niche or geographic area are replaced by new species.

"It has thus challenged our traditional understanding that modern bird origins can actually be traced back to the dinosaur era," Wu says.

The findings were published on Feb 12 in the paper *Genomes, Fossils, and the Concurrent Rise of Modern Birds and Flowering Plants in the Late Cretaceous*, in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States, a

It (the research) not only deepens our understanding of the evolutionary history of birds and life on Earth but also enlightens us as to new considerations regarding the relationship between global climate change and the evolution of biodiversity."

**Zhou Zhonghe**, researcher, Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology

peer reviewed journal of the National Academy of Sciences.

"I imagine this will ruffle a few feathers," The New York Times quoted Scott Edwards, an evolutionary biologist at Harvard and one of the study's authors, as saying.

Scientists in various fields in both countries took part in the project out of their shared interest in birds, according to Wu.

The team included prominent researchers like Zhou Zhonghe from the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology affiliated with the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Edwards from Harvard and Liu Liang from the University of Georgia.

Wu had previously examined genomic data with US scientists to understand species' origins and relationships when he was a college student.

Similar studies have been conducted on mammals and angiosperm (flowering plants), both of which Wu says account for a big part of biodiversity in the Cenozoic, Earth's current geological era.

"Everyone played a crucial role in the project," Wu says. "The scientists from abroad came to China to engage in academic exchanges with us, and discussions were direct and sparkling."

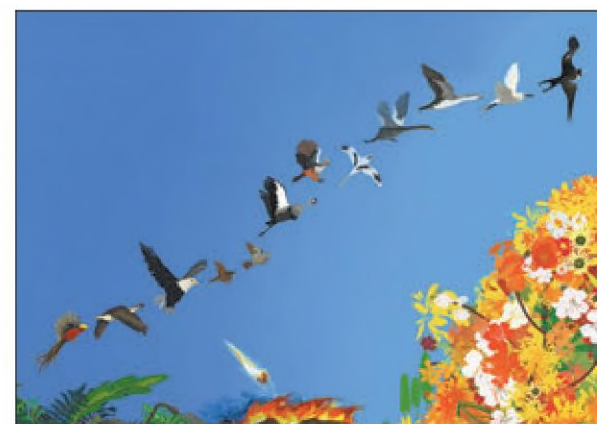
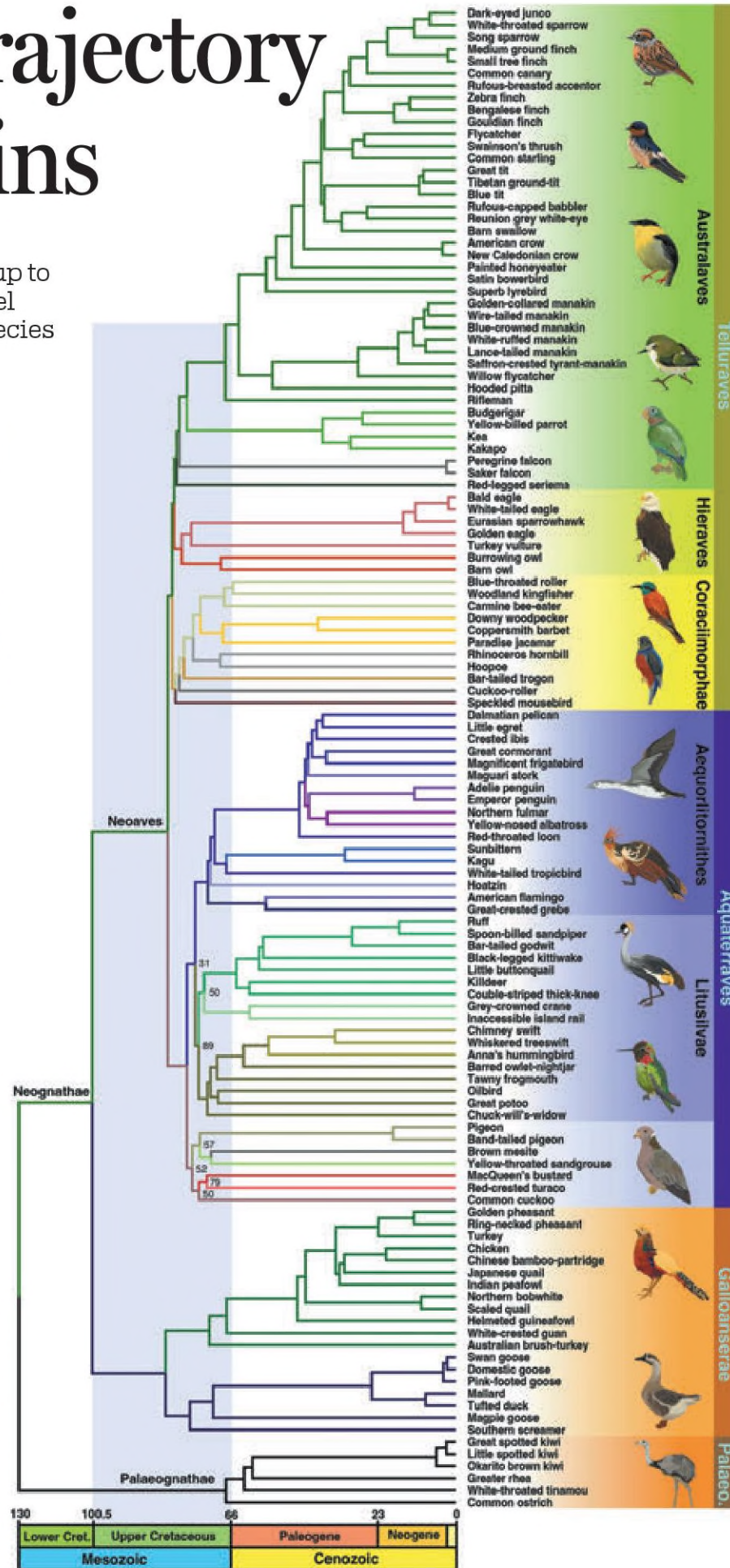
Chinese paleontologists played a big role in fine-tuning the genetic estimates by examining the ages of 19 fossils.

