

Raptor rescuer

Rehabilitator dedicated to raising public awareness of birds' plight

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Mini dramas making major headway online

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Famine looms in Gaza

Dire need seen for truce to allow food aid into embattled enclave

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CHINA DAILY

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History finds new home

Above: Visitors admire Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC) relics at the new building of the Yinxu Museum in Anyang, Henan province, on Monday. The building, which opened to the public on Monday, boasts an exhibition area of 22,000 square meters, with nearly 4,000 items on display.

Right: A visitor inspects the Simuxin ding (bronze cauldron), one of the biggest bronze vessels ever excavated in China, at the new museum building on Monday.

PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY See story, page 3



Ministry: US report ignores China's role in intl trade

By ZHONG NAN zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

China strongly opposes the United States' misrepresentation of its lawful trade activities as "economic coercion", and emphasizes that the country stands firmly against US unilateralism and bullying behavior, the Ministry of Commerce said on Monday.

Last week, the Office of the US Trade Representative released a report on China's World Trade Organization compliance, claiming that "China remains the biggest challenge to the international trading system established by the WTO". The report also disregarded China's efforts in fulfilling the commitments that the country made during its accession to the intergovernmental organization.

The head of the ministry's department of WTO affairs said that China has noted the unfounded accusations in the report, according to a ministry statement. The US has disregarded China's significant achievements in fulfilling its WTO commitments, the official said.

The US has not only distorted China's accomplishments in building a market economy and advancing reform and opening-up, but also failed to acknowledge the country's contributions to the multilateral trading system and global economic growth since its accession to the WTO in December 2001, the official said.

The US has been making baseless and arbitrary accusations about China's trade and economic policies, showcasing its unilateralism and bullying behavior, the official added.

Tu Xinquan, head of the China Institute for WTO Studies at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said that China's accession to the WTO has allowed it to leverage its strengths as well as engage in and contribute to the global value chain. This has generated products and employment opportunities worldwide while offering high-quality goods and services at reasonable prices, Tu said.

Since joining the WTO, China, as its largest developing member state, has consistently supported the multilateral trading system, practiced true multilateralism and fulfilled its WTO commitments, according to the Commerce Ministry statement. Furthermore, it said, China has continuously improved

its market economy institutions and legal framework based on its national conditions, expanded high-level institutional opening-up, and deeply participated in the reform of the WTO.

China has also actively helped other developing members, especially least-developed nations, to integrate with the multilateral trading system, according to the statement.

Meanwhile, Yu Zhen, director of Wuhan University's Institute for the US and Canadian Economies in Hubei province, said that despite key differences between China and the US on WTO reform, there is still space for cooperation. Both countries should explore avenues to maximize their shared interests at various levels and in a range of fields, and collaborate to address the issues within the WTO's trade dispute settlement system, Yu said.

The deadlock in the WTO's dispute settlement system continues. The US proposes that the process should default to adjudication by panels, while China and the European Union advocate a two-stage arbitration procedure using the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement.

Yin Zheng, executive vice-presi-

dent of China and East Asia operations for Schneider Electric, a French industrial conglomerate, said that global companies have benefited tangibly from China's membership in the WTO, and his company will continue to invest in innovation activities in the country.

Ni Yueju, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics, said that 20 years ago, multinational companies primarily sought to manufacture in China, while the country is now viewed as a critical end market, requiring companies to make significant changes in their strategies.

Minister of Commerce Wang Wentao met on Monday with US Trade Representative Katherine Tai on the sidelines of the 13th Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Abu Dhabi, the United Arab Emirates.

Both sides engaged in in-depth discussions on achieving practical outcomes during the conference, which runs from Monday to Thursday, as well as various economic and trade issues of mutual concern.

Wang also expressed China's serious concerns over US tariffs on Chinese goods and trade-related issues concerning Taiwan.

XI'S VISION | HIGH-QUALITY DEVELOPMENT

Xi's theory offers path to innovation

Legislators, political advisers weigh in on developing new productive forces

By XU WEI in Beijing and SHI RUIPENG in Nanning

What are 'new productive forces'?

- Advanced productivity freed from traditional economic growth models
- Featuring high technology, high efficiency and high quality, and aligned with the country's new development philosophy
- Emerging from continuous breakthroughs in science and technology
- Driving strategic future and emerging industries that may introduce disruptive technological advancements in an era of intelligent information

As the curtain is raised for China's most important annual political gathering next week, a key focus of deliberations among legislators and political advisers is how the nation can employ new productive forces to reinvigorate the world's second-largest economy.

The nation's top leadership has outlined plans to use new productive forces to underpin high-quality development, as policymakers seek to lift market expectations and strengthen the nation's self-reliance in science and technology amid external uncertainties.

President Xi Jinping, who first proposed the term in September, expounded on the theory of new productive forces on Jan 31 while presiding over a group study session of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, the Party's core leadership.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, underlined the key role of new productive forces in underpinning China's high-quality development, stressing that sci-tech innovation is the core element for developing new productive forces.

The theory has struck a chord with the nation's legislators and political advisers as they are set to convene in Beijing next week for the upcoming two sessions, which are the annual gatherings of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's

top political advisory body.

Pan Jiaofeng, president of the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Institutes of Science and Development and an NPC deputy, said the development of new productive forces will present key opportunities to transform traditional sectors and spur the growth of emerging industries.

Xi's latest theory will serve as a short-term and long-term guideline for China to beef up innovation in science and technology and various sectors, he said.

Pan said the nation must look to better energize its businesses in their innovation drive, as "only businesses can serve as the link between innovation and industrial chains". He added that China must strengthen the efficiency of its investment in innovation to boost its sci-tech self-reliance.

See Growth, page 3

Doctor walkouts



South Korean doctors stage a rally near the presidential office in Seoul on Sunday. About 9,000 medical interns and residents have stayed off their jobs since early last week to protest a government plan to increase medical school admissions by about 65 percent. AHN YOUNG-JOON / AP See story, page 6

Nation takes diverse global governance approach

President Xi Jinping's visionary idea of a community with a shared future for mankind, first raised in 2013, has generated substantial benefits for the entire world.

Nowadays, China continues its unwavering pursuit through the implementation of the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, in addition to the Belt and Road Initiative, all of which were proposed by President Xi and align with the global vision

WORLD WATCH

By Saud Faisal Malik

of the Communist Party of China.

Rooted in China's modernization history and cultural legacy, the concept of a community with a shared future embraces the values of lasting peace, common security, common prosperity and building an open and inclusive, clean and beautiful world.

It also underscores the dual commitment of advancing China's development while contributing significantly to the well-being of humanity with harmony among humans and with nature.

The Global Development Initiative places a high priority on inclusive partnerships, people-centered development and tangible initiatives to accomplish the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

See Initiatives, page 3

QINGTIAN PEOPLE RETURN WITH WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE

Zhejiang county sees natives come back from overseas to benefit, build nation

By YANG RAN in Qingtian county, Zhejiang yangran1@chinadaily.com.cn



Nestled in the southeastern part of Zhejiang province, the small mountainous county of Qingtian is a place of quiet beauty and unexpected global influence.

With a modest population of 568,800, Qingtian sits at the end of transportation lines, far from national borders and devoid of sea-ports. Yet, against the odds this

secluded county has astonishingly produced over 381,000 overseas Chinese scattered across 146 countries and regions.

In Qingtian, almost every family has a relative working abroad. These overseas Chinese have been building bridges between their hometown and their host countries, turning Qingtian into a melting pot

of cultures, a fusion of Chinese tradition and international flair.

Strolling through the streets of Qingtian, visitors can see over 400 coffee shops, many Western-style restaurants and European-inspired architecture, which have earned the county the nickname "China's Little Europe" on Chinese social media.

So how did Qingtian, a mountainous county, become a hub for the overseas Chinese community?

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PAGE TWO

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According to Yan Xiaohai, an officer from Qingtian Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, the answer lies in a confluence of factors. The lack of arable land and frequent natural disasters such as floods pushed its people to seek livelihoods beyond their homeland.

The county's unique resource, Qingtian soapstone, which is used for carvings, gave the locals a specialty to trade with. The rise of international exhibitions at the end of the 19th century also provided Qingtian craftsmen with a global stage to showcase their skills.

"The earliest recorded export of a Qingtian stone carving dates back to 1880. According to the Customs Trade Report of Wenzhou, Qingtian's soapstone exports weighed 4.8 (metric) tons in 1880. By 1913, annual exports peaked at an impressive 400 tons, which is a huge amount for a small county like Qingtian," said Yan.

"Since these soapstone carvings were usually sold directly by Qingtian merchants, the volume of soapstone exports mirrored the trend of migration," he added.

The export of Qingtian's soapstone carvings contributed greatly to the formation of its overseas Chinese community.

"While surrounding mountainous areas faced similar poverty, only Qingtian managed to spawn a vast number of overseas Chinese, primarily due to its booming soapstone carving exports. Around 1926, Qingtian experienced its first major wave of migration, with many locals venturing to Europe. Travelogues of that time often depicted these migrants as humble street vendors who, despite hardships, managed to earn their fortunes," Yan said.

A second wave of migration happened in the 1990s when many more Qingtianese ventured abroad to try their luck.

"Qingtian's overseas Chinese have always been characterized by a strong merchant spirit. They always attempted to engage in trade and sales from the very beginning, with the soapstone carving trade being the initial reason for their going abroad. They also adapted to local consumers' habits and sold other products accordingly," Yan said.

He said their way of doing business necessitated strong connections with their homeland, ensuring a continuous bond between Qingtian and its diaspora. "It is rare for Qingtian's overseas Chinese to sever ties with their birthplace entirely. Even those who faced obstacles like passport issues often expressed a strong desire to return and visit their roots at the earliest opportunity," he added.

Interaction evolves

As China has gone through rapid development since the launch of its reform and opening-up policy, interaction between overseas Chinese and their home has also evolved.

Zhou Yong, 51, went abroad in 1992 and stayed overseas for over two decades. Zhou recalled that in the 1990s Qingtianese who managed to settle down overseas began remitting money back home, trying to improve the living standards of their families.

This influx of foreign currency led to Qingtian being known as the top county for foreign exchange earnings. Locals often greeted each other with discussions about the fluctuation in exchange rates.

Official statistics show that Qingtian still takes in an average of more



Left: A barista makes coffee on Nov 30 at Feelfill Cafe in Qingtian county, Zhejiang province. XU YU / XINHUA Right: Consumers shop on March 10, 2022, at Qingtian Imported Commodity City. FAN YUBIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



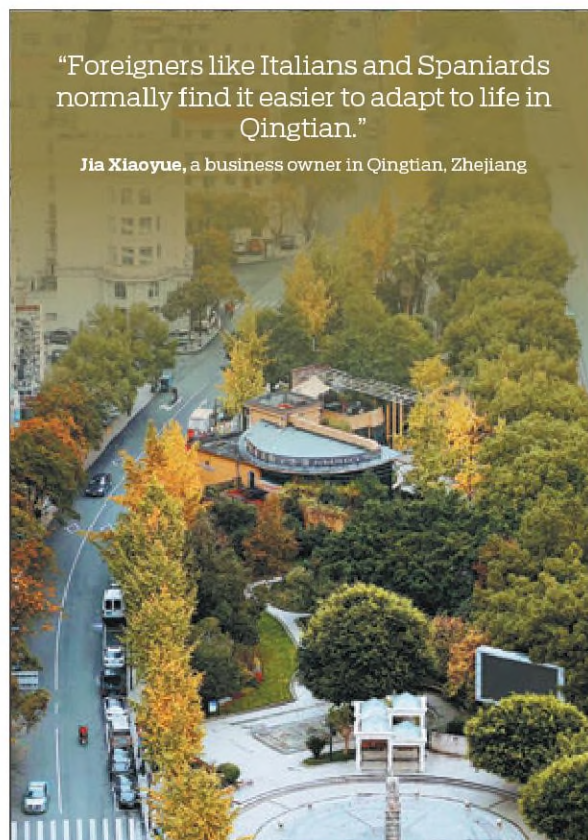
Qingtian: Advantages of overseas work leveraged



Chef Luigi Dellarena displays handmade green pasta in September. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Foreigners like Italians and Spaniards normally find it easier to adapt to life in Qingtian."

Jia Xiaoyue, a business owner in Qingtian, Zhejiang



A view of Qingtian's Linjiang Road, which features European-style architecture. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

than \$1 billion in annual remittances, with a yearly foreign exchange settlement of about \$1.7 billion, not including the additional foreign currency brought in by returning residents.

However, at the end of the 1990s, a new trend began to emerge among the Qingtian overseas Chinese community.

Many started to look homeward with entrepreneurial ambitions. There was a notable increase in the number of overseas Chinese returning to start businesses, investing in real estate and hydropower stations, Zhou said.

"By 2015, the wave of returnees had picked up speed, with some venturing into manufacturing. These overseas Chinese were optimistic about China's economic prospects and wanted to seize the business opportunities early," he said.

The choices for returning overseas Chinese are increasingly diverse, ranging from international trade to developing local industries and even promoting Chinese products overseas.

A 2022 survey by the Qingtian local government showed that the percentage of overseas Chinese willing to return to China for investment and employment had risen from 17.6 percent in 2020 to 27 percent in 2021.

"The overseas Chinese from Qingtian, generally believe that the reason for going abroad is to come back better off. If there's an opportunity to start a business back home with a stable income, we are more than willing to do so," said Zhou, who returned in 2015 to participate in the

construction of Qingtian Imported Commodity City, an imported goods trading center.

"Around 2010, the export business in Yiwu (Zhejiang) was booming, and many Qingtian overseas Chinese were engaged in selling Yiwu's products overseas. We wondered if we could also have overseas Chinese bring foreign goods back to sell," Zhou recounted.

Import trade

In 2014, Zhou and his partners organized a street fair to sell products brought back by overseas Chinese, which received an overwhelmingly positive response from locals and visitors. This success convinced them of

the viability of the imported commodities business.

Zhou believes that overseas Chinese have a competitive advantage in industries that need to draw on both overseas and domestic resources.

"They have lived abroad for long periods and understand foreign cultures, which helps them to introduce foreign products to Chinese customers. They have a closer connection with foreign suppliers, which helps them secure firsthand sources of goods," he said.

Thanks to over 100,000 Qingtian natives living in Spain, the county has become an important import hub for Spanish ham, or jamon.

"In 2018 when China allowed the



An elderly lady in Qingtian wears a smartwatch for health monitoring. XU YU / XINHUA

import of jamon in its domestic market, I imported the first leg of jamon to China," Ruan Aigao, a Qingtianese living in Spain, said in an interview with Qingtian Media Group.

Sun Chengyan, director of the development center for the overseas Chinese economic and cultural cooperation experimental zone, said: "The jamon import market in Qingtian represents more than 80 percent of the entire national market share in China, with almost all of the country's imported jamon flowing through Qingtian."

In 2023, jamon ranked as the second biggest import product in Qingtian after red wine, with sales reaching approximately 200 million yuan (\$28 million), data from Qingtian Imported Commodity City showed.

The commodity center, which was founded in 2015, hosts 277 enterprises, offering over 100,000 types of imported goods from more than 70 countries and regions.

Cumulative sales exceed 17 billion yuan, earning it the nickname the "World Supermarket".

Attracting talents

Jia Xiaoyue, 45, established her business in the commodity center after venturing to Italy when she was 16 and returning to China in 2015 following local government calls for overseas Chinese to come home.

"The government probably felt that Qingtian's economic development needed some young blood, people who can sometimes think outside the box and bring creativity.

"When I started my business here, I introduced Italian jewelry brands that were not available in China," she explained.

Jia now runs an Italian restaurant and an import company and hopes to introduce imported products through the restaurant. She recruited Luigi Dellarena, an experienced Italian chef, to head the kitchen.

"At first, Luigi did not want to come, as he thought working in China wouldn't be as easy as in Italy. But I told him that in Italy people with skills such as his are common, but in China he could play a more valuable role. Gradually, I persuaded him and we managed to get him a residence permit here," she said.

Jia believes Qingtian has advantages in attracting foreign merchants and talents. "First, with over 300,000 Qingtian overseas Chinese living abroad, foreign merchants don't have to worry about being deceived by us. Second, foreigners like Italians and Spaniards normally find it easier to adapt to life in Qingtian," she said.

Jia said although Qingtian's market is small, it is an ideal first stop for expanding into the Chinese market. "Recently a close friend of mine, Maria, an Italian jewelry designer decided to start a business here."

In addition to engaging in the import-export trade, many overseas Chinese are choosing to bring new business models back home to contribute to the development of their hometowns.

Among them is Yang Xiaohai, 56, who returned to China in 2019 after being involved in restaurants and international trade in Germany and Ecuador.

Yang invested 20 million yuan to establish an agritourism base themed on the indigenous rice-fish system in Fangshan township, Qingtian. The method was listed as a Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in 2005. The base includes an agritourism hotel, experimental farmlands, and an agricultural park, to revitalize the region's unique agricultural heritage.

Yang's agritourism base has been thriving, especially after the World Conference on Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems held in Qingtian in 2022.

"We now have a steady stream of visitors interested in agritourism and educational travel. Last July, I hosted over 1,000 visitors from more than 40 countries," she said.

Yang also harbors ambitions for her business achievements in China to inspire the next generation of overseas Chinese to return. "We need to attract more tourists and build a robust tourism industry. If the business prospers, it could prompt a wave of overseas Chinese to return in the future," she said.

Apart from facilitating the entry of foreign products into China and developing industries, Qingtian's overseas community is helping Chinese products reach global markets.

"Some Chinese companies, despite now having strong professional capabilities, lack channels to expand globally. Qingtian's extensive overseas Chinese network can help bridge this gap," said Sun from the development center. "Bajiu enterprises from Guizhou, for instance, are eager to partner with us to market their spirits internationally. Additionally, by using the over 20,000 Qingtian overseas Chinese-operated restaurants abroad, we are actively promoting the export of agricultural products."

By YANG RAN
in Qingtian county, Zhejiang

Village a remarkable tale of lows and highs of diaspora

Longxian village lies in the rolling hills of Fangshan township, Qingtian county, in Zhejiang province. It has many descriptions, including the "village of agricultural heritage", the "United Nations' village", and the "village of exhibitions".

It earned the name the "village of agricultural heritage" in 2005 when the UN Food and Agriculture Organization recognized Longxian's ancient rice-fish culture system as the first Globally Important Agricultural Heritage System in China.

Yet, Longxian's global footprint extends far beyond agriculture. "Over a century ago, many of the overseas Chinese from Qingtian hailed from here," said Xu Xiaowei, a 34-year-old village official who has worked in Longxian for three years.

One of Qingtian's earliest overseas Chinese, Wu Qiankui, is from Longxian. According to Xu, Wu ventured to Belgium in 1905 to participate in an exposition there and won awards that helped open international markets for Qingtian's soapstone carving crafts. After his success in Europe, Wu went to the United States, where he

dominated the soapstone carving trade in the 1920s.

"After Wu Qiankui made his fortune, he shipped materials from the US to build the famed 'American building' in the village," Xu said.

"Completed in 1930, the three-story main building is known as the first mansion of Qingtian, with a total area of 1,370 square meters. The gatehouse is even adorned with globes Wu

brought back from Mauritius," Xu added.

The tradition of seeking fortunes overseas, which began a century ago, continues to this day.

"The village has over 1,200 registered residents, but it has more than 1,500 overseas Chinese spread across 35 countries and regions. The reason

why the number of its overseas Chinese exceeds that of its residents is because some of the second and third generations have not yet registered back home," said Xu.

The name "UN village" has its roots in this extensive diaspora. "Many overseas Chinese return to the village for Spring Festival. In some house-

holds, family members from over a dozen different countries gather for New Year's Eve dinner, sitting around a round table much like a UN conference," Xu said.

With a majority of villagers working abroad, Longxian gradually emptied with just over 100 residents, mostly elderly people, which led to its decline.

Wu Liqun, 60, witnessed this first-



The gate of the Wu Qiankui mansion built in 1930 in Qingtian, is adorned with three globes Wu brought back from Mauritius. YANG RAN / CHINA DAILY

hand when he returned in 2017. "When I came back, the environment was terrible, with chickens and ducks roaming freely and their droppings everywhere, making it hard to walk," Wu recalled.

"After returning, I started picking up trash daily, earning the nickname 'garbage village chief'. From being the worst in terms of cleanliness in Qingtian county, Longxian has ranked first for three consecutive years," he said proudly.

When he first got back, he discovered that the village's rice-fish system was underutilized, with locals struggling to sell their products. "We organized the villagers to package their rice and fish together and tried to boost the market, and now demand outstrips supply annually," Wu said.

His advocacy for building museums is one of his strategies to develop tourism. "The first thing I did upon returning was to create a currency museum, collecting money from over 110 countries brought back by villagers." With 14 exhibition halls telling Longxian's story — from its agricultural roots to its global connections — it can be called the village of exhibitions, Wu said, adding this is an impressive achievement for a village.

TOP NEWS

Spotlight turns on diplomatic moves of China

Meetings expected to unveil policies to boost nation's role as anchor for growth, stability

By CAO DESHENG

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With the two sessions scheduled to start next week, the international spotlight is once again expected to be on China's diplomatic maneuvers as the nation gets ready to unfold its policy measures at the biggest annual event on its political calendar.

Acting as a window for the world to observe China's politics, the sessions of the National People's Congress, the nation's top legislature, and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the nation's top political advisory body, are held in March each year. Thousands of lawmakers and political advisers from across the country participate in the two sessions to chart China's future course of action for its all-around development.

Amid mounting global instability and uncertainty, the expectations are high from China, as the second-largest economy and a significant international player, to play its role as an anchor of stability and growth to promote global peace, security and cooperation.

Responding to an online survey conducted by China Daily website about readers' interest in China's diplomacy, some people said the nation's foreign policy has been exemplary in promoting peace and prosperity in the world.

Others wondered what "challenges and opportunities" China will face amid significant uncertainties in 2024, which will also be a "super election year". Countries, including the United States and Russia, will hold their general election this year, which will also see the election of the European Parliament, one of the legislative bodies of the European Union.

Addressing the Munich Security Conference on Feb 17, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China will continue to serve as a strong force for stability in a turbulent world, where the global economy is weighed down by protectionism and the abuse of the security concept, the international system is impaired by unilateralism and bloc politics, and regional conflicts such as the Ukraine and



TWO SESSIONS

Gaza crises continue unabated.

Gunter Schoech, founder and managing director of the market research and consulting company DeBrouillage in Germany, said that in a world where Western countries try to decouple from China, or even stall its development and globalization at large, it is China which is pushing for more multilateralism and global order.

China provides the largest peace-keeping contingent and makes the second-largest United Nations budget contribution, Schoech said.

It is committed to delivering on COP28 promises on addressing climate change, driving global artificial intelligence governance and serving as a growth engine for the world. It has called for cease-fire, negotiation and peaceful settlement of the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza, and it brokered the Saudi-Iranian peace deal last year, he said.

"Taking on such additional global stabilization responsibilities goes hand in hand with China's growing weight in the global community, (which is) based on its economic rise," Schoech added.

Observers said that China's policy on dealing with major countries, especially the US, as well as its specific measures to promote opening-up to be unveiled during the two sessions will also be among the highlights that will attract international attention.

He Zhigao, an associate professor at the Institute of European Studies and a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' National Institute for Global Strategy, said that China, which helps facilitate the stability and continuity of the international order, is a responsible major country to work with.

Countries should strengthen the win-win nature of cooperation, reject the lose-lose dynamics of rivalry, and jointly promote an equal and orderly multipolar world as well as universally beneficial and inclusive economic globalization, He said.



Dressed to impress

A man takes a photo with women dressed in hanfu in front of the Houses of Parliament in London, the United Kingdom, on Sunday. Enthusiasts dressed in the traditional Han attire visited the Thames riverside and the British Museum to promote Chinese culture and introduce locals and tourists to Spring Festival customs.

LI YING / XINHUA

New museum displays best of Shang Dynasty

By WANG KAIHAO

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A new museum opened its doors to the public on Monday in Anyang, Henan province, presenting the brilliance of the 3,000-year-old Shang civilization. The new building of the Yinxu Museum is China's first comprehensive archaeology museum that has on display the best of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th to 11th century BC).

Nearly 4,000 unearthed cultural relics, including bronze wares, pieces of pottery, jade artifacts and oracle bones are on display in the museum. More than three

quarters of these have never been publicly exhibited before.

The Yinxu Ruins, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2006, hosted a later period Shang capital city. First excavated in 1928, Yinxu is also the longest studied ancient capital city ruins in China, and is thus honored as one of the cradles of modern Chinese archaeology.

The site also yielded rich findings of 3,300-year-old oracle bones — the inscribed animal bones and tortoise shells used for fortune telling and recording events — revealing the oldest-known established writing sys-

tem of Chinese characters.

When visiting the Yinxu Ruins in October 2022, President Xi Jinping pointed out that the Chinese characters are extraordinary and serve as a vital link in the development of the Chinese nation. He then urged attaching more importance to and putting more efforts into archaeological research to carry forward the project of tracing the origins of the Chinese civilization.

According to Yan Yalin, director of the archaeology department at the National Cultural Heritage Administration, many key archaeological breakthroughs were made in recent years at the Yinxu site and

its surrounding areas.

For example, an urban road system and the remains of an artificial lake in the royal ancestral temple area were found. The oldest confirmed mausoleum of Shang kings was also found.

"Discoveries of many satellite settlements and large-size handicraft workshops around this metropolis further portrayed a grand picture of a capital city," Yan said.

"Through the exhibits, the public can comprehensively understand the achievements made by the Shang Dynasty in terms of politics, economy, agriculture, military affairs, among others," Yan added.

Growth: Greater emphasis on talent urged

From page 1

Official statistics showed that the nation spent 3.08 trillion yuan (\$428 billion), or 2.54 percent of its GDP, on research and development in 2022, up 10.1 percent year-on-year.

Pan said while there is limited room for China to further bolster its R&D intensity — the ratio of R&D to GDP — there is still much room to ensure the funding can be used more effectively, to bolster its self-reliance.

Xu Ling, vice-president of Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University and a member of the CPPCC National Committee, said the nation must reinforce its new labor forces to cater to the need for the development of new productive forces.

She said that increasing the skills of China's workforce to ensure that

it has greater expertise in digital technologies is a must as new business models keep emerging.

Xu said she will make a proposal to the CPPCC National Committee this year that the nation should launch special initiatives to improve the digital expertise of teachers, both in vocational education institutions and colleges.

She also highlighted the need for policymakers to roll out more incentives so that more high-quality college graduates can choose manufacturing businesses as their employers.

China's sci-tech innovation and the building up of the competitiveness of its manufacturing sector have long been emphasized by Xi as he joined national legislators and political advisers in their annual deliberations.

Xi told his fellow NPC deputies from Jiangsu province last year that sci-tech self-reliance is the key for China to build itself into a modern socialist country in all respects.

He highlighted the need to focus on the real economy in pursuing growth, saying that China must step up the reengineering of its industrial foundations and research projects on major technologies and equipment.

Jiang Weidong, an NPC deputy and founder of Wuzheng Group, said the president's emphasis on the development of new productive forces and high-quality development has bolstered the confidence of private businesses.

The company, a manufacturer of motor tricycles and other agricultural vehicles in Shandong province, will further scale up

investment in high-end equipment to offer digital and smart solutions.

Jiang said businesses must assume their due responsibilities and scale up their innovation drive to contribute to the nation's self-reliance efforts.

Zhou Yingfeng, an NPC deputy and an engineer with Guangxi Liugong Machinery Co, a machinery manufacturer headquartered in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, said the strategy laid out by Xi to upgrade China's manufacturing sector resonated strongly with him.

"The president has rightly pointed out that talent is the key factor for the upgrading of the manufacturing sector. We need greater emphasis from relevant authorities to train professionals in the manufacturing sector, both in schools and enterprises," he said.

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A safety inspector sits behind the steering wheel of a robotaxi as the autonomous passenger vehicle service is launched on Friday between Beijing Daxing International Airport and Yizhuang in Beijing's Daxing district. LI MUZYI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Robotaxis get green light for Daxing airport service

By FAN FEIFEI

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Beijing has granted permits to several robotaxi operators, including Baidu Inc and Ponyai, allowing them to offer driverless vehicle services at Beijing Daxing International Airport, a key step indicating that the city has become the world's first capital to run autonomous passenger vehicles between urban areas and the airport.

Industry experts said the move marks a milestone in China's efforts

to develop an intelligent transportation system, and will further bolster the commercial application of self-driving technology.

The approval, granted by the head office of Beijing High-Level Automated Driving Demonstration Area, allows these companies to provide self-driving vehicle services on 40-kilometer expressways connecting the international airport with Yizhuang in Beijing's Daxing district, as well as in some designated areas within the airport.

The permits come with the pre-

condition that a safety inspector will sit behind the steering wheel and take manual control in case of an emergency.

The Beijing municipal government has unveiled plans to expand the scope of demonstration zones for high-level autonomous driving this year and promote the orderly launch of self-driving services in key areas such as airports, railway stations and urban roads.

"The approval is of great significance in further accelerating the commercialization of autonomous

driving technology across the nation," said Zhang Xiang, a researcher at the Jiangxi New Energy Technology Institute, adding that other first-tier cities are likely to follow Beijing and allow the commercial operation of driverless vehicles at their airports in the future.

A report released by global consultancy IHS Markit said the market size of China's self-driving taxi services is expected to surpass 1.3 trillion yuan (\$180.6 billion) by 2030, accounting for 60 percent of the ride-hailing market nationwide.

Initiatives: Symbiotic relationship distinctive feature of nation's approach

From page 1

China strongly addresses global issues like food security and poverty reduction with cooperation from more than 100 nations.

The Global Security Initiative opposes zero-sum approaches and emphasizes common security via dialogue. China is fully committed to supporting UN peacekeeping efforts, resolving disputes and tackling nontraditional security issues.

The Global Civilization Initiative combines achievements from many diverse civilizations, reflects China's commitment to shaping a world characterized by peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom, and advocates the evolution of civilizations and people-to-people exchanges and intercultural cooperation.

What sets China's approach apart is the symbiotic relationship of the

initiatives, especially between the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative.

The acknowledgment of the inherent connection between international security and cultural narratives is underscored by the integrated character of these endeavors. China recognizes, in essence, that in order to promote a more secure and stable world, it is necessary to address traditional security concerns through the Global Security Initiative as well as to recognize — as stressed by the Global Civilization Initiative — the critical role that cooperation and cultural understanding play in attaining permanent global harmony.

This integrated approach represents an in-depth understanding of the intricate processes shaping global governance, whereby traditional security measures coexist with cultural diversity and mutual

respect. Together, the efforts offer a complete framework that goes beyond simple policy issues and demonstrates China's commitment.

The Global Security Initiative prioritizes respecting national sovereignty, opposing unilateralism, encouraging dialogue over confrontation, and ensuring shared, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. It promotes stability on a global scale by addressing both conventional and nontraditional security domains. Through talks, contributions to peacekeeping and mediation of regional disputes, China's role in preserving international peace is underlined.

The Global Civilization Initiative, on the other hand, advocates respecting the continuity and evolution of cultures as well as common human values and varied civilizations. To create an interna-

tional network for intercultural dialogue, closer international people-to-people exchanges and cooperation are encouraged. China's worldwide partnerships and cultural diplomacy initiatives all demonstrate its dedication to mutual advancement.

The world community applauds these measures for demonstrating China's powerful global vision, offering complete solutions, and aligning with global goals. The Global Development Initiative is in line with the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda, cooperative security is bolstered by the Global Security Initiative, and cultural variety and discourse are encouraged by the Global Civilization Initiative. Together, these initiatives represent China's will to create a global community that values equitable development, all-encompassing security and the enrichment of

cultural and ethical values.

As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the importance of cultural understanding cannot be overstated. China's deliberate efforts to project a positive and multifaceted cultural image contribute to a more comprehensive global discourse, challenging stereotypes and fostering an environment of mutual respect.

The strategic choices reflected by the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative have far-reaching implications for China's evolving stance on the global stage. As China actively contributes to international security efforts, it positions itself as a responsible and reliable partner in addressing global challenges. Currently, by showcasing its civilizational richness, China asserts its unique identity, fostering a narrative of a nation deeply rooted in tra-

ditional well-being for all mankind and actively contributing to the shared future of humanity.

These two initiatives also offer a blueprint for a nation seeking rejuvenation in the ever-changing landscape of global security and cultural dynamics. Beyond geopolitical considerations, China navigates a path that promotes global cooperation and cultural confidence, while rejecting exclusive security paradigms.

China takes a diverse approach to global governance, shaped by diplomatic traditions and an unwavering commitment to peace, prosperity and mutually beneficial cooperation. As it embraces its rich cultural legacy on the global scene, it has transformed into a cultural leader as well as an economic giant, advancing a world community characterized by enduring peace, security and prosperity for all.

The author is editor-in-chief of the Observer Diplomat magazine in Pakistan. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Editor's Note: For many people, making a career in something they are passionate about is a luxury, as hobbies and jobs rarely match. This page focuses on two people who've managed to turn their interests into their daily jobs, sharing their insight on how enthusiasm can motivate people in chasing their dreams.

By YAN DONGJIE

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Not many are able to turn their passion into their profession, but Zhou Lei from the Beijing Raptor Rescue Center is one of those lucky few.

Now the center's senior raptor rehabilitator, Zhou started as a volunteer at the center in 2009 after she graduated from university, and hasn't looked back since, the 42-year-old said.

Zhou's special love of animals stems from her caring nature and desire to nurture those around her. This attitude has been key in her role in promoting awareness of raptor protection among the public for the past 15 years.

"I practice two noble professions here: I'm a doctor and a teacher," Zhou said.

In the over two decades since the Beijing Raptor Rescue Center was established, a great deal of progress has been made in raising public awareness of the plight of the top predators of the food chain.

Raptors play an integral role in maintaining ecological balance and in controlling agricultural pests such as rodents and insects.

Despite being at the top of the food chain, birds of prey often fall victim to environmental degradation and the illegal wildlife trade.

In Beijing, there are as many as 50 species of raptor such as the common kestrel and the upland buzzard, all of which are under national protection.

With China's capital being a key point on a major migratory route for raptors, in December 2001, Beijing Normal University and the International Fund for Animal Welfare established the Beijing Raptor Rescue Center, the first specialized raptor rescue institution in the country.

Over the past 23 years, the center has received and treated over 5,900 raptors and organized more than 600 wildlife conservation and environmental education activities.

Public awareness of the protection of the birds has come a long way, and more concerned people are contacting the center when they come across a raptor in distress, according to Zhou.

She recalled one evening in 2018 when a delivery driver called to report seeing a large bird by the roadside, unable to stand and with blood in its mouth. It turned out to be a rare golden eagle, one of the largest raptors in the world and a species under first-class protection in China.

Considering the possibility that it may have been poisoned, Zhou and another rehabilitator worked overnight to treat the eagle.

Fortunately, it wasn't poisoned. However, it had been unable to recover from an earlier injury making it difficult to forage for food, so



Rehabilitators Zhou Lei (left) and Dai Chang at the Beijing Raptor Rescue Center release a recovered common kestrel back into the wild in Beijing last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Raptor rescuer keeps birds of prey under her wing

Nation's first rehabilitation center raises awareness of protecting avian predators at the top of the food chain

the bird had become extremely weak. When the rehabilitators first encountered the eagle, its chest muscles had almost wasted away completely and it weighed only about half of what it should.

After a little under a year of recovery and rehabilitation at the center, the bird was able to regain its weight and muscle mass, and by the spring of 2019 it had met all the criteria for release back into the wild, marking Zhou's first involvement in the release of a golden eagle.

"I felt so proud to be able to release such a majestic bird back into the sky," said Zhou, adding that flying in a cage and flying in nature are two separate things with the latter allowing birds to really spread their wings.

During the rehabilitation process, unnecessary contact with the raptors is minimized to ensure they maintain a positive perception of humans.

"Minimizing contact can protect the natural behavior of these ani-



Zhou Lei conducts a physical examination on an upland buzzard at the Beijing Raptor Rescue Center last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

mals to the greatest extent," she said.

In recent years, with continuous encouragement from the government, the public awareness of wildlife protection has significantly increased. People have become more active in reporting when they see a sick bird, contacting local police stations, neighborhood committees, rescue organizations and even volunteering in rescue work. With the guidance of the center's staff, they attempt to help the birds take back to the skies. These changes have brought Zhou a great deal of satisfaction and hope.

"The public is the first step in the chain because they are who usually first discover animals in need of rescue. Whether they can handle the situation correctly has a significant impact on subsequent rescue efforts," Zhou said.

This summer, the center received a call about an injured Chinese sparrowhawk from Miyun district on the

outskirts of Beijing. Due to heavy rain and the mountainous location, for safety reasons, the staff had to delay picking up the bird by a day.

"It seemed to have enjoyed its time with the villagers. They must have fed it well. After being brought back to the center, it passed its physical examination, and it was soon released," Zhou recalled.

Despite the harsh weather, the villagers took great care of the injured raptor, which deeply moved the center's staff.

In response to the national call to provide as much assistance as possible at the provincial and city levels, an increasing number of raptor rescue organizations have been set up across the country.

The raptor rescue center in Beijing often exchanges knowledge and experiences with these newly established organizations and has provided professional training for over 50 rescue organizations from all over the country in the past five years.

The center also maintains communication with the Carolina Raptor Center in North Carolina, in the United States, and other veterinary or rescue organizations from other countries. For some difficult cases, the center seeks advice from overseas experts through remote consultations.

"In recent years, veterinary medicine in China has developed rapidly, both in terms of equipment and technology. These practical technologies will certainly not remain at the same level; they will continue to advance," Zhou said.

One advancement has been the use of protective collars on injured birds that are taken in for treatment to allow them to recover without further harm.

"Sometimes you have to think boldly, and be creative to make breakthroughs. The collars, for example, we hadn't used on birds in the past, but they work perfectly on raptors. That's a success of trying," Zhou said.

The center once rescued a Eurasian eagle-owl with injuries to both wrist joints. Since the bird was not used to bandaging, the collar greatly assisted in speeding up its recovery.

"In a way, I am very grateful for these shopping apps because once you search for something, they continue to recommend related items, allowing you to find better options," Zhou said, adding that she spends considerable time on shopping apps looking for useful items for the birds.

It's all part and parcel for a raptor rehabilitator, she added, noting she'd replaced boards in cages to increase ventilation and added features that better replicate the natural environment for raptors.

"Zhou is like a godmother," said her colleague Zheng Zhishan. "She often thinks about how to make the birds here more comfortable."

Luo Jiaquan contributed to this story.

By YAN DONGJIE

This winter, skiing enthusiast Yu Momo has been involved in an average of two rescue operations near Koktokay Ski Resort in Altay, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, every week.

In March of last year, a severe avalanche occurred at Koktokay, trapping four tourists who had ventured outside the regulated skiing area. Yu and some experienced skiers joined the resort's rescue team, totaling 16 people, to provide assistance.

"The rescue took 24 hours because most of the mountain was covered in snow with no roads. We had to rely on skiing, which not only required strong technical skills but also demanded good physical fitness and endurance," Yu recalled.

As an avid skier who has skied in over 20 countries, Yu first visited Koktokay in 2022 and became particularly fond of the snow and the people there. Consequently, he decided to stay, combining his passion with his career.

Now, in addition to working as a ski instructor at the resort, the budding entrepreneur has opened an eight-room homestay named Fanzhong Mountain Off-road Photography Club specifically catering to skiing enthusiasts. As well as the homestay, Yu is broadening out into other tourism services such as car rental and tours.

He currently has a fleet of 92 rental cars that can be picked up and dropped off at various locations in northern Xinjiang.

The inspiration for this car rental

Enterprising skier brings convenience to the slopes



Yu Momo works at Koktokay Ski Resort, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

service model came from Yu's visit to Japan's Niseko Ski Resort, where visitors can simply fill in the rental period and flight number online in advance, present their ID and driver's license, and without a deposit, rent and return a car at various locations.

"We have staff to deliver and collect the cars, and any issues are handled online, ensuring that it doesn't disrupt the visitors' travel plans," Yu said.

This online-based rental and return model poses potential derivative issues such as vehicle scratches, and the time and effort required to address these problems have deterred many local rental compa-



Yu Momo (left) greets foreign skiers at Koktokay Ski Resort during the winter snow season last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

nies in the past. However, in order to provide a better skiing experience for visitors, Yu is willing to give it a try.

"I believe that this service model would be very beneficial if implemented domestically," he said.

The rental service utilizes remote vehicle inspection with customers uploading a three-to-five-minute video of their car's condition after use. Before this feature was implemented, Yu's company suffered losses in post-damage claims for vehicles.

"I want to provide comprehensive services in the ice and snow industry, including dining, accommodation, ski equipment

rental and car rental services, allowing skiing enthusiasts to travel light and enjoy skiing more conveniently in this skiing paradise," he said.

This winter, Yu launched a 15-day, 14,999 yuan (\$2,090) Xinjiang skiing package, which has been taken up by many tourists.