"They have helped to convert the mutation rates seen in the genomes into specific times through fossil analyses," Wu explains.

If a branch appeared to be newer than a fossil that belonged to it, they would adjust the computer model that estimated the evolutionary pace.

Ultimately, biological data from the past was acquired and compared with data from modern times to trace the origin of birds, which Wu says will offer valuable information for humanity.

"The Earth has experienced major climate and environmental changes, which have affected biodiversity, and the data will offer us an insight and thus better prepare us



Top: The time-calibrated tree of 124 avian species demonstrates the phylogenetic relationships of modern birds. Above: An illustration shows modern birds date back further than previously assumed, much earlier than the dinosaurian extinction event. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

for the future," Wu says. "As we are experiencing global warming, we need international cooperation to address the issue."

The study also revealed that living birds share a common ancestor that lived 130 million years ago. New branches of its family tree split off throughout the Cretaceous and afterward at a fairly steady pace, which Wu says was a result of the growing diversity of flowering plants

and insects during the period.

These new discoveries have prompted scientists to reexamine bird evolution and pose a bold question about Earth's biological history: How exactly did birds embark on their evolutionary journey during the dinosaur era?

Experts believe the discoveries support Charles Darwin's classic theory of gradual species evolution and provide new evidence for the

impact of global climate change on the unfolding of biodiversity.

"This research has led us to a new understanding of the timeline of bird evolution," says Zhou from the Institute of Vertebrate Paleontology and Paleoanthropology.

In contrast to the previously widely accepted model of rapid evolution, the evolution of modern birds appears to lean toward a slower and more continuous process, gradually changing through natural selection and showing synchronous trends with the evolutionary radiations of angiosperms, mammals, fish and insects, Zhou explains.