"Continuously taking on new challenges, growing and achieving a sense of accomplishment are important to me in life," he said.

The 32-year-old, originally from the Ningxia Hui autonomous region, has been passionate about extreme sports since childhood, having been involved in almost all extreme sports. In 2019, he tried

skiing for the first time in New Zealand and instantly fell in love with it.

"When I engage in these sports, I feel like I can truly be myself." For Yu, winter should be spent on the ski slopes, while summer should be spent on a motorcycle.

He enjoys motorcycle touring and has ridden in eight European countries and nearly all the countries in Asia.

"If I want to go somewhere, I go. I don't want to have regrets when I'm older. I approach things the same way now. I do things my way, and I have a high level of execution," Yu said.

In 2005, at the age of 14, Yu represented the Ningxia Motorcycle Association in a youth motorcycle open tournament, winning a prize of 3,500 yuan.

His continued outstanding performances in competitions not only brought him great fame in the industry but also provided him with economic independence, allowing him to pursue his hobbies and do what he wanted with more financial means and time.

"Motorcycling was originally just a hobby, and I didn't expect to make money from it. I began by winning prizes, and later received endorsements. Since I was 14, I haven't spent a penny from my family," Yu said.

In 2006, Yu was invited to the city of Ordos to participate in a national motorcycle race, where he secured second place in the national amateur youth category.

From nine in the morning to nine at night, most of Yu's day is spent at the ski resort. Here, he encounters skiing enthusiasts from all walks of life. His most memorable encounter was with a 72-year-old grandfather who still takes to the slopes.

"If I can be like him when I'm in my 70s, I'll be very satisfied. To be able to persist in doing what you love in your 70s is remarkable," he said.

Located at the golden latitude for world-class skiing, Koktokay has a snow season that lasts up to 240 days a year and currently boasts 27 ski courses. "The snow here is great, and it's very safe," Yu said.

Due to the complex terrain, the resort has put a lot of effort into ensuring effective rescue operations, investing heavily in improving the resort's protective and rescue facilities, such as safety nets and snowmobiles.

"The speed of the rescue makes me feel very secure skiing here. As long as you can give a rough location, they can find you," Yu added.

Recently, agreements between China and countries such as Georgia and Kazakhstan to mutually exempt visas have come into effect. As a result of this convenience and the resumption of flights, the willingness of domestic tourists to travel abroad has been increasing.

"I plan to start exploring in February. If feasible, I will begin preparing for the construction of a global skiing platform," Yu said. His global skiing platform includes three major ski resorts in Xinjiang, as well as those in Kazakhstan, Georgia, Serbia and other countries.

WORLD

WWII fishers' heroic rescue remembered

Descendants recount 82-year-old event in which 380 British POWs were saved

By XING YI in Gloucester, England
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Three descendants of Chinese fishermen who rescued British prisoners of war during the *Lisbon Maru* incident 82 years ago visited the United Kingdom and met children and relatives of some of the survivors at a commemorative event in Gloucester, England, on Saturday.

"My dad always told me that if it hadn't been for the Chinese fishermen, he too would have died," said Denise Wynne, daughter of Dennis Morley, the last of the survivors, who died in 2021 aged 101.

"He always spoke about the Chinese fishermen being true heroes ... I've met three (of their descendants) and I'm just so happy to be able to do that, and I know my father must be looking down on all this."

The *Lisbon Maru* was a cargo ship requisitioned by the Imperial Japanese Army to carry prisoners of war at the height of World War II. In October 1942, while carrying more than 1,800 British prisoners off the coast of Zhejiang province, the ship was torpedoed by a United States submarine, its crew unaware that prisoners were on board.

The Japanese guards tried to lock the prisoners in the holds, intending for them to go down with the ship, but some eventually broke out before the ship sank.

Having spotted the sinking ship, fishermen on nearby Dongji Island in Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, went out on small boats to rescue the drowning British soldiers. More than 800 prisoners died in the incident, but about 380 were saved.

Wu Buwei, grandson of the late fisherman Wu Qisheng, recounted the heroic rescue during Saturday's commemoration.

"My grandfather was one of the main organizers of the rescue efforts ... I was told of their story when I was a child," said Wu, 63.

"Men and women, the old and the young, everyone in the village was mobilized. They rowed their small fishing boats out to carry the British soldiers ashore, and then clothed and fed the soldiers with fish, sweet potatoes — all that they had at home.

"Regardless of the danger of being found out by Japanese soldiers, my father and some others also escorted three British soldiers to a safe place, and had a very precious photo with (them).

"I'm proud of the courage of my grandfather and people from Dongji. My descendants also like to hear me talk about this story — I'm very happy that this rescue has forged a special friendship between China and the UK."

Zheng Zeguang, China's ambassador to the UK, said that President Xi Jinping has noted the incident was an important testimony to China and the UK fighting shoulder to shoulder as allies against fascist aggression during World War II.

Xi has also encouraged the *Lisbon Maru* families to further work on the friendship between people

from the two countries, Zheng said. Brian Finch, convener of the *Lisbon Maru* families, said: "At the moment, everyone who knows about the story remembers it, relatives are very keen, but the vast number of people in the UK do not know about it. What we need to do is to make maximum publicity within the UK and internationally to get the story widely known."

Reciprocating goodwill

At Saturday's event, Wu Xiaofei, granddaughter of another now-deceased rescuer, Wu Qilin, gave Wynne a painting she had done of the fishermen from Dongji Island. British artist Paul Christien, who was moved by the story of the rescue, reciprocated by giving Wu a woodblock painting he had done based on the *Lisbon Maru* incident.

"It's important for us to get together culturally, and have contact with each other, even though the survivors have sadly died off through time, to keep that memory going," Christien said.

"I'm proud of the courage of my grandfather and people from Dongji. My descendants also like to hear me talk about this story — I'm very happy that this rescue has forged a special friendship between China and the UK."

Wu Buwei, grandson of the late fisherman Wu Qisheng

Liu Tao, mayor of Dongji town, said a museum dedicated to the *Lisbon Maru* rescue was built in 2009, and historical artifacts and oral history have been added to it in recent years.

Kathy Williams, mayor of Gloucester City Council, said she was moved by the story and by seeing the people who attended the event.

"If it hadn't been for the Chinese people's rescue, that room of people wouldn't have been here," she said. "It's a very moving thing, and a beautiful thing that happened today."

Williams said she plans to get in touch with the Royal British Legion and try to get the *Lisbon Maru* families to join the Remembrance Day parade on Nov 11 in London, where they could lay a wreath at the memorial, to let more people know the story.

Ambassador Zheng said: "We look forward to more events like this, so that this touching story of friendship can live on and be carried forward. The friendship between our two peoples can be further deepened."

Deadly crash



Rescuers work at the scene of a road crash in Arusha, northern Tanzania, on Saturday. At least 25 people were killed, including seven foreign volunteer teachers, when the driver of a truck lost control of the vehicle, which collided with three other vehicles. XINHUA

Independent stand urged for Europe amid conflicts

By CHEN YINGQUN
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With two geopolitical conflicts unfolding on its borders, both seeing no hope of a quick solution, the European Union faces increasing challenges and needs to strengthen its ability to act autonomously, analysts said.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has been ongoing for more than two years, with both sides entrenched on the battlefield and the prospect of peace still elusive.

Since the outbreak of the conflict, EU countries have followed the policy of the United States, providing military aid to Ukraine and imposing a series of economic sanctions on Russia. These sanctions have had a significant impact on Europe's economy, causing rising energy prices, high inflation and huge losses for businesses.

After the outbreak of the Palestine-Israel conflict in October, the Houthis group in Yemen has launched attacks against what it calls Israel-affiliated and bound ships in and around the Red Sea, an essential channel linking Europe and Asia, since November. As shipping through the Red Sea has been rerouted, delivery times for shipments between Asia and the EU have increased by 10-15 days, which has disrupted global maritime trade and supply chains and made the EU's economic recovery more difficult.

The protracted Russia-Ukraine conflict and the escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have had a serious impact on the security, economy, and society of Europe, making the road of seeking security and promoting the development of the EU mired in difficulties, said Ding Chun, director of the Centre for European Studies at Fudan University.

Ding said that European countries have essentially been involved in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. European nations generally see the conflict as a challenge to European security or even to the entire existing

international order.

They tend to regard supporting Ukraine against Russia as a politically correct act to uphold their security and justice. However, due to Europe's military reliance on the US and NATO, the EU's policy on the Russia-Ukraine conflict is tied to that of the US.

"Despite being well aware that the US has economically profited from the conflict without considering the interests of its European allies, while the European economy has suffered from the sanctions imposed on Russia,"

Ding Chun, director of the Centre for European Studies at Fudan University

Sven Biscop, director of the Europe in the World Programme at the Egmont-Royal Institute for International Relations in Brussels, said he never expected that sanctions would force Russia to end the conflict. But as long as the conflict continues, the EU will deliver military support to Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Zhang Lihua, a professor in the



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Ding Chun, director of the Centre for European Studies at Fudan University

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"Despite being well aware that the US has economically profited from the conflict without considering the interests of its European allies, while the European economy has suffered from the sanctions imposed on Russia, its military dependence on the US has weakened its strategic autonomy," he said.

Sven Biscop, director of the Europe in the World Programme at the Egmont-Royal Institute for International Relations in Brussels, said he never expected that sanctions would force Russia to end the conflict. But as long as the conflict continues, the EU will deliver military support to Ukraine for as long as it takes.

Zhang Lihua, a professor in the

Department of International Relations at Tsinghua University in Beijing, said that from the EU's position on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the influence from the US is obvious.

Negative effects

However, EU sanctions against Russia have not achieved the goal of weakening Russia; instead, they have brought significant negative effects to the European economy, she said. In the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the EU underestimated Russia's capacity to withstand Western sanctions, which is largely due to the one-sided perception of Russia and EU-Russia relations by the leaders of the EU and its major member states, said Zhang.

The EU regards Russia as the greatest threat to Europe, only seeing the negative aspects of EU-Russia relations, without recognizing the positive potential for cooperation, she said.

Zhang said they fail to realize that if NATO had not repeatedly expanded eastward, Russia might not have had such a reaction.

During Angela Merkel's tenure as chancellor of Germany, relations between Germany and Russia, as well as between the EU and Russia, were relatively relaxed. Russia's energy was imported into Europe in large quantities, and European products were exported to Russia, and trade exchanges were mutually beneficial, she said.

Comparatively, the EU's stance on the Palestine-Israel conflict is different from that of the US, demonstrating a degree of strategic autonomy and considering issues based on its own interests, Ding said.

Reducing dependence on the US and pursuing strategic autonomy has been a long-term goal for Europe, but as things stand, Europe is still influenced by the US on a range of international issues and is unable to make decisions based entirely on its own interests. Gaining strategic autonomy is what the EU should do, Ding said.

FM calls for consensus on advancing human rights

By XU WEI
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Foreign Minister Wang Yi called on Monday for stronger global consensus, solidarity and cooperation in advancing the cause of global human rights, while condemning the misuse of relevant issues as a pretext for interfering in other countries' internal affairs and hindering their development.

Addressing the 55th session of the Human Rights Council of United Nations via video link, Wang, who is also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, emphasized the shared responsibility of the international community in protecting and promoting human rights.

The senior diplomat highlighted the tragic human cost of recent crises, including the Palestine-Israel conflict that has resulted in nearly 30,000 civilian deaths and displaced almost 2 million people.

He stressed that ensuring fair, equal and effective protection of human rights for every ethnic group and individual is the common responsibility of the international community.

Wang advocated for openness, inclusiveness and respect for the diversity of world civilizations and the autonomy of countries to choose their human rights development paths without being imposed external values or models.

He called for win-win cooperation, encouraging dialogue to build consensus and exchange for mutual learning, while highlighting the importance of advancing human rights through better security, development and cooperation.

Emerging issues, such as the effects of artificial intelligence on human rights, must be properly addressed, he said.

Impartial and objective

He emphasized the need for UN human rights bodies to operate impartially and objectively, adhering to principles of nonselectivity and nonpoliticization, and giving equal importance to all types of human rights.

Reflecting on China's human rights achievements, Wang noted the country's historic elimination of absolute poverty, the development of the world's largest education, social security and healthcare systems, and the promotion of equal rights among all ethnic groups.

He highlighted China's active participation in global human rights governance and its efforts to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

No one can claim to be perfect in human rights protection, he said, because there is always room for improvement.

China is committed to sharing the fruits of modernization more broadly and fairly among all its people, continuously improving the level of human rights protection, he said.

The country always links its future with that of people around the world, actively promotes universal values shared by all humanity, and works with all parties to promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, he said.



Zheng Zeguang (center), China's ambassador to the United Kingdom, and participants at a commemorative event for the *Lisbon Maru* incident hold hands as people sing *Auld Lang Syne* in Gloucester, England, on Saturday. HE TINGDE / FOR CHINA DAILY

Legislators in Germany vote to legalize cannabis

By EARLE GALE in London
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Germany has joined the growing number of countries that have legalized cannabis.

Legislators in the European economic powerhouse of 84 million people decided on Friday, by a vote of 407 to 226, to allow the recreational use of the drug.

The new law will come into effect on April 1.

The change, which was championed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz's ruling three-party coalition, brings Germany in line with several other countries that have legalized the drug, including Canada, Georgia, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, South Africa, Thailand and Uruguay. Its recreational use has also been

legalized in several US states, as well as in parts of Australia.

Despite laws prohibiting its consumption, cannabis use in Germany had spiked in recent years, Karl Lauterbach, the country's health minister, said.

The government decided it would be better to allow people to use the drug legally in a controlled way, which would immediately remove a massive revenue stream from the criminal gangs that had been supplying it, Lauterbach said.

It would also be easier to guarantee the quality of the drug that way, with gangs no longer able to supply people with cannabis bulked out with harmful ingredients such as fiberglass, he said.

"The number of consumers aged between 18 and 25 has doubled in

the past 10 years. We have two goals — to crack down on the black market and improved protection of children and young people."

But Simone Borhardt, of the Christian Democratic Union, Germany's second-largest political party, said the new law was "unnecessary" and "confused" and ran contrary to advice from the medical profession and law enforcement agencies.

Scorn expressed

Tino Sorge, another CDU legislator, poured scorn on the rationale for legalizing it, saying, "You are asserting, in all seriousness, that by legalizing more drugs we will contain drug use among young people."

While the new law makes it legal

for adults to have up to 25 grams of cannabis in their possession in public places and up to 50 grams on them in private homes, it does not pave the way for easy access. For now, people wanting to consume cannabis will need to buy seeds and grow their own marijuana plants, via nonprofit cannabis-growing clubs.

The government said it may eventually allow shops to sell cannabis, but it wants to study the issue more before making a decision.

The law only extends to German residents. Tourists and other visitors will not be allowed to possess the drug legally, something Parliament insisted upon in a bid to prevent so-called cannabis tourism.

The new law also prohibits the consumption of cannabis near to schools and on sports grounds.

WORLD

S. Korea sets deadline for striking young doctors

SEOUL — South Korea's government on Monday told young doctors they had until the end of February to return to work or risk being punished for staging a weeklong protest that has disrupted services for patients at several major hospitals.

Two-thirds of the nation's resident and intern doctors had walked off the job to protest a government plan to increase the number of students admitted to medical school in a bid to address what authorities say is a shortage of doctors that is set to worsen in one of the world's fastest aging societies.

The protest has forced hospitals to turn away patients and cancel procedures.

"Considering the gravity of the situation, the government issues the last plea," Safety Minister Lee Sang-min said at the opening of a task force meeting, adding that chaos was mounting in hospitals and emergency services had reached a "dangerous situation".

"If you return to the hospital you left behind by Feb 29, you won't be held responsible for what has already happened," he said.

"We urge you to remember your voice will be heard loudly and most effectively when you are by the side of patients."

The government has previously warned that it could take legal action against doctors who do not comply with a back-to-work order, including prosecution, possible arrest and stripping them of their medical licenses.

The protesting doctors say the

government should first address pay and working conditions before trying to increase the number of physicians.

Vice-Health Minister Park Min-soo said those who did not return by March 1 would face a minimum three-month suspension of their medical license among other legal actions.

Senior doctors and private practitioners have not joined the walk-out but have held rallies urging the government to scrap its plan to boost medical school quotas.

Many South Koreans support the plan, which has been spearheaded by President Yoon Suk-yeol.

In a package of policy plans to improve medical services, the government said it will increase the number of new medical students by 2,000 a year and expand legal protection against malpractice suits and prosecution.

It also plans to give incentives for doctors to practice in essential disciplines such as pediatrics and general surgery and in regional areas where a shortage of doctors is more serious.

Some doctors, however, say the government's plan is aimed at winning more votes in the April general election. In a statement, medical professors at Seoul National University, which runs one of the top medical schools in the country, called on the authorities to postpone discussing the plan until after the elections.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Multilateral action urged to tackle climate change

By WANG XIAODONG
in Nairobi, Kenya

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Delegates at an international conference on the environment have called for accelerated multilateral action to cope with intensifying global environmental crises such as climate change, loss of biodiversity and pollution for sustainable development.

"We are living in a time of turmoil. Our response must demonstrate that multilateral diplomacy can deliver," Leila Benali, president of the United Nations Environment Assembly, said during opening remarks at the sixth session of the assembly in Nairobi, Kenya, on Monday.

"Today, we must accelerate multilateral action to strengthen the environmental foundation of sustainable development."

This year's session of the UNEA, the world's top decision-making body on environment that includes all 193 UN member states, opened at a "critical" time for the planet Earth, with climate change intensifying, 1 million species heading toward extinction, and pollution remaining one of the leading causes of death globally, the United Nations Environment Programme said.

Inger Andersen, executive director of the UNEP, said at the opening ceremony that this year's session has garnered increased global attention and demonstrated more unity, with a record number of more than 5,000 delegates attending.

During the five-day meeting, government leaders are expected to debate 19 draft resolutions on issues including improving air quality, addressing climate change, limiting chemical pollu-

tion, countering desertification and ending biodiversity loss. They also plan to renew calls for progress on Sustainable Development Goals.

UNEA resolutions are not legally binding, but provide an important basis for international agreement on the environment.

Soipan Tuuya, Kenya's cabinet secretary for environment, climate change and forestry, said at a time when meeting SDGs has become challenging as many countries in Africa are still grappling with poverty and economic inequality increasing globally, the international society should demonstrate solidarity in this year's UNEA session for concrete results.

"The world will be looking to us here in Nairobi this week to renew hope. And hope we must provide as we consider the draft resolutions," she said.

"A lot of action, hard work, honest negotiations and leadership are therefore needed over the next week if this UNEA is to live to its promise."

Zainab Hawa Bangura, UN under-secretary-general and director-general of the United Nations Office at Nairobi, said concrete actions are needed for the international community to deliver on the goals already agreed.

"In tackling the triple planetary crisis of climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and of pollution and waste, there is only one way to deliver — action, action, action!" she said.

Bacha Debele Buta, Ethiopia's permanent representative to the UNEP, said Africa is severely impacted by environmental challenges such as climate change, land degradation and pollution, and called for more international assistance to help its sustainable development.



Storm reminder

People enjoy Manzanillo Beach near boat debris left in the wake of Hurricane Otis in Acapulco, Mexico, on Friday. The resort has been struggling to recover its tourism trade after being hit by the Category 5 storm in October, leaving at least 52 dead and destroying or damaging most hotels. RODRIGO OROPEZA / AFP

Famine looms over Gaza amid conflict

Analysts see truce efforts in dire need as starvation takes a toll on civilians

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Reports of a possible temporary cease-fire deal in the Israel-Palestine conflict have been welcomed by analysts as they noted that starvation is taking a toll on civilian lives amid an ongoing food crisis in Gaza.

Philippe Lazzarini, commissioner-general of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, lamented that the last time the organization was able to deliver food aid to northern Gaza was on Jan 23, adding that their calls to send food aid "have been denied and have fallen on deaf ears".

Doha-based news outlet Al Jazeera reported on Sunday that a 2-month-old Palestinian boy died from starvation in northern Gaza, just days after international child welfare advocates warned of an "explosion" in child deaths due to Israel's attacks on the besieged enclave.

On Feb 19, UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and the World Food Programme issued a consolidated statement, noting that before the ongoing hostilities, malnutrition was rare in Gaza with just 0.8 percent of children under 5 classified as acutely malnourished.

Acute malnutrition now affecting 15.6 percent of children under 2 in northern Gaza suggests "a serious and rapid decline".

"The deliberate starvation, particularly evident in the northern part of Gaza, is viewed as a coercive tactic aimed at compelling Palestinian resistance factions to acquiesce to Israeli terms," Belal Alakhras, a political analyst and Palestinian researcher at the University of Malaya in Malaysia, told China Daily.

"Amid this critical juncture in Gaza with far-reaching regional implications, the role of international actors comes under scrutiny, serving as a litmus test of whether the global landscape remains predominantly under the sway of US unipolarity or has indeed transitioned to a multipolar reality," he added.

Negotiations on hammering out an urgent cease-fire deal took place in Paris among representatives from Egypt, Qatar, the United States, and Israel on Friday.

Conditions on a potential six-week pause involve a prisoner swap deal

US airman sets himself on fire outside Israeli embassy in Washington, DC

An active-duty member of the US Air Force was critically injured on Sunday after setting himself ablaze outside the Israeli embassy in Washington, DC, while declaring that he "will no longer be complicit in genocide," a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press.

The man, whose name wasn't immediately released, walked up to the embassy shortly before 1 pm and began livestreaming on the video streaming platform Twitch, the source said. Law enforcement officials believe he then set his phone down and doused himself in accelerant and ignited the flames. At one point, the victim said he "will no longer be complicit in genocide," the person said. The video was later removed from the platform, but law enforcement officials have obtained and reviewed a copy.

The source was not authorized to publicly discuss details of the ongoing investigation and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity.

Police did not immediately provide any additional details about the

incident, which happened as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu looks to seek cabinet approval for a military operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah while a temporary cease-fire deal is being negotiated. Israel's military offensive in Gaza, however, has drawn criticism, including genocide claims against the Palestinians.

In December, a person self-immolated outside the Israeli consulate in Atlanta and used gasoline as an accelerant, according to Atlanta's fire authorities. A Palestinian flag was found at the scene, and the act was believed to be one of "extreme political protest".

In a statement, the Metropolitan Police Department in Washington said its officers had responded to the scene outside the Israeli embassy to assist US Secret Service officers and that its bomb squad had also been called to examine a suspicious vehicle. Police said no hazardous materials were found in the vehicle.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

between Hamas and Israeli authorities, various media outlets reported.

The talks were set to resume in Qatar where an Israeli delegation was expected to arrive to continue securing a pause in the conflict in Gaza that may see its hostages being released.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told US broadcaster CBS News it was unclear whether a hostage deal would materialize from the negotiations but said Hamas needed to make more reasonable demands as he accused them of being on "another planet".

Mediation visit

Meanwhile, Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, whose country has been involved in mediation efforts, is scheduled to visit Paris for his first state visit to France since becoming emir in 2013. Gaza is expected to be the dominant subject of his talks with French President Emmanuel Macron.

Alakhras from the University of Malaya noted that almost five months into the conflict, Israel had yet to achieve its stated military objectives.

This dilemma, he said, "has not gone unnoticed by Israel's allies", who are now exploring alternative approaches to safeguard Israeli

interests "amid this quagmire".

"Discussions of a potential pause or cease-fire in Gaza reflect a maneuver to secure the release of Israeli prisoners in exchange for Palestinian detainees, affording Israel the opportunity to reassess its approach to the situation," said Alakhras.

"In contrast, Palestinians are seeking a cessation of hostilities to stop the ongoing bloodshed, which is mostly felt by civilians.

"Israel and its allies, particularly the United States, appear inclined to perpetuate this cycle, seeking to evade the implications of the October moment, which also poses a threat to the political standing of the current Israeli government and regional leverage for them," he said.

Meanwhile, Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh said on Monday his government is resigning.

President Mahmoud Abbas must decide whether he accepts Shtayyeh and his government's resignation.

"The next stage and its challenges require new governmental and political arrangements that take into account the new reality in the Gaza Strip," Shtayyeh said at a cabinet meeting.

Agencies contributed to this story.

XINHUA—AGENCIES

1 killed, 6 injured in airstrikes in Yemen

SANAA — A man was killed and six members of his family were injured in Yemen's southwestern province of Taiz in Saturday's overnight airstrikes by the US-British forces, the Houthi-run Al-Masirah TV reported on Sunday.

Following the airstrikes, Yemen's Houthi-controlled Saba news agency said: "The American-British aggression airstrikes targeted the communications networks in the Shamir area of Maqbanah District, and in Haifan District." They are both located in Taiz Province.

It also reported other airstrikes on a farm in the Abs District in the northwestern province of Hajjah, and more than a dozen airstrikes in the capital Sanaa targeting several well-known military positions.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani on Sunday strongly condemned the attacks.

He made the remarks in a statement published on the Iranian Foreign Ministry's website, describing the large-scale military attacks launched late on Saturday as "arbitrary, and in violation of the recognized international rules and regulations as well as Yemen's sovereignty and territorial integrity".

Kanaani said the United States and Britain "prioritize commitment to Israel's security and illegitimate objectives over international peace and security".

Intensifying tensions

Kanaani added that with such attacks, the US and Britain sought to "intensify the tension and crisis in the region".

Local witnesses and residents said in the attacks last night, at least four missiles hit the Al-Siyana Military Camp, north of Sanaa's downtown, causing big explosions and fire, and the warplanes struck a military camp in the southern part of the capital and another camp on a mountain east of Sanaa.

US media, citing anonymous US officials, reported that the US and Britain hit more than a dozen Houthi targets in response to a recent surge in the group's attacks on ships in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.

The officials said the US and British fighter jets hit about 18 sites in this fourth joint strike against the Houthis since Jan 12.

The Houthis say their attacks on shipping around the Red Sea are in support of Palestinians in Gaza.

Regional tensions have soared since the conflict erupted in October, stoking violence involving groups in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Bangladeshi court bars adoption of wild elephant

DHAKA — A Bangladeshi court on Sunday barred the adoption of elephants from the wild, a move hailed by animal rights activists as a "landmark" order to help stop the cruelty.

Rights groups said the high court order suspending licenses will stop the torture of captive Asian elephants in the name of training.

"The high court today suspended all licenses for the captive rearing of

elephants," Amit Das Gupta, deputy attorney general of the country, said. Bangladesh was once one of the major homes for Asian elephants.

But poaching and habitat loss saw their numbers dwindle.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature says there are nearly 100 captive Asian elephants in Bangladesh, nearly half the number left in the wild in the country.

As logging and farming encroach on elephant territory, young animals are captured in the country's northern and southeastern hills.

The forestry department had previously issued licenses to logging groups who use the elephants to drag tree trunks, or to circus groups, to adopt the animals. But Gupta said the elephants were being exploited and used for begging and "street extor-

tion", breaking the license terms.

Animal rights activists said the suspension would end often brutal training, known as "hadani".

"This is a landmark order," said Rakibul Haque Emil, head of the animal rights group People for Animal Welfare Foundation in Bangladesh.

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WORLDUS

FRIENDS AFAR

Editor's note: China Daily presents the series Friends Afar to tell the stories of people-to-people exchanges between China and other countries. Through the vivid narration of the people in the stories, readers can get a better understanding of a country that is boosting openness.

American goes on a kung fu odyssey to Emei Mountain

By MINLU ZHANG in New York
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At Emei Mountain in August, a young man from the US state of Michigan reached its peak. Below him, trees covered with fog unfolded like pages of a book.

Emei's Golden Summit Temple shone in the summer sunlight as Joshua Chiatovich walked toward it. After decades of martial arts training, he said he stood where his dreams had led him.

"Being a martial artist and competing against the best martial artists in the world on Emei Mountain is the dream. It's a fantasy," said Chiatovich, who organized Team US to take part in the ninth World Kung Fu Championships in Sichuan province.

Emei Mountain has been a destination for martial arts training and competition because of its treacherous terrain. Over time, martial artists have gathered there for exchanges and competitions.

Chiatovich, an author and martial arts teacher at a martial arts club in Detroit, Michigan, has been practicing kung fu for decades, and now teaches students, mostly Chinese Americans.

Stretching his hands and with fingers curved like sharp claws to mimic the movements of a mantis in combat, Chiatovich demonstrated his own style of Praying Mantis Boxing at the competition.

There, he met someone who practiced Six Harmonies Praying Mantis. They argued about Chiatovich's style, Bajì Mantis. The man said there is no such thing. But Chiatovich said his grandmaster mixed bajì quan, or Bajì Boxing, and Praying Mantis Boxing for more power and speed.

The argument seemed like a scene from Chiatovich's kung fu novel, *The Bajì Mantis*, published in July.

Based in ancient China, it is a martial arts fantasy about a young praying mantis, whose obsession with the human world leads him on a journey of adventure, discovery and kung fu.

Chiatovich did not feel alone when he was in China, as Wu Liang, Xu Pang and Xiaoxiao, the three mantis characters,

accompanied him on the trip. The martial arts trip to China has given him much inspiration to continue the story of the three mantises, which will be a trilogy.

Coming-of-age story

The story begins with a young mantis aged 9, and readers will witness him growing up to 18.

"It's kind of like the lessons they learn and the growth that they undergo because it's a coming-of-age story," Chiatovich said.

He said he was "shocked" with the Western audience he gained from the book.

"The audience I'm gaining in the West has no knowledge of China. They've never been to China, they don't speak Chinese, and they know almost nothing about Chinese culture," he said.

"A lot of the reviews I'm reading have people saying I'm accidentally teaching them about Chinese culture, and they're learning about Chinese martial arts and culture seamlessly through the story. So, those things make me really happy when I read that."

Chiatovich's kung fu dreams began when he was 8. One night, he stumbled on an old kung fu movie on television. It happened to be *Drunken Master*, and that was his first kung fu movie.

"It changed my life, introducing me to kung fu, Jackie Chan and the idea of China. From that moment, my dream of practicing kung fu and moving to China began," he said.

After graduating from Eastern Michigan University, Chiatovich traveled to China to study Chinese culture and philosophy at Xiamen University in Fujian province, where he lived for four years. That was "the best time of my life," he said.

After returning to his hometown Detroit, he began promoting martial arts and traditional Chinese festivals such as Chinese New Year to promote traditional Chinese culture. He is also the chief communications officer of the Detroit Chinatown Group.

"Every time I'm in China, I feel I'm living my dream, and I will be traveling back and forth the rest of my life," Chiatovich said.



American passengers in the inaugural "Brilliant China Tour" travel group celebrate with Air China personnel before boarding their flight on Sunday at Los Angeles International Airport. RENA LI / CHINA DAILY

'Brilliant China Tour' takes flight

Inaugural group from US receives warm wishes from Air China at LAX

By RENA LI in Los Angeles
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As the first "Brilliant China Tour" passengers prepared to board their Air China flight, they received a warm welcome from the airline — along with some cuddly panda dolls.

During a brief departure event Sunday at the Air China counter at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), the tour group's passengers were presented with the airline's adorable Fat Andra panda dolls as they checked in for the flight. They were brimming with excitement and

anticipation for their trip to China.

One of the group's members, Mary, who came from Florida, shared her excitement with China Daily.

"It's my second time visiting China," she said. "I've always looked forward to going back. China is amazing — the food, the incredible culture and the humble people. This time, I'm especially excited to visit the Great Wall, which I missed during my first trip."

Peng Lei, the managing director of Air China North America, told China Daily that the initiative aims to revitalize people-to-people exchanges following the pandemic.

"To foster cultural exchanges between the US and China and cater to passengers' travel preferences, we collaborated with the Chinese Consulate General in LA and the China National Tourism Administration

to introduce an innovative tourism program called Brilliant China Tour," Peng said.

Since the program launched online, it has garnered attention from tourists in North America, he said.

The first group of 11 tour members from various parts of the US gathered in Los Angeles and boarded Air China flight CA988 directly to China. Their itinerary includes exploring Beijing, Shanghai, Suzhou, Hangzhou and Shenzhen, culminating in their return to LA from Shenzhen on Air China flight CA769 on March 5.

"We will provide visitors with an exceptional experience through the Brilliant China Tour program," said Alex Wang, president of InterTrips, the travel agency organizing the initial tour group. "This program

offers opportunities to marvel at ancient architecture, savor delectable cuisine, and immerse oneself in the vibrancy of modern cities," he said, adding that the visitors will be warmly greeted in each city upon their arrival in China.

Peng Jing, commercial counselor for the consulate, emphasized the importance of fostering deeper, mutually beneficial cooperation between China and the US through people-to-people exchange.

"President Xi has stated that the hope and foundation of the China-US relationship lie in the people," she said. "I believe the first tour group to China will serve as an example to enhance people-to-people exchanges and friendship. We welcome more Americans to visit China personally and share their experiences with their families and friends."

Measles outbreak hits several states in US

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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A measles outbreak has infected nine people in Florida including children and an adult after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed that there have been 35 cases of the highly transmissible virus in more than 15 US states this year.

The most recent case of measles involves an adult aged 20 to 24 who lives in Polk County, Central Florida, the Florida Health Department said. Other cases in Broward County involved eight young people, including a child under age 5.

Most of the cases among children in the Sunshine State have been linked to Manatee Bay Elementary School in Weston, near Fort Lauderdale. Health officials warned that it was likely that the outbreak would spread from schoolchildren to others.

While Florida has the largest number of measles cases in the country, the state's Surgeon General Dr Joseph Ladapo has sparked controversy over how he has handled the issue as he has offered advice that contradicts other medical guidance.

Doctors suggest that children who haven't been vaccinated for measles should be isolated for 21 days after being exposed at school.

Last week, Ladapo wrote to parents at Manatee Bay Elementary School that it was up to them to decide whether they wanted to allow their children to keep attending school or quarantine.

The letter read: "Because of the high likelihood of infection, it is normally recommended that children stay home until the end of the infectious period."

"Due to the high immunity rate in the community, as well as the burden on families and educational cost of healthy children missing school, DOH [Department of Health] is deferring to parents or guardians to make decisions about school attendance."

The CDC advises that any child who is unvaccinated and becomes exposed to measles should stay home for three weeks.

Under Florida law, students must be vaccinated for measles and other contagious diseases. They can get an exemption for medical reasons or if parents believe it violates their religious tenets and practices.

Measles are highly transmissible and easily spread through the air and on surfaces, especially in a confined space like a school. It is prevalent in late winter and early spring. If someone coughs or sneezes, the measles virus can stay in the air for up to two hours.

In his letter, Florida's surgeon general stopped short of encouraging parents to get their children vaccinated against the virus. He added that his recommendations may change, and any children with symptoms of measles shouldn't go to school.

Yet, the CDC advises that all children from ages 12 to 15 months old and students at post-high school educational institutions, adults or those traveling internationally should be inoculated against the virus.

"CDC recommends that people get MMR vaccine to protect against measles, mumps, and rubella," it said. "Children should get two doses of MMR vaccine, starting with the first dose at 12 to 15 months of age, and the second dose at 4 through 6 years of age. Teens and adults should also be up to date on their MMR vaccination."

Among unvaccinated people, 90 percent can become infected, the CDC said. Around 97 percent of those who are fully vaccinated are protected against infection.

The virus can be particularly severe among pregnant women or children under age 5. It can lead to hospitalization or pneumonia — the most common cause of death from measles in young children. At least 1 in 5 unvaccinated people who contract measles will be hospitalized.

There were just 58 cases of measles

in 2023, according to CDC data. Of the 35 measles cases already confirmed this year, nine were found in Pennsylvania in January, including eight in Philadelphia. Last week, Michigan's Health Department reported its first case of measles since 2019.

The outbreak had also spread to Arizona, California, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New York City, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Washington as of Feb 22, according to the CDC. Most have been linked to international travel.

Worldwide, the number of cases confirmed has increased due to low vaccination rates generated, in part, over fears after the COVID-19 pandemic.

In January, the CDC urged doctors to "stay alert" for measles after a slew of cases among the unvaccinated.

Florida's surgeon general, Ladapo, was appointed by Republican Governor Ron DeSantis in 2021. He was formerly a clinical researcher at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Ladapo is opposed to COVID-19 vaccines and wrote in a January letter that the vaccine should be suspended because "freedom trumps public health, freedom trumps protection."

The Food and Drug Administration warned that his stance could "put people at risk of death or serious illness".



Joshua Chiatovich donates his kung fu novel, *The Bajì Mantis*, to Xiamen University in August, where he received his bachelor's degree in Chinese philosophy. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

US fans excited to see return of pandas

SAN DIEGO, California — Panda lovers in the United States received a long-awaited injection of hope after Chinese and US wildlife conservation organizations signed a new agreement on giant panda conservation last week.

The China Wildlife Conservation Association inked the agreement with the San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, or SDZWA, and Madrid Zoo Aquarium, or SDZWA, and Madrid Zoo Aquarium, or SDZWA, for cooperation on the conservation of giant pandas, as part of efforts to step up the protection of the species on a global level.

"We are humbled by the potential opportunity of continuing our collaborative conservation efforts to secure

the future for giant pandas," Megan Owen, SDZWA's vice-president of conservation science, said.

The message spread fast among panda lovers in the US, who are eager to see giant pandas back again. At the San Diego Zoo, many visitors called the news "thrilling," "fantastic" and "amazing."

"I screamed when I got an email from San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance this morning, sharing the news of the return of giant pandas. Wow, we are very, very excited," Lillian Hallberg, a visitor from Boston, said on Thursday.

"This is a wonderful alliance between the US and China." Lillian Hallberg and her husband

George Hallberg are both panda fans. They have visited the San Diego Zoo and the Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington, DC, many times when giant pandas lived there.

"All US citizens love the panda bears, all over the world too," Lillian Hallberg added.

"They (the US and China) are all doing it together. The conservation worked. It's very important," George Hallberg said.

Like the Hallbergs, many people in the US are keen to see giant pandas back.

Claudia Rodriguez, a local resident of San Diego, said she had a great time with the last two giant pandas at the

San Diego Zoo, Bai Yun and her son Xiao Liwu, before they returned to China in 2019.

"They were very popular and many people came to see them," she said. "They were so beautiful."

Pandas have long been a symbol of China-US friendship.

In 1972, two giant pandas arrived at the Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington, DC, also known as the US National Zoo, from China as a gift from the Chinese government following then-US president Richard Nixon's groundbreaking trip to China.

The San Diego Zoo had pandas from 1996 to 2019 before Bai Yun and Xiao Liwu left the zoo for their homeland in May 2019.

Decadeslong partnership

The SDZWA has a nearly 30-year

conservation partnership with research collaborators in China focused on protecting and recovering giant pandas.

These collaborative efforts have had significant impacts, including an increased scientific understanding of giant panda biology, care and wellness, and what pandas need to thrive in a changing climate, according to the SDZWA.

Currently, the giant panda habitat at the San Diego Zoo is under construction. Preparations are underway for the arrival of pandas.

"Our purpose here is not just to showcase pandas. We obviously want people to connect with them, to fall in love with them like we do, and to support our work in conserving them. But the purpose has been, and will always be conserving the species," Andrew

James, senior public relations representative at the SDZWA, said.

"We will continue to maintain that relationship with our partners in China, and the goal is to conserve them (pandas). We're hoping and we are very confident that the next chapter will be just as successful as the last," James said.

Jeff He, who traveled from Los Angeles to the San Diego Zoo with his wife and daughter, said he expects to see more exchanges and cooperation between the United States and China besides the conservation of giant pandas.

"Pandas serve as goodwill ambassadors of China. They are adorable and cute. Hope the return of pandas will bring us more joy and hope," he noted.

XINHUA

THE HANDS OF TIME

Editor's note:
Traditional arts and crafts are supreme samples of Chinese cultural heritage. China Daily is running this series to show how master artisans are using dedication and innovation to inject new life into these age-old heritages. In this installment, we examine how the ancient craft of cloisonne reflects our modern lives.

TRACING A GOLDEN LEGACY

A Beijing handicraft factory is carrying forward tradition and innovation, giving new mettle to old metal with designs that shine across time. **Chen Nan** reports.

You'll see large cloisonne vases, striking plates and other colorful pieces in Beijing Gongmei Group's arts-and-crafts factory's studio near Yonghegong, or the Lama Temple, in the capital.

Gaze upon these long enough, and you will be stunned by the diversity of distinctive Chinese patterns traced by countless thin golden wires.

"It's said that there are 108 steps in the process of producing cloisonne goods," says the factory's director, 59-year-old Zhang Yongzhen, who has practiced the craft for four decades.

"I don't know the exact number. But I can tell you that the traditional handicraft is very sophisticated. No one can finish the whole process by himself or herself. It's a delicate art that takes dedication to every small step."

Cloisonne, or *jingtaitan* in Chinese, is the technique of creating designs on metal with colored-glass paste, or enamel, that fills in spaces among copper or bronze wiring that's bent or hammered into patterns.