"This major discovery has inspired us to contemplate the evolution of life and Earth's history," he says.

"It not only deepens our understanding of the evolutionary history of birds and life on Earth but also enlightens us as to new considerations regarding the relationship between global climate change and the evolution of biodiversity," Zhou adds.

Wu says the new discoveries mark a first step in future studies.

"We will continue to collect and compare biological, climate and environmental data to develop a bigger picture and thus provide guidance and insight into the impact on biodiversity, and how to address challenges."

Contact the writer at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

## Smarter libraries deliver greater knowledge

How long does it take for a reader to get a book after placing an order in a library of over 8 million?

The answer from a new library in suburban Beijing is less than 15 minutes.

Located in the eastern district of Tongzhou, Beijing Library has become a popular destination since it opened in late December. It received over 80,000 visits during the three-day New Year holiday.

Book lovers are attracted not only by the library's architectural design, which resembles a reading space under giant ginkgo trees, but also by its abundant collection of books and smart services.

Covering some 75,000 square meters, Beijing Library houses over 8 million books. The towering stacks on the library's basement floor contribute to its massive capacity. They are part of the largest single automated storage and retrieval system, also known as AS/RS, for books in China.

The stacks have a total storage area of less than 3,000 sq m, yet they can store up to 7.1 million books largely due to their special design. Such a huge repository would require a storage area of at least 10,000 sq m in a traditional library.

In addition to the stacks, the smart system includes various types of smart equipment like robots, which enable intelligent book delivery and auxiliary sorting.

"The automated book storage and retrieval system functions like the smart brain of the library, enabling an array of highly efficient services that reduce manual labor," says Shi Qi, general manager of the AS/RS business unit of Jiayu Technology, the smart reading service provider responsible for the design of Beijing Library's AS/RS.

Beijing Library is not alone in adopting innovative storage methods. The Suzhou No 2 Library, which opened in late 2019, was the first Chinese library to embrace the smart book storage and retrieval system.

"As more local governments place enriching cultural life high on their agenda, we are seeing growing interest from public libraries to introduce the smart storage and retrieval system," Shi says.

To make borrowing books easier, visitors to Beijing Library can register for a seamless borrowing service empowered by facial recognition and other technologies. A digital guide at the library's entrance also offers on-demand interactions with visitors.

Readers who want to avoid travel to the library can use the online borrowing service, which will deliver the book to their doorstep. The library's online borrowing service is open to readers not only in Beijing but also in neighboring Tianjin and Hebei province.

"It's quite a refreshing experience to visit the library," says Meng Fan, a local sixth-grader. "The books here enrich your mind, and some of the smart services here can blow your mind."

XINHUA



Beijing residents spend a Sunday reading at the recently opened Beijing Library in Tongzhou district in January. PENG ZIYANG / XINHUA

## LIFE



Established in Xingyi, Guizhou province, in 2012, Dashan Xiaoi ("big mountain small love") is a children's charity dedicated to narrowing the regional gap in education and broadening the children's perspective, with various activities, such as (from left) movies, book fairs and reading clubs. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Children in one village in the Qianxinan Bouyei and Miao autonomous prefecture, in Guizhou province, have a new place to spend their winter vacation — a library in a karst cave built by a local charity group.

Located in Banwan village and blending in with the surrounding landscape, the library became a must-visit place for tourists during the recent Spring Festival holiday.

"Fostering a culture of reading in a rural community is not an easy thing, because it is not a necessity for residents. This is why the library has an appealing design and a welcoming atmosphere, which helps encourage potential readers," says 32-year-old Zhou Beilei, head of the Dashan Xiaoi ("big mountain small love") charity.

This is the eighth library that the charity has built to help rural residents, especially children, learn. Involved in rural education for more than 10 years, Zhou discovered that rural children, many of whom live with relatives because their parents have migrated to cities to find work, do not have anywhere to spend quality time after school.