The fundamentals include shaping the object's body; bending and inlaying copper wires to render surface patterns; coloring in the shapes these wires form with metallic oxides; heating — since the enamel usually shrinks after firing, this process is repeated to fully fill in the designs — and, finally, polishing and gilding.

The technique was introduced to China in the late 13th century. It's believed that cloisonne reached its peak and was given its present Chinese name during the reign of Emperor Jingtai in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). *Lan* means blue in Chinese, and *jingtaitan* goods were typically infused with a special dark blue enamel as the base color.

The craft was further developed in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), following innovations in copper-smelting techniques.

Future relics
Zhang calls cloisonne goods "treasures that will be seen as cultural relics 1,000 years later."

"Cloisonne, with its flamboyant styles and vibrant colors, was initially primarily intended for the royal family. The objects' bodies were usually made of copper or bronze, which were expensive materials that could only be owned by royal families in the past," Zhang explains.

He adds that *jingtaitan* is one of the Yanjing Eight Palace Handicrafts, which also include embroidery, jade and ivory carving. (Yanjing is an old name for Beijing.)

Zhang says he didn't realize these treasures' value when he began to learn cloisonne at around age 17, when his father sent him to a vocational school to study the technique. His dad spent his whole life working on the first step of making cloisonne items — hammering copper or bronze into the objects' shapes.

Zhang instead learned the more intricate step of using thin metal wires to outline patterns and designs on the surfaces.

"There were about 30 students in the class, among them only three men," Zhang recalls.

"The technique requires patience and concentration. Imagine inserting the thin metal wires with small tweezers and repeating the movements thousands of times every day. It was very boring.

"But I still agreed to learn it and later worked at the same factory as my father since he believed the job was stable and guaranteed my livelihood. I listened to him."

Still, Zhang continued to seek other jobs in different departments of the company. He even worked abroad as a salesman, and as a trainer and manager at the factory.

"When I saw people were wowed by the technique, especially when I worked abroad,



From top: Zhang Yongzhen and his apprentice Xi Wen are two master artisans of cloisonne at the Beijing Gongmei Group. Their creations of cloisonne vessels feature traditional patterns and are inspired by ancient bronze ware. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

I started to rethink cloisonne. I didn't realize its beauty and value until I left it and observed it as an outsider," Zhang says.

"Now, I still love watching people in the factory making cloisonne, from the very beginning of designing the products to the final stage of polishing."

Creative creations
New blood is needed to infuse the old medium, Zhang explains.

He particularly praises 39-year-old Xi Wen, head of the design department of the factory, which belongs to the 70-year-old Beijing Gongmei Group.

She joined the group in 2007 after graduating from the Academy of Arts and Design of Tsinghua University as an environmental art design major in 2007. Later, she obtained a Master of Arts in interior design from the Central Academy of Fine Arts. Her cloisonne designs have since won national awards.

"I first learned about the technique when I was a student," the Beijing native recalls. "The beautiful photos of cloisonne appeared in my school books and intrigued me."

Xi's mother was a fan of Chinese paintings and had her study traditional painting and calligraphy at around age 4. She sensed the girl's talent and encouraged her to pursue art as her career.

"My mother told me that I could paint very detailed features of an object, such as the small black dots on a yellow pear. She believed that I could become a great painter because of my 'observant eyes' and sensitivity to color," says Xi.

Xi worked as a designer with the Beijing Gongmei Group for years before she was transferred to the arts-and-crafts factory in 2016. Since then, she has concentrated on learning cloisonne techniques and designing related products as Zhang's apprentice.

"When I was a designer, before learning with Zhang, I only painted on paper. Now, my paintings not only appear on paper but also come alive as real objects. That makes me very happy and proud," says Xi.

"I've never found learning cloisonne boring because, to me, it's a magical process to turn a piece of metal into a piece of art. I used to spend the whole night watching the colors change during the firing process."

Zhang says: "Unlike traditional cloisonne artisans, who strictly follow their masters' instructions, Xi is full of creativity and imagination when it comes to design. She is also very bold with the use of colors. Her creations are unique."

One item Xi made was inspired by a *pipa* (a traditional Chinese lute) that's depicted in the murals of the Mogao Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Northwest China's Gansu province.

Named *Shengshi Hefeng*, or Prosperity and Harmony, the black, blue and gold vessel resembles the pear-shaped instrument, combines the traditional techniques of cloisonne and filigree inlay.

Xi also made a pair of items named *Dragon and Phoenix* that combine cloisonne with carved lacquer, which is also one of the Yanjing Eight Palace Handicrafts.

She hopes to bring *jingtaitan* into people's daily lives by making everyday items like jewelry, boxes and incense burners.

"I don't consider myself an artist, although I design and paint. I like the word artisan, which is not only about the creative side but also about functional value," Xi says.

"Artisans make cloisonne products with their hands and — through skill, experience and talent — they can create things of great beauty that are also useful."

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Artisans make cloisonne products with their hands and — through skill, experience and talent — they can create things of great beauty that are also useful."

Xi Wen, head of design at Beijing Gongmei Group

Items in the collections of Beijing's Palace Museum and New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art offer a source of inspiration for modern cloisonne artworks. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG AND WANG KAIHONG / CHINA DAILY AND PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Left: Guan Dian and her husband, Li Jinglong, run cloisonne workshops in Beijing. Right: Guan instructs a student on how to create a painting. The fish image involves soldering delicate metal strips bent to the outline of a design and filling the spaces with different colors. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Close up on cloisonne

By CHEN NAN

About eight years ago, Li Jinglong and Guan Dian visited the Palace Museum in Beijing. Like many tourists, the young couple were amazed by the ancient complex, which is also known as the Forbidden City. It was China's imperial palace from 1420 to 1911 and is home to over 1.86 million cultural relics. The cloisonne objects on display attracted them in particular.

"We spent hours looking at those beautiful objects. We just couldn't take our eyes off them," says Li.

Born and raised in Beijing, 35-year-old Li is no stranger to cloisonne, since there were a pair of cloisonne vases in his grandparents' home. His wife, 34-year-old Guan, who learned to paint as a child and later became a designer after graduating from the Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology, is also familiar with cloisonne, as it appears in her art books.

As a result of their visit, the couple made the bold decision to open a workshop to promote Chinese-style cloisonne.

"We learned cloisonne after seeing the pieces displayed at the Palace Museum. We wanted to turn our hobby into a career, so that people could enjoy and learn to make the craft themselves," says Li, who worked in a finance company before quitting his job to launch Handcraft Addicted, a DIY workshop where participants can make cloisonne. Since 2018, they have opened three workshops in Beijing.

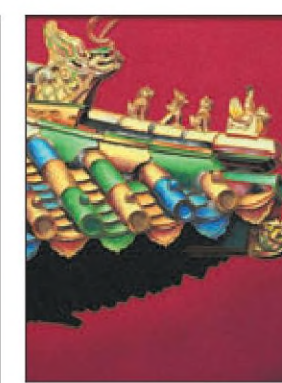
Traditionally, the art of making cloisonne involves many steps, including making a metal base, soldering delicate metal strips bent to the outline of a design, filling the spaces with different colored pigments and firing. The couple simplify the process so that participants only have to learn to bend the thin metal wires into their desired pattern, and apply the powdered ore pigments.

Instead of focusing on making traditional cloisonne objects, such as plates and vases, the workshop allows participants to create the designs they want on panels of glass, resin or wood.

Although the process has been simplified, it is still not easy for people trying cloisonne for the first time to succeed.

Chang Yunqi has been making cloisonne art at Handcraft Addicted for about five years.

When she and her classmates were looking for a place to celebrate their high school graduation in 2019, they checked online to look for somewhere fun. As none of them wanted to go to a restaurant or a karaoke bar, hoping to find something new to do, they chose to try Handcraft Addicted.



Cloisonne paintings created at Guan's workshops cover a wide range of themes, such as architecture (top and center) and pandas. PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY



Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

"We are happy to give people a glimpse of the traditional techniques of cloisonne as part of a DIY experience."

Guan Dian, cofounder of Handcraft Addicted workshops

"I was curious about cloisonne, which is a very complicated, professional technique. I didn't know what to expect at the workshop until I saw different paintings made using the cloisonne technique," Chang says. She has since become one of the workshop's many fans.

Chang learned oil painting as a child and for her first try, chose to re-create *The Birthday*, a painting by French artist Marc Chagall.

"The thin metal wires resembled the pencil lines I drew on canvas. It was challenging but also interesting. The coloring process was magical. When I saw the finished result, which was based on an oil painting, presented in total different medium and approach, I was amazed," she says.

"Cloisonne is difficult, but this only involved two of the traditional steps. I can't imagine how hard it would be to make a full cloisonne piece."

Since then, Chang has made one painting a year at the workshop, mostly her own interpretations of pieces by Western artists like Pablo Picasso and Salvador Dalí.

One of her latest was based on John La Farge's *Autumn, Scattering Leaves*, which she saw at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2023. It took her seven months to finish.

"I have a full-time job, so I only go to the workshop in my spare time. Usually I spend three or four hours there concentrating on whatever I'm working on. It allows me to slow down and dedicate myself to the piece," she adds.

Guan says: "We are happy to give people a glimpse of the traditional techniques of cloisonne as part of a DIY experience. They spend months making one piece, which they take home or give friends as presents."

Li says it's a luxury for people to spend time alone and fully focus on one thing nowadays because of the fast pace of life. "We have many participants like Chang, who come to our workshop every week, not only to create art, but also to take a break from their busy lives."



LIFE

A place where young people can shine

One man's vision gives migrant children a chance to express and enjoy themselves, **Chen Bowen** reports in Haikou.

The Kindergarten Without Walls sounds like the ultimate dream for any child — no tuition, no rules, no barriers or enrollment requirements. Located in Binlianxincun, a crowded urban village in Haikou, capital of South China's Hainan province, it has been a companion space for children to learn and play since 2018.

Kindergarten Without Walls is a unique concept that deviates from the traditional model of education. Housed in a small general store, this unconventional "kindergarten" opens its doors for free to mainly migrant children and children in difficulty on Friday evenings and weekends, and offers a range of activities — from singing and dancing to painting, watching movies, reading books, and playing games.

The kindergarten is funded by its founder Tang Haoduo and private donors. The volunteers, including stay-at-home mothers and employees of State-owned enterprises, mostly contacted Tang after discovering the Kindergarten Without Walls' public WeChat account.

"Only on weekends do volunteers step in as teachers. They offer their time and expertise to the children, fostering a supportive community in Binlianxincun," says Tang. "We aim to forge a creative and caring community for children in the neighborhood."

Tang, 41, an art teacher at a public junior high school, has been involved in social art practice since 2018, and has addressed important issues such as domestic violence and children's mental health problems. He ran a chat club at the school and conducted an important but anonymous survey, which showed that domestic violence against children often takes the form of control "in the name of love" and verbal attacks that reflect the impact of social pressure.

The reason Tang decided to run the chat club was because he was a victim of domestic violence. He recalls that his father used physical violence against his mother and siblings. Growing up in a rural area, he considered himself a left-behind, migrant child at the time. "My life underwent constant change in the absence of my parents," he says.

Tang became a resident of Binlianxincun in October 2017. The urban village's mixed demographic of city workers and those from rural areas, along with its diversity of ages and family situations, prompted him to create an experimental space.

He rented a shop in 2017 at a cost of around 20,000 yuan (about \$2,780) per year. He named it Quality Time Variety Store, meaning it's not just a grocery store, but a space that offers companionship and a sense of togetherness.

"As an artist, I used to focus on creating physical work such as sculptures and installations. But I gradually felt the pull toward a more participatory and action-oriented practice. This shift in my approach led me to envision a practical and sustainable space where I could not only create art, but also live and breathe creativity," Tang says.

His aspiration was to establish a space that is not just a short-term endeavor, but a long-term commitment to building a community of artistic expression and collaboration.

Tang sells an array of items ranging from sweet potato liquor, peanut oil and honey, to daily necessities and books. However, what sets the store apart are its vibrant and diverse events. From concerts and salons to independent film screenings, Tang has established a hub for community engagement, relaxation, and artistic expression. The store provides a space for residents and travelers to come together, converse, and even find temporary lodging.

About six months after the Quality Time Variety Store opened, a distressed child appeared one midnight in May 2018. Her disheveled appearance and clothes caked



Translations of two of the poems

But I still miss my mom

When the farmers were already at work,
Mom asked me to get up and have breakfast.
Then I went to school.
When I came back from school,
Mom had run away from home.
She should have gone to work.
But I still miss my mom.
I also wanted my dad to stay with me at home.
He would send me to school.
He would buy me breakfast.
(Xiaoyu, 5 years old, recorded on Jan 10, 2021. Translated by Zhou Yan and Celine Tan)

Play

Let's go to Beijing to play games.
Let's go to an amusement park and play Space Party games.
Let's go to Jinniuling to see the flowers.
And I will go to see my sisters.
I will go to Shuangchuang Square to have some snacks.
I will hold an exhibition in a little park.
Let's take a walk in the Verdant Garden.
(Yueliang, 12 years old, recorded on Nov 19, 2022. Translated by Zhou Yan and Celine Tan)

CHINA DAILY

in dirt immediately caught Tang's attention.

He tried to reach out to her, but she was resistant and rude. The next day she returned to the store and asked for snacks. Tang established a connection with the girl, who is called Yueliang (Moon). As he got to know her, he learned about her troubled past, including being adopted at birth and not attending school.

Yueliang's resistance to school might have stemmed from her difficult childhood, making it challenging for any educational institution to accept her.

Tang decided to teach her basic reading and counting skills when she came to the store. "What I was most concerned about was if she continued to wander alone in the middle of the night, she might face potential danger," he says.

"I had approached Yueliang with sympathy, but as time passed, I began to realize that the girl's actions were often misunderstood by others. It dawned on me that perhaps they were a result of her unique perspective, her own inner world that is different from ours," Tang says.

Despite the initial confusion



From top: Children at Kindergarten Without Walls organize their own Children's Day party in 2021; the Quality Time Variety Store hosts Kindergarten Without Walls; the pottery workshop is a fun event held by Kindergarten Without Walls during the 2022 art festival; Yueliang manages a stall at the flea market in 2021. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and concerns over Yueliang's behavior, it turned out that her intentions were often born of generosity. Her mother told Tang one day that the girl had taken 800 yuan from her. Later, they found out that she was actually taking the money to treat her friends to a dinner.

Realizing conventional education wouldn't work, Tang tailored

an education program for Yueliang, as he discovered that she was talented at painting. "Yueliang is now 14 years old and I want to represent her work pro bono and support her until she reaches 18. Perhaps then she can use the money she has accumulated from her artworks for her adult life," Tang says.

Through the interaction with

Yueliang and her friends, Tang became aware of the plight many children face in the neighborhood. He came to understand that they often felt misunderstood and were often overlooked by the adults in their lives.

This motivated him to expand his work. In 2019, he turned the store into a community educational art project for children — Kindergarten Without Walls.

"Without Walls' stands for breaking boundaries, and embracing freedom and openness. 'Kindergarten' refers to its somewhat lighthearted, childlike setting," Tang explains. "However, our kindergarten is not only for little kids, but also for high school students, ranging from 3 or 4 years old to 18 years old."

He believes that Kindergarten Without Walls has the potential to reach a global audience and create a borderless community online. "We can use the current space as a base to try online workshops, not limited by countries and regions, and embrace the world in the future," he says.

Tang began to study child psychology in 2018. To better help the children in his neighborhood, he has participated in online discussions with the Psychological Analysis Society in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, since 2019.

"Every counselor needs someone they trust to supervise and support them. Even though most of the time I just listen to the children, I'm still under a lot of pressure," he says.

At Kindergarten Without Walls, children have the opportunity to explore and experience the outside world. Every Friday night, the Quality Time Variety Store transforms into a movie hub, screening international blockbusters from Disney, Hayao Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli, as well as popular films from theaters. "We typically have 10 to 20 children from the neighborhood joining us for movie nights," Tang says.

Ke Youyou, 17, sometimes helps Tang to select and play movies. Her role as a volunteer from the neighborhood provides her with a unique insight into the inclusive and nurturing environment cultivated in the project. "All kinds of children can play in the kindergarten. It's inclusive, without cliques. It's very child-friendly. The absence of school rules and regulations fosters a sense of freedom and relaxation, which allows children to explore and learn," she says.

Tang and the volunteers invite friends from different backgrounds to share their insights with the children. They also organize flea markets in the neighborhood where the children can sell their paintings, old books and toys.

Kindergarten Without Walls

started an art festival in 2022, inviting people from all over the country to take part. With around 100 participants so far, the festival has been held twice so far — for two days in November 2022, for two and a half days in August 2023 — and is scheduled to continue this year.

It has been held in vacant shops in the community, and neighbors such as grocery stores and barber shops are willing to provide space. The range of activities available, from woodworking and improvised drama to printmaking and pottery, offers a rich artistic experience for all involved, according to Tang.

Kindergarten Without Walls also holds a "store manager for a day" weekly activity, which invites children from the neighborhood to take on the role of a manager. The "manager" is expected to organize a day of activities in the variety store, complete with games and sales of items like books, embroidery, and postcards.

Among the items sold are prints of spoken poems by the children. Inspired by the spontaneous storytelling of his fifth-grade daughter, Tang realized that children possess a natural ability for oral expression from as early as kindergarten. Unlike adults who follow logic, grammar, and precise vocabulary, children's descriptions often mirror the attributes of modern poetry, says Tang.

He takes time to record their daily musings and expressions, and has amassed a collection of more than 100 poems, 79 of which have been published, with 10 even being translated into English. Tang cuts woodblocks and prints the poems himself. He also uses them to make postcards.

Zhou Yan, curator and a PhD candidate in the field of interdisciplinary studies of cultural heritage, museum studies, contemporary art, and cross-cultural studies, at the University of Toronto, has been responsible for translating the children's poems.

She says that they are a beautiful reflection of the children's natural and unfiltered creativity. "It provides a window into their innermost feelings, preferences, and thoughts, allowing them to express a wide range of emotions, including sadness and dissatisfaction. Whether they're grappling with family issues or navigating the challenges of school, children's poetry serves as an authentic outlet for processing their experiences," she explains.

With words and language that are naturally appropriate, the poetry captures their natural voices, and through their intuitive understanding, these young poets often incorporate elements such as repetition, imagery, and rhythm, infusing their work with a lyrical quality, according to Zhou.

She has her teenage daughter and niece review her translations, in terms of the grammar, word choice, and overall tone to ensure that they are natural and align with the authentic voice of a child.

As an art practice researcher, Zhou notes that the starting point of Kindergarten Without Walls is humble and down-to-earth. "Tang is an ordinary person whose neighborhood where the 'kindergarten' is located is not different from his own life," she says.

Zhou believes healing from personal trauma is not a solitary journey; rather, it is a collective effort that requires the support and involvement of a compassionate community. "The best part of Tang's project lies in the authentic, organic growth of the relationships between the children, families, neighbors, and the broader community," she says. "It is the spontaneous, beautiful things in people and the community that grow naturally given an opportunity, out of human need and concern," she says.

"The kindergarten is small in size, but like a plant, its roots are firmly embedded in the soil," she adds.

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COMMENT

Editorials

US criticism of China's WTO compliance falls flat as it doesn't have a leg to stand on

The United States has once again pointed an accusing finger at China for allegedly failing to comply with the norms and principles of the World Trade Organization, which, as well as being "false", as China's Ministry of Commerce immediately made clear, displays some chutzpah given the US' actions.

In a report to Congress on China's WTO compliance released on Friday, the Office of the US Trade Representative warned of the "very serious challenge" that China poses for the international trading system, claiming that the country still embraces a "State-led, nonmarket approach" to the economy and trade. China's practice, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai said, has caused "serious harm" to workers, businesses, and industries in the US and around the world.

This year's report is the 21st of its kind, but it is essentially another rinse and repeat that harps on the same old string about China's so-called exploitation of WTO loopholes and disregard of the world trade body's rules. Such allegations are contrary to the facts, given that China, as the largest developing country, has always supported the multilateral trading system and earnestly fulfilled its WTO commitments.

Since its accession to the WTO more than two decades ago, the country has continuously advanced its opening-up, firmly opposed unilateralism and protectionism, and contributed its due part to the development of economic globalization in a more open, inclusive, balanced and win-win way. All this has won the country acclaim from the overwhelming majority of WTO members.

Rather than doing harm, as the US claims, China's steady economic growth has brought tremendous benefits and opportunities to the rest of the world. Thanks to China's WTO accession, US consumers have been able to enjoy two decades of relatively inexpensive consumer goods imported from China. "Each US household saw its annual purchasing power increase by \$1,500 thanks to lower prices caused by increased trade with China from 2000 to 2007", according to a 2019 analysis by the London School of Economics. And the US-China Business Council's 2021 member survey revealed that "95 percent of respondents report that their China operations were profitable over the last year".