She says that taking weekends, school vacations and festival holidays into account, students in Qianxinan spend more than 180 days at home, where most have no parental supervision or access to educational resources like bookstores.

"This is why we decided to build libraries for the children, to offer them high-quality and sustainable activities, and nurture their love for reading," Zhou says.

She adds that in addition to books, the libraries are public spaces and serve a wide range of community needs and purposes. In other words, each is much more than just a repository of books.

The charity's first library, in the prefecture's Qiaoma town, opened in March 2019. It is divided into an adult area and a designated space for children and organizes a variety of after-school activities, including homework tutoring, a parenthood salon and film screenings.

To encourage them to read, children can join a free rewards program and earn points by reading books. When they have a certain number of points, they get a gift.

Li Feng, a former volunteer at the library, is happy to see how popular

## Rural libraries open exciting chapter for children

Charity's initiative in Guizhou builds a vibrant community, and fosters ambition, **Wang Qian** and **Yang Jun** report in Guiyang.



Fostering a culture of reading in a rural community is not an easy thing, because it is not a necessity for residents. This is why the library has an appealing design and a welcoming atmosphere."

**Zhou Beilei**, head of a charity

it has become with the local children.

"Not all the children come to read, but there are always a few who discover their passion for books. As long as they come, we will keep opening," Li says.

Lu Xiaoman, a fifth-grader and a regular reader, has written in the library's guest book that "it is my second home, only more fun and better".

Built with the support of the local government, companies and individuals, the charity's eight libraries house around 120,000 books between them, and receive about 18,000 visits on average every month.

"It has taken us five years to build and improve the libraries, which are attracting increasing numbers of readers, from kindergarten and middle school students to adult residents," Zhou says, adding that they will likely change some readers' lives and at the very least, create



happy memories for the children.

Brought up by her grandfather, Zhou has always understood the important role parents play in the lives of children.

"My parents used to work in Guiyang, Guizhou, while I spent my childhood with my grandpa in Wenzhou, Zhejiang province. What I looked forward to most back then was my parents coming home," she says.

When she heard about Dashan Xiaoi's volunteer teacher program in Guizhou, the then sophomore at the Shanghai Normal University applied and during her summer vacation in 2012, traveled to Ayi, a remote village in Qianxinan prefecture.

Although she knew of the gap between urban and rural education, Zhou was still surprised by the low literacy rate of most of the students in her classroom. Many had problems understanding and writing, and often failed in their exams, and when she left, many of them cried and asked her if she would come back the following year.

"I didn't say anything at the time, but I told myself this was the career I wanted to devote myself to," she says.

The one-month program had made her realize the importance of narrowing the rural education gap, and so, every vacation thereafter, Zhou returned to her students and also began to bring other volunteer teachers with her.

At the end of 2021, there were 4.77 million left-behind children aged under 16 living in rural areas in China, a 47.4 percent drop from the 9.02 million recorded in 2016, according to statistics from the Ministry of Civil Affairs. The phenomenon is more common in central and western China, where the

economy is less developed, forcing many adults to find work in cities.

Taking care of these children requires the support and help of all parties, including the government and nongovernmental organizations, according to Jiang Yongping, a researcher at the Women's Studies Institute of China.

After graduating in 2014, Zhou joined the charity and became its first full-time employee. To help alleviate the teacher shortage in Qianxinan, she and 900-plus volunteers have taught a variety of courses, including English, music and art, in classrooms at 11 primary schools across the prefecture over the past 12 years.

"I felt the calling. I can't do much on my own, but it's a starting point, which I believe will make a difference one day," Zhou says.

Her belief echoes Dashan Xiaoi's slogan: "The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention".

Cao Yiming, who was a volunteer teacher in 2013, says that the students showed him a touching degree of warmth.

"Unlike the hustle and bustle of city life, life in the countryside is fulfilling, and joy is found in the simpler things in life," Cao says, adding that when he came down with a sore throat, a student who wasn't in his class brought him honeysuckle to soothe the pain.

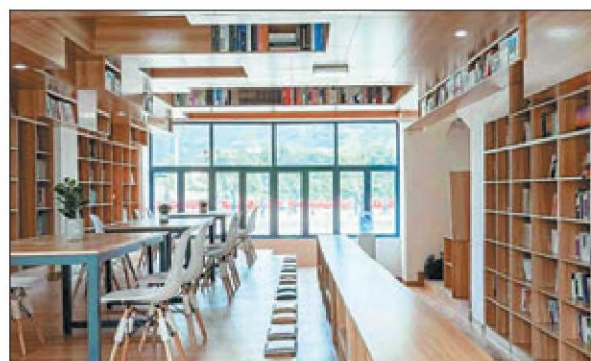
Volunteer teacher Chen Zichao, who has taken part in the program for three years, wants to learn new things and also to help the 36 students in his class get to know themselves better, accept who they are, and become their better selves.

In the course of their teaching, Zhou and her team have explored a number of different programs to help narrow the regional gap and foster opportunities for rural children, including organizing city trips, running lunch programs and setting up dental health services.

Last year, she was named a Good Samaritan of Guizhou and in 2022 she was given the province's May 4th Youth Medal.

After 12 years devoting herself to rural education, Zhou says that she is happy that some of the students she has taught have come back to their villages to work with her.

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



From left: Zhou Beilei, head of the charity, introduces the group to new volunteers during a training session in Guizhou. With support from the local government, companies and individuals, the eight libraries operated by the charity receive about 18,000 visits on average every month. Children respond enthusiastically to Zhou during a lesson. Top: To celebrate the opening of the eighth library built by the Dashan Xiaoi charity, a concert is held at the library in a karst cave in Banwan village, Guizhou, on New Year's Eve.

## Learning Chinese best way to build cultural bridge, says Spanish student

BARCELONA — According to Albert Estrada, studying Chinese is one of the best ways to get closer to the culture.

"After I first went to China in 2018, I set myself the goal of going there to live and to work as soon as possible, because I love the whole culture there," says the Spanish student, who has been studying at the Confucius Institute of Barcelona in

Spain for five years.

His trip was inspired by Chinese friends.

"When I got to China, I saw it was a different world, and it fascinated me. It seemed like a wonderful place, the people treated me well, and when I got back, I began studying Chinese," he says.

The huge differences between the two languages mean that Chinese

people find some aspects of Spanish grammar hard, he says, such as conjugating verbs. However, Spanish people find the pronunciation of Chinese, as well as Chinese characters, challenging.

"I wouldn't say I speak Chinese right now, I'm a student of Chinese, which is not the same thing. But the last few times I've been to China, I have been able to get by without

resorting to English. I've been able to shop, buy food and talk to people," he says.

The Confucius Institute was founded in Barcelona in 2009 as part of a collaborative effort between Spanish and Chinese universities. It offers Chinese language courses at 14 different levels, as well as the HSK (Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi) exams, China's official test of

language proficiency for nonnative speakers.

Estrada is currently on the fourth of the six HSK levels, and is one of around 50,000 people studying Chinese in Spain.

He stresses that it is important to mix with Chinese people, both at home and in China.

"Breaking the linguistic barrier is the first step, and once they see

that you are learning the language, they feel more relaxed and then it is easy to form a relationship," he says.

He spent two months in the country last summer, and hopes to visit for three months at the end of this year to experience Chinese New Year in China.

XINHUA

# CULTURE



Visitors to the China Cultural Center in Paris, France check out examples of Jingdezhen ceramics during a special exhibition that ended on Feb 18. The pieces on display included *Harmony in Gold and Jade*, *Hearts Gather from Four Seas* (right), from the Feng kiln. PHOTOS FROM XINHUA



## Famed porcelain featured in Paris

By LI CHUNYAN in Paris  
For China Daily

One of the main opening events in 2024 Sino-French Cultural Tourism Year drew enthusiastic visitors to the China Cultural Center in Paris, France seeking a rare chance to see iconic ceramics from Jingdezhen, East China's Jiangxi province, up close.