In comparison, the US has been counterproductive to the development of the multilateral trade system with its unilateralism and protectionism and its abuse of WTO rules. It has also paralyzed the WTO's dispute resolution mechanism after years of blocking the appointment of new judges.

The US should stop politicizing the world trade body as it is causing irreparable damage to global economic and trade ties.

West's hypocrisy paraded for public consumption

The touching words some visiting Western leaders offered a group of Ukrainian soldiers in Kyiv on Saturday, in an attempt to show their solidarity and enhance the morale of the Ukrainian military, only served to do the opposite. The frowns and doubtful looks of their listeners indicated they hoped to hear concrete plans to end the fighting rather than promises of new financial and military assistance and training that can allow them to fight "for as long as it takes", as European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen promised.

To better explain to Kyiv as well as their own people why their "generous assistance" had not yet materialized into Ukraine's victory, or even progress on the ground, after so many Ukrainian lives have been lost, the G7 leaders have tried to pass the buck to third parties.

Apart from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Iran, which were as before criticized for their support of Russia in the document issued by the G7 leaders to mark the second anniversary of the outbreak of the conflict, China notably appeared for the first time as a cause for "concern", due to its alleged material support for Russia.

"We express our concern about transfers to Russia from businesses in the People's Republic of China of dual-use materials and components for weapons and equipment for military production," the document reads. That charge is testimony to the group's rising guilt at the nightmare of attri-

tion they are prolonging in Ukraine.

China has maintained normal, legal and productive trade with the two sides of the conflict from day one of the Ukraine crisis. The G7's accusations have no validity.

The G7 leaders would do better explaining why there is no mention of India in the document, whose imports of Russian oil and gas rose markedly after the crisis began, enabling it to become a reliable reseller to the West over the past two years. The West's price capping of Russia's oil exports, aimed at reducing Moscow's energy income, has actually contributed to the tremendous profits India has been making through its buying low and selling high of Russian oil.

They are also silent on the fact that many US refineries have actually never stopped processing Russia-sourced crude oil that has been ceaselessly flowing into the US market through Indian agents, and that oil is resold to the European market at a high price in many forms of refined energy products.

Kyiv should have seen through the West's hypocrisy a long time ago, as the sanctions it tries to impose on third-party country entities for their alleged support to Moscow, with the United States' sanctions being the representative, are not to help Ukraine as it claims, but serve the West's own narrow ends.

The G7 members were well aware, from the very beginning, of the use value of the Ukraine crisis, the porous structure of their self-serving "sanctions", and the inevitability of the protraction of the crisis. But they still demand that the Ukrainians continue to fight.

Manila sabotaging consensus with its antics

Incited by the United States' attempts to muddy the waters of the South China Sea surrounding the Philippines' maritime disputes with China, some Philippine politicians seem bewitched by the illusion that Washington's support will help the Philippines gain the upper hand in the disputes. As a result, they have grown increasingly bolder and more brazen recently in testing Beijing's bottom line.

According to a spokesperson for the China Coast Guard, Chinese maritime law enforcement authorities drove away a Philippine government vessel that illegally intruded into Chinese waters in the South China Sea. BRP *Datu Sanday*, a vessel of the Philippines' Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources, intruded into waters near China's Huangyan Island on Thursday and Friday in defiance of the "repeated dissuasion and warnings" given by the CCG. It was later expelled from the waters after the Chinese maritime law enforcement agency took "necessary measures".

This was only the latest of a series of similar incidents as Manila seeks to further internationalize the historical maritime disputes, and may not be the last. The South China Sea disputes are legacies of history whose resolution calls for patient scrutiny of past and present realities as well as international laws and conventions. The Code of Conduct Beijing and the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are drafting is a constructive collective endeavor for the peaceful resolution of the territorial disputes, not only between China and the

Philippines but for all the disputes in the South China Sea.

The impressive headway made in that direction is evidence that countries in the region are fully capable of handling such legacies of history in a calm and reasonable way if left to their own devices and are capable of working together to promote regional peace and prosperity. Manila's recent interest in amplifying the tensions and their international visibility is an opportunistic attempt to fish for gains at the expense of the regional consensus that the disputes should not derail regional development.

That Manila wants to sugarcoat its provocative actions with the veneer of respectability is evidenced by the Philippine vessel operating with a heavy media presence onboard. But as the China Coast Guard spokesperson said, its response was professional and in strict accordance with law, leaving no doubt about which party is stirring up trouble. Given the historical and jurisprudential basis of Beijing's sovereignty claim to the disputed territory, no theatrics can gloss over the dirty antics Manila is staging under the US' orchestration.

Sooner or later, Manila will realize that it has little to gain, but a lot to lose by dancing to Washington's tune and that the best way out of the predicament it is putting itself in is to continue negotiating the multilateral Code of Conduct.

If Manila continues with its present approach, it will only end up poisoning the atmosphere for the peaceful resolution of the disputes. That will serve no party in the region any good.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Appliance replacement campaign can help stimulate consumption

At a recent financial conference, the top leader stressed the country should accelerate product upgrading to promote high-quality development, and guide a new round of equipment upgrading and the replacement of old consumer goods with new ones.

China's economy is now shifting from high-speed development to high-quality development, and people's desire for consumption upgrading has also become stronger. The yearning for a better life requires more abundant and diversified products supply. At the same time, the global political and economic environment is undergoing complicated and volatile changes that have not been seen in decades. In order to accelerate the construction of the new development paradigm, China should further unblock domestic circulation channels and boost domestic demand.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics show that consumption has become the main driver of China's economic growth. Therefore,

the country needs to further consolidate the recovery trend of consumption and create new consumption growth points.

In the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis, China launched a large-scale campaign to promote household appliances to enter the countryside under government subsidies. This initiative not only boosted domestic consumption, but also enabled more residents to enjoy consumption upgrading. It also played an active role in promoting China's industrial transformation and upgrading, while some enterprises achieved leapfrog development.

Backed by aggressive interest rate hikes by the US Federal Reserve last year, China's exports have encountered headwinds, making it necessary for China to initiate a new campaign to promote the replacement of old household appliances with new ones across the domestic market, to promote market vitality and strengthen consumption motivations.

In recent years, China's new energy industry has developed rapidly, becoming a major player in a number of categories. Therefore, promoting the replacement of old products with new ones is a move that suits China's industrial transformation and upgrading.

Compared with the last government-led and subsidized campaign, the replacement of old equipment with new is a government-guided and enterprises-led initiative based on market rules, which will promote more efficient dovetailing between supply and demand. However, the actual effect of some measures still needs to be improved after the lack of financial supports.

To facilitate the smooth advancement of the initiative, while trying to build a friendly business environment and provide relaxed and inclusive policy conditions for enterprises, the country should also strengthen fiscal policy intensity and provide more subsidies and support to enterprises and consumers.

— BEIJING NEWS

Now you can fly from A and B with C

Guests made a beeline for the C919 during its inaugural flight demonstration at the Singapore Airshow from Feb 20 to 25. As is the case with other major passenger jets, the C919's components come from suppliers around the world.

But with numerous interfaces — millions on the C919 alone — linking various systems such as hydraulics and avionics, it's far from just a simple assembly, which is accomplished in China. With over 2,000 wing drawings, integrated design of the fuselage, wings, pylon-mounted engines, and nearly 200 patent applications, the C919 signifies a

leap forward for China's aviation industry.

The C919 injects fresh vitality into the aviation industry, as it is expected to end the binary paradigm of A (Airbus) or B (Boeing), providing airlines worldwide with a C option, COMAC being the manufacturer of the C919. The C919, a large passenger aircraft, adopts advanced aerodynamic design, propulsion systems and materials, resulting in lower carbon emissions and higher fuel efficiency. Its advanced cockpit design effectively reduces pilot workload, while its passenger-friendly cabin design

offers a comfortable travel environment. Since successfully completing its maiden commercial flight in May last year, the C919 has transported over 110,000 passengers.

Healthy competition drives industry development. The internationalization of China's large aircraft industry endeavors to achieve win-win outcomes. For the European and US companies, while competition is a consideration, collaboration should also be contemplated to jointly expand the market and share the dividends of global aviation industry development.

— XINHUA NEWS AGENCY

What They Say

Rags-to-riches result of business acumen not frugality

Zong Qinghou, a beverage tycoon from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, died of an illness on Sunday at the age of 79. There has been much mourning at his passing as he was well-known as the founder of a company, headquartered in his hometown in the late 1980s, which later developed into the Wahaha Group, a major beverage enterprise.

He is known to the public for three things — his rags-to-riches rise, his long-term spartan lifestyle, and his commitment to boosting China's national industrial entities. Forbes ranked him, with a wealth of about \$5.9 billion, No 53 among Chinese billionaires last year.

Yet apart from that, it is also worthwhile to delve into the question about whether his entrepreneurial success can be replicated

today and what lessons policymakers can learn from his self-made business success as they try to enrich the soil for entrepreneurship.

Before winning a contract to work as a salesperson of a small school-run factory selling stationery, iced treats and soft beverages in Hangzhou in 1987, Zong worked as a traveling salesman for nearly a decade after working for 15 years on various posts in local farming communes with Grade-9 education.

His sharp business sense, which he attributed to poverty rather than the genes of the Zhejiang business community as some suggested, enabled him to recognize business opportunities at a time when the country had just initiated the transition from a planned economy to a socialist market one.

The broad space and autonomy he enjoyed as a sales representative of the factory enabled him to continuously hone his sales tactics and enlarge his network of business partners. That not only helped him accumulate the start-up funds he later used to contract the whole factory, a predecessor of the Wahaha Group, but also influenced his later inclusive and results-oriented management style, which he summed up as always trying to make complicated things simple rather than the opposite.

As he told the media, it is the spirit of adventure of his generation of entrepreneurs and their down-to-earth work style that deserve attention, rather than his frugal lifestyle, which was a personal choice.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Lin Rupeng

Young talents key to science, tech innovation

China has been advocating the need for developing new productive forces in order to promote innovation and high-quality development. Scientific research is an innovative, complex and uncertain activity that requires large amounts of resource input.

To be sure, young science and technology talents are the driving force of research and innovation. And without continuous human, material and financial resources, it is difficult to achieve breakthroughs in the field of science and technology.

Young talents need more support

First, despite the above fact, young science and technology talents are in a disadvantaged position in resource competitions for a lack of sustained support. For example, in recent years, due to the rapid increase in the number of applicants, the average funding rate for the National Natural Science Foundation's Young Scientists Fund has decreased.

The support and coverage of the basic research funds for central universities for young science and technology talents need to be further improved. And while there are few opportunities to take the lead in major, key projects and research platforms, the opportunities for young talents to take on major responsibilities are also few.

Second, there is a need to improve the academic environment for young science and technology talents. Some young talents have to do a large amount of non-research and teaching-related work, which consumes a lot of their time and energy, leaving them with less time to engage in genuine research, making it difficult for them to produce original, high-quality results.

Additionally, the allowance or salary, and resource allocation for young talents who have not obtained certain titles are relatively low. As a result, some young talents end up spending a lot of their precious time and energy in the pursuit of

The evaluation process for young talents engaged in applied research should focus on their research and development capabilities, and industrial application of their research results.

these titles, such as networking with and unnecessarily "paying respect to their seniors", making it difficult for them to focus on research.

Third, there is not enough administrative capacity for the development of young talents. To conduct serious and focused research, young talents need to engage in a great amount of preparatory work including applying for funds, procuring equipment and adding to laboratory paraphernalia. Each of these procedures requires support from the employing institutions, which is apparently in severe shortage.

Fourth, a comprehensive evaluation mechanism that encourages young talents to take up challenging research is yet to be established. For example, an increasing number of universities are implementing a pre-employment or tenured employment system for young researchers. If a young talent doesn't have enough published papers or projects, he or she may fail to get promoted as an associate professor and cannot renew contracts.

Finally, most young talents still struggle to make ends meet and thus cannot fully concentrate on research. Although young talents can meet their basic living needs from the salaries they get, only "high-end talents" who have obtained certain titles or published papers are paid decent salaries. The rest still face significant livelihood and other pressure — for example in buying or renting a house and paying for their children's education.

A problem-solving approach to boost capability of talents

To address these problems, it is necessary to focus on national strategic needs, adopt a problem-solving approach, and build a comprehensive, systematic institutional system to boost the independent capability of young talents.

In the new era, the focus should be on attracting talents from all over the world and systematically mobilizing them to build a strong country and achieve national rejuvenation.

Amid the increasingly fierce global competition in the field of science and technology, the flow of intellectual capital has accelerated. So to win the international talent competition, it is necessary to adopt a more open approach to attracting and using overseas talents, and to set up an overseas talent introduction system to meet the needs of the country.

Besides, the focus should be on building a strategic independent talent training system to boost the independent and controllable innovation capability of talents. In this regard, it is necessary to establish a mechanism for discovering young talents using big data, artificial intelligence and other information technology tools, and prepare a comprehensive list of potential talents based on their education background, work experience, teaching and research achievements, competency, development potential, teamwork and leadership.

The idea is to give young talents the option of choosing their research direction or path, providing them with adequate resource support, and helping them participate in global scientific and technological competitions to test and cultivate their research and innovation capability.

This may require the further deepening of reforms and implementing new concepts, policies and measures for talents, including boosting long-term support for young science and technology talents, granting higher amounts for research projects at all levels, offering sustained support for young talents,

implementing a "lump sum" funding management model for certain projects, and improving the "leading by competition" system for research projects.

It is also necessary to provide one-stop services for young science and technology talents. The document, issued by the Ministry of Science and Technology and other departments in 2022, to reduce the burden on young scientific researchers proposed to solve the prominent problems faced by young researchers by, among other things, increasing the opportunities for emerging talents, widening the channels for growth, conducting fewer and honest evaluations, and easing their administrative burdens. This will stimulate young talents' innovative potential and allow them to focus their attention on research.

As for universities and research institutions, they should loosen the reins on young talents, and provide them with the needed services and support including start-up funding to redress their grievances and meet their genuine needs.

Improving the evaluation and incentive system for young talents is also necessary. The evaluation process for young talents engaged in applied research should focus on their research and development capabilities, and industrial application of their research results. To retain talents, for instance, measures should be taken to provide them with a more relaxed research environment.

In order to ensure young talents realize their full potential, the authorities need to build a mechanism that values innovations and outstanding research work through actions such as promotions and salary increments, so as to allow young talents in the early stages of their careers to not worry about livelihood issues and concentrate on their research, better tap their potential and serve the country.

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Kang Bing

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Begging rackets deny help to those who really need it

I saw a beggar in his early 40s outside a hospital recently. He was kneeling down on his haunches on the sidewalk. In front of him was spread a small table-sized plastic sheet on which was printed his "miserable experience" — that his daughter was suffering from a fatal disease and he was "paralyzed" after a traffic accident.

A policeman was standing in front of the man, asking him to leave. "It's the third time we have caught you cheating. Get up, pack up your belongings and follow us to the police station for investigation," the policeman said.

Laughter broke out from the small crowd that had gathered around him when the "paralyzed" man stood up and walked to the police car. Some even cursed the man for his attempt to fool the public. I did not join them but smiled a bitter smile. Such cheating tricks have been reported by the media, and police have warned the public to not be fooled by such tricksters.

Walking away from the scene, I suddenly realized that the man was probably the first "beggar" I had seen in two to three years in Beijing or the other Chinese cities I have visited in recent years.

Nearly six decades ago when I was a kid, I once saw hundreds of beggars sleeping on the railway station square in my home city, Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on a summer night. During the day, every household in the vicinity of the railway station was "visited" by about 10 beggars who had lost their crops in floods and were forced to beg to feed their family. The households did their best to help the beggars despite struggling themselves to make ends meet.

The successful poverty eradication program and the large social relief network have prompted many people like me to question the intention of the people begging on the streets.

Two decades ago, when my son was just a few years old, I used to collect small coins and ask him to put them in a beggar's bowl. By doing so, I tried to not only help the poor people but also teach my son to be sympathetic to the poor and help the needy.

But things changed when cheaters started taking advantage of people's sympathy for the poor.

The reform and opening-up over the past four-plus decades and the national poverty eradication work in the past 10-odd years have greatly improved people's living standards in the countryside. The introduction of social insurance and medical insurance, despite being for relatively small amounts, are enough to ensure that even the poorest people have enough to eat and can access basic medical care.

Longer life expectancy and government and social support prompted many people to give up begging. With government subsidy, ranging from 400 yuan (\$55.59) to nearly 2,000 yuan and social donations, even the disabled people don't have to worry about hunger, and by doing some job which suits them, they can even live a decent life.

As for people who are homeless, disabled or live with mental illness, or those who refuse to give up begging for different reasons, the relief centers in different cities and regions are where they can go to seek help. Statistics show that the number of people helped by such centers declined drastically because of livelihood improvement.

The successful poverty eradication program and the large social relief network have prompted many people like me to question the intention of the people begging on the streets. Media reports have exposed many people who disguise themselves as disabled persons to gain sympathy and seek alms from the public — such as the case I saw outside the hospital. Media reports have also highlighted the existence of gangs running "begging rackets" by compelling the disabled or kids to beg for them. There are also reports of beggars who have become millionaires by begging.

Such stories together with police warnings have prevented many kind-hearted people from giving alms to "beggars" on the streets, not to mention that few people carry cash these days thanks to the introduction of e-payment systems such as WeChat Pay and Alipay.

As a result, authorities should put an end to fraudulent begging, as it damages public sympathy and trust, ultimately impeding genuine assistance to those in need.

Wang Xiaoguang

Time to end data falsification for better decision-making

Appropriate economic decision-making, essentially, depends on the accuracy and reliability of data. To make informed decisions, it is necessary to adhere to the principles of seeking truth, analyzing trends and solving problems based on statistics. "Truth seeking" and "trend analyzing" involve analyzing and understanding the inherent trends of events, representing positive factors and the development direction. "Problem-solving", on the other hand, entails finding solutions to burning issues.

Despite no big increase in the number of data falsification cases, the harmful effects of falsifying data can become horrendous. In particular, as data are a vital economic element, serving as both the "eyes" of economic decision-makers and the "pulse" of the wealth of enterprises and individuals, the harmful effects of data falsification are primarily manifested in three ways.

First, it severely disrupts central decision-making. Since government decisions and actions play a significant role in modern economic development, officials could take inappropriate economic decisions if data are severely distorted, leading to counterproductive economic regulations.

Second, data falsification undermines government credibility. Information and credibility are the two pillars of modern economies. As a public good, official data reflect a government's credibility, and falsification of official data causes a government to lose face and credibility, undermining market confidence.

And third, data falsification is especially unfair and harmful to directly affected regions, enterprises and individuals, as it could cause huge losses to them.

Data falsification in some regions and departments in China can be attributed to three main factors. Some people try to conceal the truth to evade responsibilities and obligations. Some others engage in painting a rosy picture of their eco-



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omic performance while concealing the negative aspects. And some manipulate data for personal gain, in order to advance their career or get specific economic benefits through official positions and data rent-seeking activities.

To enhance the credibility of official data and the scientific nature of economic decision-making, China has made various institutional arrangements. For instance, it conducts a census every five years, and has intensified the review and

approval of data since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012.

The goal is to safeguard the authenticity of data. The CPC Central Committee issued the revised regulations on Party disciplinary actions at the end of last year, explicitly making "statistical falsification" a violation of Party discipline, sending a strong signal that the Party has become increasingly strict about overall discipline enforcement and will

punish data falsification more forcefully.

However, apart from strengthening legal and Party disciplinary constraints, there is a need to reform the cadre selection process and appointment mechanism, breaking the one-sided evaluation criterion of "only numerical achievements" and putting greater emphasis on the actual performance and capabilities of leading officials.

Simultaneously, there is a need to strengthen the scientific and comprehensive nature of the cadre assessment system. This approach aims to increase the cost of illegal activities, rendering statistical falsification unprofitable. Only through such measures can the impulse for data falsification be curbed.

So to eradicate "data falsification" and improve macroeconomic decision-making and government credibility, continuous improvements in relevant systems and technical means are necessary so as to deter potential wrongdoers.

To begin with, there is a need to enhance and implement the leading officials assessment and appointment system in line with the new development concepts and high-quality development principle.

Besides, establishing a normal supervision mechanism is crucial, and it should incorporate issues such as data falsification in the inspection items of central disciplinary and national supervision departments, as well as resolutely addressing "number seeking" and statistical corruption issues in statistics departments.

In this regard, improving technical supervision procedures and means to plug the loopholes compromising the authenticity of official data, such as mandating uniform data disclosure timelines among regions, is an essential step forward.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

ROY ANTHONY ROGERS

Golden jubilee

Fifty years of friendship between China and Malaysia

The celebration of the 50th anniversary is often associated with gold, and the Chinese saying "pure gold does not fear the test of fire" describes the relationship between China and Malaysia. This is because, over the past five decades, the relationship between the two countries has experienced various challenges but remains friendly and firm, like pure gold, and it still retains its quality despite the heat of the fire. Malaysia was the first country among members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to establish diplomatic relations with China during the official visit to Beijing in 1974 of then Malaysian prime minister Tun Abdul Razak. Bilateral diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China began following the Joint Communiqué between Malaysia and China in Beijing on May 31, 1974. Since then, Malaysia has adhered to the one-China policy.

Although bilateral relations were established in 1974, at the initial stage, there were still some challenges due to the Cold War. Relations were strengthened when the travel ban to China was lifted in 1985. However, bilateral relations really started to improve after 1991, when the Cold War ended. One of the main components of China-Malaysia relations is their economic ties. Trade between Malaysia and China has grown from \$388 million in 1985 to \$203.6 billion in 2022, an increase of over 500 times in 37 years.

It is noteworthy that China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years, and Malaysia is China's second-largest trading partner among members of the Association of

It should be emphasized that the history of Malaysia-China relations is one of friendship and mutual respect. Malaysia-China relations are win-win because both countries need each other. As the Chinese say, "Gold is easy to get, but best friends are harder to find".

Southeast Asian Nations. Fifty years ago, China-Malaysia trade involved agricultural products. However, nowadays, it involves sophisticated enterprises and industries such as the East Coast Rail Line, the Kuantan Malaysia-China Industrial Park, and cooperation in the digital economy, green development and new energy. For example, Geely plans to invest \$10 billion in Malaysia for the development of the Automotive High-Technology Valley. Vehicle companies such as BYD, Chery and Great Wall Motor are also actively expanding into the Malaysian market. Telecommunications companies such as Huawei, ZTE and others are collaborating with local companies to provide better communication network services and make Malaysia a digital economic hub in Southeast Asia.

In terms of people-to-people rela-

tions, cooperation between China and Malaysia also includes education. Among them, Tsinghua University has agreed to strengthen cooperation with universities in Malaysia on the exchange of students, academics and researchers and embracing the opportunity to conduct joint research. In addition, Xiamen University already has its campus in Sepang, Selangor. It is interesting to note that Malaysian public and private universities have been the primary target for many Chinese students to further their studies, whether at the undergraduate or doctoral level.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Malaysia, China returned Malaysia's favor by sending equipment such as face masks, ventilators, test kits and sanitizers to help the Malaysian government contain the spread of the virus. Chinese medical and health experts held a video conference with medical experts from 26 hospitals in Malaysia to discuss the treatment and control of viral infections.

China-Malaysia relations also face various challenges and obstacles. Among them is the issue of overlapping claims in the South China Sea and tensions between the United States and China. On the issue of overlapping claims in the South China Sea, Malaysia is consistent with its stance that the way to a solution is through negotiation and peace based on international law and international norms. It is estimated that almost 40 to 50 percent of goods traded in the world passes through the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca, so any military conflict in the waters of the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca will bring losses to all parties. Neutrality has become the core



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

of Malaysia's foreign policy. Malaysia wants to avoid being dragged into the political arrangement of the big powers. Since its independence in 1957, Malaysia has established friendly relations with all countries. The United States under the Joe Biden administration has become more active in Southeast Asia. However, the US should refrain from continuing the policy of confrontation with China and expecting countries to choose either the US or China. Malaysia hopes the US will show leadership for common interests

and prioritize multilateralism.

This year in the Chinese zodiac is a Year of the Dragon, a mystical animal often associated with China. While the tiger is a symbol of Malaysia, this year, we will witness close cooperation between the "dragon and tiger". Although diplomatic relations between Malaysia and China only started in 1974, in terms of history, Malaysia-China relations have been intertwined for hundreds of years. It should be emphasized that the history of Malaysia-China relations is one of friendship and mutual respect.

Malaysia-China relations are win-win because both countries need each other. As the Chinese say, "Gold is easy to get, but best friends are harder to find".

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SUN CHENGHAO AND HE SIJING

Plugging the intelligence gap

As a responsible major developing country, China advocates balanced AI development and shared outcomes among all nations

Artificial intelligence is growing rapidly globally, driving technological revolutions and industrial upgrades. However, it's also important to recognize that artificial intelligence has some uncertain characteristics. While creating tremendous development opportunities for humanity and society, AI also brings about many risks, presenting multifaceted challenges to global peace and development. Against this backdrop, it has gradually become a concern of the international community to more effectively address the risks posed by AI technology. Various multilateral organizations, institutions, and governments have actively come up with concepts, initiatives and policy measures to promote the formation of a global force in AI governance.

At the multilateral level, initiatives related to AI governance are gradually on the rise. In November 2021, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization passed the first normative global framework agreement, Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence, to promote the service of AI to human society and ecosystems and prevent potential risks. In November 2023, the world's first AI Safety Summit was held in the United Kingdom, where 28 countries, including China, signed the first international declaration on AI, the Bletchley Declaration, emphasizing the strengthening of international cooperation to identify common risks and develop transnational policies for risk mitigation.

It is not difficult to find that different countries have different levels of concerns in terms of risk prevention, fairness and justice as well as personal privacy and national security protection, as a result of differences in levels of development, values, culture and national interests. However, the development trends and characteristics of AI require the construction of a more inclusive global governance framework. Under the current circumstances, there are still many challenges and difficulties to be overcome to reach a global consensus on AI governance frameworks, standards and norms.

First, AI technology is highly complex, especially in terms of

algorithms and models, the demand for big data, requirements for computing resources and hardware, the interpretation of models and transparency, the integration of interdisciplinary knowledge, the need for continuous learning and adaptability, and ethical norms. As the application of AI becomes widely popular, risks such as data privacy, unfairness and discrimination, and national security become increasingly prominent. The complexity of AI technology and its induced wide-ranging, systemic, and international risks will be one of the challenges to global governance cooperation.

Second, the global governance of AI may shift toward confrontation. The Joe Biden administration regards China and Russia as major rivals, and is especially aiming to "out-compete" China as a key strategic goal for the coming decades. The United States continues to promote the strategy of building "a small yard with high fences", in a bid to hinder China's ability to develop AI and other advanced technologies. The US also continues to rally its allies to strengthen cooperation in the field of AI, including through coordination with the European Union via the Trade and Technology Council and the formation of the Quad semiconductor partnership. Thus, global AI governance is facing a complex situation of bloc confrontation and limited cooperation in normative governance. It is also confronted with the severe challenge of avoiding falling into a zero-sum game.

Third, the diversity of stakeholders will become a factor restricting global AI governance. Currently, AI governance is still dominated by governments. China, the EU and the US have formulated and released a series of AI governance



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initiatives, plans and legislation. However, the private sector plays an indispensable role in the development of AI technology, and seeking discourse power in AI rules can enhance its influence. Multiple stakeholders centered on their interests may lead to multi-party games or even vicious competition for the dominance and discourse power in AI governance, which would severely damage the momentum of cooperation among all parties.

Fourth, it is difficult to incorporate some countries of the Global South into a unified governance framework. There are significant technological and conceptual differences between some Global

South countries and developed economies in Europe and America. AI is viewed by developing countries as an effective tool to participate in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, but developed countries hold the edge in developing this technology. Global South countries are trying to catch up with and understand cutting-edge AI technologies, while still lacking sufficient experience in formulating policies and regulations. Moreover, the Matthew effect of AI technology and its improper use will further exacerbate inequality between countries, widening the social development gap.

In the face of the multiple challenges and realities of global AI

governance, China proposes a solution under its vision to build a community with a shared future for mankind.

The Chinese government put forward the Global AI Governance Initiative during the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in October 2023, which systematically emphasizes on the development, security, and governance of AI. The summit between China and the US leaders near San Francisco in November opened a new chapter for bilateral AI cooperation. This spring, China and the US will start the first round of intergovernmental dialogue on AI to address security risks. Previously, pragmatic exchanges have been conducted at the track II level between the two countries. For example, since 2019, the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University has engaged in AI exchanges with the Brookings Institution, which yielded a series of outcomes.

Led by the vision to build a community with a shared future for mankind, Beijing has played a leading role as a responsible major country in forming an inclusive and comprehensive governance framework. Upholding the principles of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits, the nation will continue to contribute to the realization of a global vision for AI governance, mainly reflected in the following aspects.

First, China has upheld a people-centered development philosophy and the principle of developing AI for good. This philosophy integrates humanistic values and philosophical thoughts from both the East and the West, emphasizing that the development of AI technology should not only respect and protect individual rights but also aim to enhance the common well-

being of humanity. It should conform to humanity's common values of peace, development, equity, justice, democracy and freedom. China advocates the construction of a new model for global AI governance and actively supports the use of AI to aid sustainable development of human society.

Second, China maintains the principles of wide participation, consensus-based decision-making, and adopting a gradual approach. China advocates closely monitoring technological developments, effective communication among technological entities, and sharing best practices. Through dialogue and cooperation, and with full respect for the policy and practical differences among countries, China promotes active participation by multiple parties to form a broad consensus in the field of international AI governance. This approach takes into account the technological and conceptual differences among countries, balancing the reality of multiple stakeholders participating in global governance, and provides a viable solution for breaking the trend of bloc-based governance and constructing a multi-stakeholder governance system.

Third, China consistently emphasizes enhancing the representation and voice of developing countries in global AI governance, ensuring equal rights, opportunities, and rules for AI development and governance among all countries. Committed to bridging the digital divide and governance capacity gap, China recognizes that an unfair global governance framework would only widen the "intelligence gap" for developing countries. China adheres to its position as a responsible major developing country, thus advocating balanced AI development and shared outcomes among all nations.

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BUSINESS

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Experts flay US chip move

Export curbs on SMIC will hurt American firms, semiconductor market worldwide

By MA SI
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The US government's reported latest move to stop US companies from supplying critical raw materials to Chinese chip company Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp highlights once again that Washington is misusing political power to disrupt normal commercial cooperation between business entities of the two countries, which would further hurt US companies, experts said.

They were reacting to a Reuters report last week that quoted anonymous sources as saying that the US Commerce Department had sent dozens of letters to US suppliers late last year, suspending permission to sell their materials and parts to SMIC's most advanced plant known as SMIC South.

While many US companies had already stopped selling to SMIC South, the letters halted millions of dollars worth of shipments of chip-making materials and parts from at least one supplier, Entegris, Reuters reported.

Bai Ming, a researcher at the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said the reported move is the latest evidence that to contain China's technological rise, the US government is leveraging all means, regardless of how much



A view of the booth of Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corp during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

pain it will cause to US companies.

Entegris is the latest victim of such attempts. The company produces filters, gases, chemicals and products for handling wafers, the building blocks for making chips.

The Chinese mainland accounted for 16 percent of Entegris' net sales of about \$3.5 billion in fiscal 2023, the company said in its annual report, noting that recent US export regulations "have reduced our ability to sell our products in China and it is possible future regulation could further reduce demand for our products."

Bai said despite Washington's shift

in rhetoric from "decoupling" to "de-risking" in key supply chains, the US government continues to tighten its controls over chip exports to China.

The US has already adopted a string of measures to contain Chinese technology companies. Apart from levying additional tariffs on a large number of Chinese products, it has included many Chinese market entities on its export control list, and imposed sanctions on Chinese enterprises.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecommunications industry association in China, said

the intensified attempts by the US government to contain China's rise in the tech sector through export controls will hurt the interests of US companies and accelerate Chinese companies' efforts for technological breakthroughs.

Wei Shaojun, president of the integrated circuit design branch of the China Semiconductor Industry Association, said the US' strict chip restrictions are severely disrupting the development cycle of the global semiconductor industry and systematically fragmenting global chip industrial chains.

Online mini dramas making major headway

By FAN FEIFEI
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The competition in China's fast-growing online mini drama series sector is heating up as major short-video platforms have intensified efforts to offer cash incentives and data traffic support for content creators in a bid to improve the production of high-quality video content and hasten their monetization push.

Video-sharing platform Douyin, which is owned by Chinese tech heavyweight ByteDance, recently said it will invest 5 million yuan (\$694,900) in cash to support the development of premium mini dramas, with each episode lasting just two or three minutes and featuring tightly knit plots.

Douyin said more than 500 mini dramas had registered over 100 million views each by the end of 2023, with 12 such presentations garnering more than 1 billion views. The platform will collaborate with professional film and television companies, multi-channel network (MCN) agencies and individual creators in the areas of scriptwriting, content production and operations.

Compared with traditional TV series, mini dramas feature fast-paced narration, numerous plot twists, simpler overarching themes and character relationships that are closer to viewers' daily life experiences. They are gaining increasing popularity among younger viewers who yearn to find time to relax from stressful work scenarios.

Chinese short-video platform Kuaishou has announced plans to roll out more than 200 mini dramas in 2024, provide more capital and data traffic for content creators, as well as step up support for paid mini dramas in an attempt to enhance the production quality of offerings and better monetize long-term content operations.

Chen Yiyi, vice-president of Kuaishou and head of the company's culture and entertainment business, said average daily active users watching mini dramas on Kuaishou reached 270 million last year, and the number of viewers watching over 10 episodes of mini drama series daily rose 52.6 percent year-on-year to 94 million.

Meanwhile, the number of content creators on Kuaishou surpassed 100,000 by the end of 2023. The company has also launched paid mini dramas on its eponymous app, where users can choose to purchase each episode or entire dramas. The number of users who pay for dramas soared nearly 10 fold, while gross merchandise value (GMV) of paid mini dramas surged about 20-fold, it said.

China's mini drama market is expected to see robust growth over the next few years. Market consultancy iiMedia Research said revenue from the country's online mini drama industry stood at

The rapid development of mini dramas ... is conducive to enriching the content ecosystem of short-video platforms, enhancing user engagement and enticing a new breed of users."

Ma Shicong, an analyst with Beijing-based internet consultancy Analysys

37.39 billion yuan in 2023, surging 267.65 percent year-on-year. And the figure is expected to reach nearly 100.68 billion yuan in 2027.

Ma Shicong, an analyst with Beijing-based internet consultancy Analysys, said younger consumers, whose free time tends to be more fragmented and sporadic, are exhibiting great enthusiasm for mini drama series.

"The rapid development of mini dramas, which are grouped into various genres including suspense, mystery and romance, is conducive to enriching the content ecosystem of short-video platforms, enhancing user engagement and enticing a new breed of users," Ma said.

More efforts should be made to explore more diversified monetization models, including advertising, paid content and e-commerce livestreaming, Ma said, adding that further introduction of paid content will generate more profits for the mini drama sector.

Chen Jiaqi, a 27-year-old fashion magazine editor in Beijing, loves to binge-watch mini dramas in her spare time on Douyin. She said the simple storylines, funny dialogues and tightly knit plots are quite to her taste, and she is drawn in by the thrilling plots and surprise endings.

Zhang Yi, CEO and principal analyst at iiMedia Research, said the current quality of mini drama series varies considerably. "Short-video users exhibit an increasing demand for high-quality content, while the country's supervision over the mini drama industry will be gradually stricter, which will further drive the regulated and healthy development of the mini drama market."

A report from the China Internet Audio and Video Convention showed that more than half of short-video fans had watched mini dramas or variety shows that last less than three minutes, while users aged below 19 represented 57.9 percent of total short-video viewers.

Economist: China can ride out realty pressure

By LIU ZHIHUA
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China is capable of effecting more measures to boost market confidence in property developers' liquidity and credit, thereby reversing the downward pressure on the Chinese economy from real estate and further vitalizing the economy, said Xu Gao, chief economist at BOC International, during an exclusive interview with China Daily on Monday.

He said he expects both the GDP growth target for the year and the actual figure to be around 5 percent, as economic performance in 2024 will likely be better than last year's.

The 2024 GDP growth target is expected to be unveiled during the upcoming two sessions, or the annual sittings of the nation's top legislature and top political advisory body, in the first half of March.

Xu made the remarks while scotching some views expressed in Western media that China's economic growth has peaked and the

country will likely go Japan's way. In the 1990s, Japan had seen its real estate bubble burst.

"I expect the government to roll out more adjustment policy measures to safeguard traditional growth drivers, especially the real estate, to ensure the stable fundamentals of the Chinese economy," Xu said, adding he believes the Chinese economy will realize relatively high-speed growth as well as its high-quality development goals, on a solid base of stable economic fundamentals and growing new supplies from new productive forces.

"While seeking more new growth points from emerging sectors or new productive forces, the country is wise to stabilize key traditional industries, especially real estate, to stabilize demand," he said, adding such an approach also underpins the new policy tone of "establishing the new before abolishing the old," stipulated in the annual Central Economic Work Conference in December.

"Since the second half of last year, a

myriad of adjustment measures have been adopted in China to stimulate the development of the real estate industry. These included reducing purchase restrictions and lowering mortgage rates. But their effectiveness has been less than expected as they mostly targeted the demand side rather than the supply side in the real estate industry," Xu said.

"Key adjustment moves for the next stage can focus on significantly easing financing bottlenecks and increasing financing for developers, to effectively resolve credit risks facing developers and then boost market confidence to enable the industry to recover and expand," he said. Otherwise, more real estate projects will likely encounter financing and housing delivery problems.

He suggested that China should set aside special relief funds for real estate, buying stocks and bonds of key developers. Such moves will rebuild confidence of investors and homebuyers, to eventually ease liquidity stress in the industry, he said.

Xu also said China is fully capable of avoiding the kind of experiences that bedeviled Japan in the '90s, despite similar challenges like tepid demand and wavering market confidence amid lingering real estate downturn.

"China has also developed a unique development model of combining government functions with market forces well, to let the government play its positive role to the full extent when market fails to ensure long-term stable economic growth."

To tap the potential of new productive forces, China can adopt policies to support specific industries as well as ensure stable economic fundamentals so that the private sector will have stable macro conditions to expand investment, he said.

Data from the People's Bank of China showed that both China's new yuan-denominated loans and total financing to the real economy in January hit all-time highs of 4.92 trillion yuan (\$683.9 billion) and 6.5 trillion yuan, respectively.

Briefly

Commercial vehicle sales jump in January

China's commercial vehicle sales soared 79.6 percent year-on-year to 324,000 units in January, said the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. Some 289,000 trucks were sold during the period, a surge of 81.8 percent year-on-year. A total of 35,000 coaches were sold last month, an increase of 63.4 percent compared with the same period of 2023.

Privately offered funds at \$2.86 trillion

The value of China's privately offered funds stood at 20.33 trillion yuan (\$2.86 trillion) at the end of January, said the Asset Management Association of China. Equity investment funds, with a total worth of 11.07 trillion yuan, formed the largest category, followed by securities investment funds and venture investment funds. The number of registered privately offered funds had stood at 153,756 by the end of January.

XINHUA · CHINA DAILY

Gold back in favor as Gen Z buys

By ZHENG XIN
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Gold is witnessing a resurgence in popularity, with the precious metal reclaiming its allure this year, driven by the country's younger generation.

Consumption of the yellow metal, whose appeal had once waned as Chinese consumers favored diamonds and other gems, has remained robust during the Spring Festival holiday despite elevated prices.

As the world's largest precious metals market geared up for the Chinese New Year celebrations this year, gold jewelry and the Year of the Dragon gold bars have emerged as the most popular products, according to the China Gold Association.

Boosted by a series of policies aimed at stimulating consumption, the domestic consumer market has recovered steadily, with gold and silver jewelry emerging as the fastest-growing categories among various retail segments through last year, it said.

The domestic gold consumption market has shown signs of improvement since last year as China's cen-

tral bank and retail consumers alike turned to the safe-haven asset, said Zhang Yongtao, vice-president and secretary-general of the China Gold Association.

Gold jewelry processing and retail enterprises in China have also continuously innovated in the design of gold products, driving the increased demand for gold jewelry. Gold bars and coins with relatively lower premiums have also been favored by consumers seeking physical gold investments, said Zhang.

While the Spring Festival holiday has always been a peak season for gold sales, gold jewelry featuring the zodiac sign of the dragon has been especially popular this year, and the rising gold prices have not deterred consumers' purchasing enthusiasm, according to the Beijing Caishikou Department Store.

Several Chinese gold jewelers are designing various jewelry products bearing traditional Chinese cultural elements to satisfy the aesthetic needs of young consumers.