The special exhibition of Jingdezhen ceramics and their surrounding culture, named The Silk Road Porcelain Tour, was open to the public from Jan 30 to Feb 18.

It featured 48 ceramic pieces created in Jingdezhen, which has been known as "China's ceramic capital" for thousands of years. Some were copies of pieces created in various dynasties, from the distant past all the way through to contemporary work.

The exhibition showcased the Chinese craftsmanship spirit of striving for excellence and the idea of innovation and dialogue with the world, said organizers.

It was jointly organized by the information bureau and department of culture and tourism of Jiangxi provincial government, Jingdezhen municipal government and the China Cultural Center in Paris, France.

Yue Jun, director of the Jingdezhen Art Museum, said during a lecture delivered on the opening day of the exhibition that the true genesis of Chinese ceramics extends all the way back to the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) with the emergence of the technique of glazing.

But he said there is a distinction between what we call "pottery" and what is known as "porcelain", with the firing temperatures for pottery ranging from 800 C to 1,000 C and those for porcelain ranging from 1,200 C to 1,400 C.

Kiln technology was not advanced enough for porcelain production until the time of the Song Dynasty (960-1279). Ceramics that predate that time should be properly called pottery.

Through the annals of time, ceramic art has evolved, progressing in terms of the materials used, craftsmanship, decoration, and other facets, and the variations have given rise to a range of diverse styles and schools.

### Royal approval

The Jingdezhen kiln emerged in the early 10th century, during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and the Five Dynasties and Ten Kingdoms period (907-960), which disrupted the paradigm of "southern green and northern white" ceramics prevalent during the earlier part of the Tang Dynasty.

By the time of the Song Dynasty, kilns in Jingdezhen had evolved to become the best in China and the region had started to pioneer its iconic blue and white porcelain.

The appellation "Jingdezhen" was bestowed by Emperor Zhenzong of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) in 1004 AD.

Yue explained that, from the time of the Tang Dynasty through to the present day, ceramic art has continued to flourish in China. During its

Iconic pieces from 'China's ceramic capital' tell story dating back thousands of years



Above Left: A replica of the famed *Chicken Cup* from the Ming Dynasty. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Right: A copy of a blue and white porcelain vase in the style of Yuan Dynasty, which contains a scene of decoration that shows Xiao He chasing Han Xin under the moon. PROVIDED BY THE CHINA CULTURAL CENTER IN PARIS

"This exhibition is captivating, and I am delighted to be here. I dream of going to China and discovering this great porcelain capital of the world there."

Yannick Lintz, director of Guimet National Museum of Asian Arts in Paris



and differences with French porcelain, just as the Chinese and French people do.

Despite any differences between the two peoples, Chen said, they have been able to understand and appreciate each other for the past 60 years, during which diplomatic relations have been in place.

Dong Zhen, deputy director of the publicity department at Jingdezhen municipal party committee, said: "Jingdezhen, with a history of over 2,000 years of pottery smelting, has become an important window for China to go global and for the world to understand China."

She said the ceramics produced there have witnessed the profound fraternal friendship between China and France. Bilateral cultural exchanges have continued and flourished since the time of the boom in porcelain trade between the countries in the 18th century, all the way through to the establishment of a sister-city relationship between Jingdezhen and Limoges, France in 2010, and beyond.

"This exhibition is captivating, and I am delighted to be here," said Yannick Lintz, director of Guimet National Museum of Asian Arts in Paris.

"I dream of going to China and discovering this great porcelain capital of the world there. At the Guimet Museum, we showcase remarkable examples of Chinese porcelain creation, and the displayed items here are very beautiful."

### Through to the present

Remy Aron, president of the House of Artists Association in France, said he got to see Jingdezhen for himself last year. During his two-week visit, he had the opportunity to appreciate both the process through which porcelain is made and the artists who create it.

"They are very open-minded toward modernity and tradition," he said of the craftspeople.

Olga Cuxart Oriol, a young Spanish artist who is one of the small number of overseas craftspeople resident in Jingdezhen, was a representative of the modern-era artists at the exhibition, with one of her works, a porcelain cup titled *All Living Beings*, among items on display.

Monique and Marcello Ernst, a French couple fervent about contemporary ceramics and art, visited the exhibition.

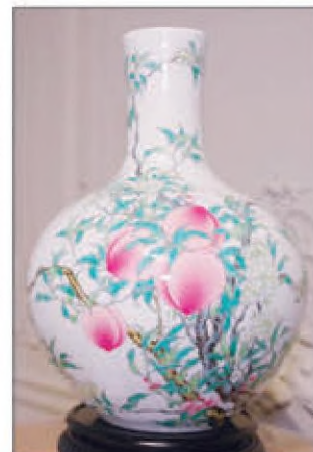
"We are not experts in Chinese ceramics, but obviously, we are very interested in the forms, techniques, colors, and influence, including the exchanges between the continents," Monique said.

"In the 9th and 10th centuries, all of this was already very developed, showcasing an extremely advanced technique and societies that have exchange and dialogue abilities."

Marcello said it seemed to him that, over time, ceramics "gradually became an object through which we wanted to create emotions".

He said ceramics went on to represent civilization, and "little by little, an extraordinary rise emerged: China developed its own approach ... with artists who have developed their own ways of expression."

"This is a formidable adventure of the human spirit," he said.



Clockwise from top left: People study an exquisite replica of *Porcelain Flagon* in the style of Song Dynasty, which was made by Duan Chenggang, at the exhibition in Paris, France. XINHUA; An artist from Jingdezhen demonstrates traditional porcelain painting techniques at the exhibition. *Skinned* by Spanish artist Jaume Ribalta. A painting on a glazed porcelain panel *Lady Mu Guiying Takes Command* by Zhang Zhaochun. A replica of *Globular Vase with Decoration of Nine Peaches* in the style of the era of Emperor Qianlong in the Qing Dynasty. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE CHINA CULTURAL CENTER IN PARIS

long history, the country has seen the creation of renowned kilns and porcelain varieties, and ceramic art has become one of the most important representatives of Chinese culture in the world and made invaluable contributions to global civilization.

Trade in ceramics between China and the West started in the 8th century, during the Tang Dynasty, Yue said.

In the 17th century, during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), the export of Chinese ceramics reached its zenith,

with more than 100 million Chinese porcelain products exported, according to Yue.

Today, ceramic trade between China and the West has continued to be vibrant. "In Jingdezhen, various types of porcelain can be customized to suit individual preferences," Yue said.

Traditional Chinese ceramic works often feature animal motifs imbued with important connotations. For instance, the word for chicken in Chinese — *ji* — sounds similar to the word for auspicious,

so the chicken motif is often used to represent auspiciousness.

A replica of *Chicken Cup* in *doucai* style, a bowl-shaped imperial porcelain piece made during the reign of Emperor Chenghua (1465-1487) in the Ming Dynasty, is an example of this symbolism that was on display at the exhibition. *Doucai*, which means "contrasting colors", is a porcelain enamelling technique.

The original iteration of the masterpiece was auctioned at Sotheby's in Hong Kong in April 2014 for 280 million yuan (\$39 million), which

set a new global auction record for Chinese porcelain.

More than 180 Chinese and French guests attended the opening ceremony of the porcelain exhibition, including Anne-Marie Raffarin, wife of former prime minister of France Jean-Pierre Raffarin, Liu Hongge, director of the China Cultural Center in Paris, and Josiane Gaude, deputy mayor of the 7th arrondissement of Paris.

Chen Li, minister counselor at China's Embassy in France, said at the opening of the exhibition that Chinese porcelain shares similarities