Shandong Gold Group, for example, said it has been actively engaged in exchanges and cooperation with universities, inheritors of intangible

cultural heritages, and cultural and art institutions, to better explore the integration of traditional culture with innovation in gold jewelry designs and techniques, in order to inject vitality into the gold industry.

Fashionable and lightweight gold jewelry has gained significant favor among consumers, contributing to the overall increase in gold jewelry consumption, said the association.

Young Chinese aged between 25 and 34 have become the main force of gold consumption, with their proportion at 59 percent in 2023. In the future, consumers under the age of 25 will become new major gold buyers, it said.

Gold jewelry, once considered old-fashioned, is now drawing interest from younger Chinese. Demand has been pretty decent, considering where the price is, said Nikos Kavalis, managing director at consultancy Metals Focus Ltd.

In the not-too-distant past, gold symbolized the taste of the older generations, but it is now a statement of Generation Z's identity that represents both personal style and cultural loyalty, said Wang Zhongwu, professor at the School of Phi-



A shopper looks at gold ornaments at a jewelry store in Suzhou, Jiangsu province. WANG JIANKANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

losophy and Social Development of Shandong University.

Wang Lixin, CEO of the World Gold Council (China), has said previously that the introduction of various economic stimulus measures with a focus on consumption has also contributed to the growth in purchases of gold jewelry since last year.

The country's gold consumption rose 8.78 percent year-on-year to 1,089.69 metric tons in 2023, according to the association.

Of the total, gold jewelry con-

sumption hit 706.48 tons, a year-on-year increase of 7.97 percent, while gold bars and coins touched 299.6 tons, up 15.7 percent year-on-year, it said.

Gold production, meanwhile, rose 0.84 percent year-on-year to 375.155 tons, it said.

The council believes gold output and consumption will remain in the positive territory and continue to garner attention from global investors in 2024, fueled by economic recovery and sustained purchases by the central bank.

BUSINESS

ERGO takes major step in insurance biz

Chinese market will 'continue to grow significantly', says German firm's exec

By ZHOU LANXU
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German insurance group ERGO has strengthened its commitment to the Chinese market through a new insurance brokerage joint venture.

This comes as global financial institutions expand their footprint in the domestic market to leverage its significant growth opportunities.

"China has been growing very strong on the GDP side and even stronger on the insurance side. And we also think that it (China's insurance market) will continue to grow significantly," Juergen Schmitz, CEO of ERGO China, told China Daily.

The European insurer's latest step to tap into the huge potential of China's insurance market, ERGO FESCO Insurance Brokerage Co Ltd, obtained regulatory approval to carry out the insurance brokerage business in November.

Based in Beijing, ERGO FESCO was established by ERGO and the Beijing Foreign Enterprise Human Resources Service Co Ltd or FESCO, a State-owned human resources service provider. ERGO and its subsidiary hold 66 percent of the venture's shares, while FESCO holds the rest.

As of late February, the venture has completed contracts with a range of enterprises — through which it reaches individual customers — spanning IT, finance and consulting to manufacturing and retail.

Schmitz, who is also chairman of ERGO FESCO, said the joint venture, collaborating with partners, provides comprehensive health insurance solutions that integrate the functions of insurance brokerage, health insurance third-party administrator and health management.

An insurance broker serves as an intermediary, assisting clients in selecting optimal, customized insurance policies. A third-party administrator (TPA) specializes in assisting insurance companies in direct payment, claim processing and other services. Health management services encompass expedited hospital services, health consultations and so on.

This integrated insurance solution was developed to cater to the increasingly differentiated demand of Chinese consumers, a trend that has provided opportunities for launching innovative insurance services, Schmitz said.

"They (Chinese consumers) not only want simple insurance coverage but related services such as handling of their claims," he said.

The insurance brokerage venture is part of ERGO's ongoing efforts to further enlarge its presence in China, as it completes ERGO's health insurance value chain here by adding a crucial sales component to the existing offerings that span insurance and services, Schmitz said.

In August 2023, ERGO was approved to become the majority shareholder of ERGO China Life Insurance Co Ltd, its life insurance JV in China, increasing its stake from 50 to 65 percent, as the country further opened up its insurance sector.

ERGO is among the international financial giants that are intensifying their presence in the Chinese market, experts said, contrary to a clear bias in some Western media's claims that China's economic development has peaked and lost appeal with foreign investors.

This month, Fidelity International, a global asset manager, increased the registered capital of its wholly owned mutual fund subsidiary in China by \$30 million to \$160 million, the fourth capital injection since the subsidiary's inception in 2021.

Other asset management behemoths like BlackRock and Neuberger Berman also ramped up the registered capital of their mutual fund subsidiaries in China last year.

"China's vast domestic market remains an investment destination that foreign enterprises can't afford to overlook," said Liu Chunsheng, an associate professor at the Central University of Finance and Economics.

Despite the headwinds of the US Federal Reserve's most aggressive interest rate hikes in decades, a net total of \$62.1 billion in equity-based foreign direct investment flowed into China last year, according to the State Administration of Foreign Exchange.

Schmitz said China's institutional financial opening-up, which stresses aligning domestic rules and standards with international ones, is very important for ERGO, as having the same regulatory principles will help domestic regulators and foreign financial institutions "talk the same language."

"We like the development of the Chinese insurance regulation. Sometimes this makes it a bit challenging because there are many new rules over time. But the trend is the right one because it's becoming more and more specific and also more and more adopting the principles we see from other markets."

Hao Jie, board director and general manager of FESCO, said that the JV is aiming to build a robust service capacity in its first year of operation, intending to acquire clients through the combined networks of FESCO and ERGO.

FESCO will utilize its strengths in corporate client resources and health management capabilities in the JV's development, Hao said.

The venture aligns with FESCO's strategic focus on creating a platform offering comprehensive insurance as well as health management and examination services.

Sunny prospects



Technicians of State Grid Dezhou Lingcheng Power Supply Co, a unit of State Grid Corp, check PV panels at a solar power plant in Dezhou, Shandong province. The power plant is part of a 20-megawatt solar project that utilizes local croplands during slack farming periods for solar power generation, providing additional benefits to local farmers. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Cargo is loaded onto an SF Airlines aircraft at Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport in Sichuan province. DING PING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Logistics giants enlarge footprint in Chengdu

By HUANG ZHILING and PENG CHAO in Chengdu

Global logistics companies are expanding their presence in Chengdu, as the capital of Southwest China's Sichuan province actively integrates itself into global industrial and supply chains.

International express cargo carrier DHL has nearly completed construction of its regional express transit center in Chengdu's Shuangliu district. The new facility is expected to be officially put into operation between April and May, said Wu Jinkun, operations manager of DHL Express at Chengdu port.

Wu said DHL currently handles a daily cargo import and export volume of 30 metric tons in Chengdu, mainly focusing on electronic products. "High-value products, including mobile phones, computers, tablets and chip equipment, account for more than 40 percent of our daily shipment volume," he said.

To meet the growing business demand, DHL Express China signed a cooperation agreement with the Shuangliu district government in 2022, to upgrade its port facilities at the Chengdu Airport International Express Center into a regional transit center.

Wu said the total area of the

regional transit center will exceed 4,000 square meters, and its maximum handling capacity will be around seven times the current volume of express deliveries.

The distance from the loading point of the transit center to the apron of Chengdu Shuangliu International Airport is less than 2 kilometers, and the transportation process can be completed in just over 10 minutes.

Guo Wenbin, general manager of DHL Express China's southwest region, said in a previous interview that the transit center — once operational — will become a key hub for DHL Express in the southwest region, facilitating import and export operations in the region, including Sichuan, Chongqing municipality and Guizhou province.

"As one of the earliest international express companies to establish a presence in Chengdu, we have always been optimistic about the future development prospects of the express industry in the city," Wu said.

"Chengdu's express volume exceeded 2.1 billion shipments in 2023, which has further boosted the confidence of international express enterprises like us," he added.

SF Express, another logistics services provider, opened new interna-

tional cargo routes from Chengdu to two cities in India — Chennai and Mumbai — last year, bringing the number of international all-cargo flights it operates in Chengdu to four.

Wang Zhenghui, project director of SF Express in the western China region, said the company handled more than 15,000 tons of international cargo in Chengdu last year. The goods mainly include business documents, daily necessities, electronic products and machinery accessories.

SF Express' Western Air Cargo Hub project, with a total investment of 1 billion yuan (\$139.1 million), is under construction in Shuangliu. The main construction is expected to be completed by June 2024, and it is scheduled to be put into operation in August 2025, he said.

"This project marks SF Express' fourth regional international air cargo transit center in China, following those in Beijing, Hangzhou in Zhejiang province and Shenzhen in Guangdong province," he said, adding that it will feature comprehensive functions and advanced technologies.

Wang said the project will provide fast transit to various locations in Sichuan while facilitating the transportation of goods from Sichuan to destinations worldwide.

You Pengwei, head of logistics

and industry at JLL West China, said Chengdu's advantageous industrial foundation and its position as a regional central city with strong consumer power have given international logistics companies the confidence to increase their investments in the city.

"Due to its solid foundation in industries such as electronic information and high-end manufacturing, the city's total export value of industrial products has long accounted for about 70 percent of the total international air cargo exports," he said.

In addition, as Chengdu was approved as the country's fifth port city for the import of biological products in 2020, its international freight volume is expected to see sustained growth, he added.

Chengdu handled 772,000 tons of air cargo in 2023, ranking sixth among Chinese cities, according to the city's government work report for 2024.

International freight trains departing from Chengdu have connected it with 108 cities abroad, with more than 5,000 trips made throughout last year.

Zhang Chunqi contributed to this story.

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Nestle China reaps sweet gains on demand surge

By WANG ZHUOQIONG
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Nestle China posted 2023 sales of 43.6 billion yuan (\$6.06 billion), up 4.2 percent year-on-year, driven by increased product demand and e-commerce business, alongside a surge in market shares among soluble coffee, pet foods and confectioneries, according to its 2023 financial report.

Mark Schneider, Nestle CEO, said this year the company is prioritizing volume and diversified growth with increased brand support and consumer-centric innovations spanning premiumization, affordability and nutritious options.

"We will continue to focus capital allocation on our fast-growing billionaire brands, which enables us to deliver dependable growth while enhancing brand loyalty. To drive market share gains, our key priorities are delighting consumers through differentiated offerings and focusing on superior execution," said Schneider.

In the Chinese market, Nestle Professional — which offers food service operations with ingredients, products, systems and services — was the largest growth contributor, supported by innovation and distribution expansion, said the report.

The company's culinary category has posted high single-digit growth, with increased demand for food seasoning brand Totole in out-of-home retail channels and new product launches.

The confectionery category recorded mid-single-digit growth, led by Shark wafers and Hsu Fu



Visitors check out Nestle products during the sixth China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Chi. Infant nutrition products also saw positive growth, led by NAN hypoallergenic and specialty baby formula offerings.

In the fourth quarter, Nestle China launched a new infant milk solution for its Illuma brand, which contains special prebiotics considered helpful to bolster a baby's immune system.

The company reported double-digit growth in sales of healthy aging products, attributable to the launch of N3 milk, a formulation low in lactose and rich in nutrients.

Coffee products reported low

single-digit growth, supported by ready-to-drink offerings.

Last year, Nescafe capitalized on the burgeoning trend with the debut of Nescafe Ice Roast, catering to consumers seeking a refreshing dark coffee experience.

Purina PetCare grew at a double-digit rate, backed by new product launches and strong e-commerce performance.

Zhu Danpeng, a food and drink analyst in China, said he is optimistic regarding Nestle's prospects in the Chinese market, highlighting the company's consistent innovation and product

updates, and the leverage of its expansive scale as key drivers of its potential growth.

Zhang Xiqiang, CEO of Nestle China, in a recent letter to employees, said the company is expanding into new distribution channels and markets to actively bolster its market share.

"Innovating is our primary catalyst for growth," said Zhang. "We must capitalize on opportunities in consumption and distribution channels, with a strategic focus on premiumization, scale and health, to maintain a competitive edge in the market."

BUSINESSFOCUS

Jilin's winter wonderland heating up

Tourists flocking to northeast province in droves to enjoy snowy landscapes

By ZHU WENQIAN in Beijing and LIU MINGTAI in Changchun

When it snows, Naitou, a village in Northeast China's Jilin province, becomes a fairy tale-like winter wonderland. Now the famous village near Changbai Mountain attracts travelers to enjoy snow tubing, hiking adventures and even hunting and fishing expeditions.

This winter, which marks the first complete season of ice and snow travel after China optimized its COVID-19 response measures, has seen strong growth in the number of travelers and related tourism revenue.

Like Naitou, located in the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture, a number of small villages in Jilin have become popular tourist destinations with their distinguished features, and have fueled incomes and business growth of villagers and retailers.

For instance, Naitou has actively developed rural experience tours that are integrated with Korean ethnic group folk culture, opened multiple restaurants that include performances of folk arts, and renovated village homes into bed-and-breakfast homestays with distinctive decor.

"Naitou has developed red tourism routes, built ice and snow parks and shaped a regional rural tourism chain with various projects," said Yang Lina, chairman of a homestay cooperative council in Jilin.

"The village has signed cooperation agreements with multiple travel agencies nationwide and cooperated with several online travel agencies to promote the area," Yang said.

Since December, the tourism sector in Northeast China, led by the "ice city" of Harbin — capital of Heilongjiang province — has achieved new records this winter. The travel appeal of Harbin has also driven the popularity of other cities in the region.

During the Chinese New Year break from Feb 10 to 17, booking volumes of hotels in Changchun, Jilin and Shenyang, Liaoning province, jumped over fourfold year-on-year, said Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency.

The frigid weather did little to curb tourists' enthusiasm for camping, which has become one of the most popular activities in Naitou. Visitors wear folk costumes and get to mingle with reindeer as they

gather around hotpots and bonfires.

Last winter, Naitou served some 110,000 person visits. This winter, the local ice and snow parks expanded recreational areas and added more modes of entertainment, and the local government hopes visitors can experience different Korean ethnic cultural aspects and ice and snow events via new platforms and scenarios.

In addition to winter tourism, Naitou has developed itself into a place suitable for travel during all seasons, which includes flower appreciation in spring, and fall foliage excursions.

In 2023, Changchun Longjia International Airport handled some 114,000 flights, up 15.8 percent compared with pre-pandemic levels in 2019. Meanwhile, the airport handled 15.49 million passenger trips, growing 11.1 percent over 2019. The level of recovery ranked tops among 10-million-level airports nationwide, according to the local government.

Last year, Jilin received 314 million person visits, jumping 173 percent year-on-year and reaching 126.5 percent of 2019 level. The province also achieved total tourism revenue of 527.7 billion yuan (\$73.3 billion), surging 242 percent year-on-year and exceeding 2019 figures, setting a record high, the local government said.

"This year, Jilin will build more world-class ice and snow tourism destinations and support the expansion of nine key ski resorts, as well as making investments in summer resorts. The province aims to achieve an annual tourism revenue of 600 billion yuan," said Hu Yuting, governor of Jilin province.

Since the holding of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, teenagers and youngsters in China have shown an increasing interest in skiing-related activities. Chinese people born in the 1990s and after the year 2000 are the main groups of skiers, said Nanjing, Jiangsu province-based online travel agency Tuniu.

The number of bookings for skiing-related services made by these two age groups put together accounts for 60 percent of the total of such bookings, and the number of children who have gone skiing with their parents is on the rise, Tuniu said.

Naitou, located along the border of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, had only 30



Top: Visitors from Beijing enjoy ice and snow sports in Naitou village, Northeast China's Jilin province, during this year's Spring Festival holiday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Above: A tourist showcases his catch during a winter fishing event in Chagan Lake, Jilin province, in December. ZHANG NAN / XINHUA

households back in 2017. Now, the number of households exceeds 2,000. The village is only 18 kilometers from the Changbai Mountain scenic area, and it boasts unique ecological resources.

Yang was one of a group of young people who went back to their hometowns to help contribute to the growth of ice and snow tourism in Northeast China. She returned to her hometown in 2011 to help explore local folk culture resources and develop rural tourism.

By integrating red tourism culture, Korean folk culture and local ecological resources, Yang and others have helped build Naitou into a renowned rural tourism destination. The village is now home to hot springs resorts, luxury bed-and-breakfast homestays and Changbai Mountain cultural and history exhibition halls.

"Before, the annual income of local villagers was only about 3,000 yuan, and the popularity of tourism has helped raise their incomes to

40,000 yuan annually, which has also helped with rural revitalization," Yang said.

Meanwhile, another village near Chagan Lake in Jilin, which is famous for winter-harvested fish, has become a popular tourist spot with a large number of seafood restaurants graced by beautiful village homes featuring white walls and blue tiles.

The village, Xisuo Entu, is surrounded by the lake on three sides and has integrated itself with the

“This year, Jilin will build more world-class ice and snow tourism destinations ... The province aims to achieve an annual tourism revenue of 600 billion yuan.”

Hu Yuting, governor of Jilin province

nearby views. A bus transfer station is located at the village entrance.

It is also located close to some sightseeing spots such as the local fishing and hunting culture museum, and the fishing and hunting cultural tourism festival is held in the village annually.

"Now, we have more than 80 restaurants and homestays in the village, and the daily reception of visitors could reach 20,000 person visits. With booming winter tourism, the average annual income of villagers has doubled and could reach as high as 32,000 yuan," said Duan Chunbo, an accounting clerk of the village.

The local government said it would vigorously help promote the creation of a 5A-level scenic spot designation for Chagan Lake, and develop high-quality red tourism, rural tourism, health and wellness tourism, as well as study tours in the region. It will also help promote the building of nostalgic landmarks at industrial sites and focus on developing innovative marketing models.

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National games spur robust growth of ice-snow sports, industry

HOOHOT — China's winter sports industry will receive a boost from the country's 14th National Winter Games, which opened in North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region on Feb 17.

As the nation's first comprehensive winter sports event after the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, the games feature more than 3,700 athletes in 176 events across eight sports — the largest edition in the history of the National Winter Games.

Two years after the Beijing Winter Olympics, the ripple effects of its legacy have continued to grow, fueled by the National Winter Games. This has led to improved athletic achievements, a booming winter sports industry, and the public's growing enthusiasm for ice-and-snow sports and related tourism.

"The 14th National Winter Games will further consolidate the goal of engaging 300 million people in winter sports, a goal set when Beijing won the Olympic bid in 2015. It will also serve as a drill for our athletes to sharpen the competitive edge for the 2026 Winter Olympics," said Ding Tao, an official with the General Administration of Sport.

Dream come true

Historically, Chinese tourists have preferred to spend their winter holidays in warmer climes down south. However, this year's Spring Festival saw a rise in ice-and-snow tourism, especially in Hulunbuir, the host city of the 14th National Winter Games' ice sports events.

For the first time in her life, Zhang Ruiyang from Hebei province spent her Spring Festival holiday in Hulunbuir, which is several hundred kilometers from home.

Fourteen-year-old Zhang, a fan of star speed skater Lin Xiaojun, saw her winter dream come to life in Hulunbuir. Her parents had planned an immersive experience for her and her brother, scheduling to attend the short-track speed skating competitions, which started prior to the official opening of the games.

"I've practiced short-track speed skating for a year and a half, and I really adore Lin Xiaojun. I'm very happy that my parents and my brother all accompanied me to achieve my wish of watching Lin's races on site," said Zhang.

Winter usually spans seven months in Hulunbuir, with tem-



China's 14th National Winter Games, featuring over 3,700 athletes from across the nation, officially open in Hulunbuir, North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region, on Feb 17. LIAN ZHEN / XINHUA

peratures plummeting well below -20 C, and the season is usually not an ideal time for tourism. This year, however, some scenic spots were operated for the first time in winter.

Bat Suh, a 50-year-old local herdsman, has been involved in tourism for 12 years. He describes

this winter as the busiest he has experienced. "The impact of the 14th Winter Games is very apparent. This winter, we have seen an increase in tourists, as well as many activities," he noted.

Apart from the booming winter tourism, winter sports events and activities have also spurred the

construction of infrastructure, helping better promote such sports in China.

Moreover, the frenzy of winter sports has overcome the obstacles of climate and geography, reaching the cities and towns that seldom see snow all year round.

The sports gala has also inspired Inner Mongolia to make better use of its abundant ice-and-snow resources. "We plan to develop the ice-and-snow equipment manufacturing industry in the future. We'll cooperate with universities and research institutes to build test bases for ice and snow equipment in extremely cold regions. It can also help us transform and upgrade our industries," said Xuan Mingmei, head of the Ice and Snow Industry Research Institute of Hailaer district, Hulunbuir.

Rising powerhouse

The 14th National Winter Games feature events in line with the 2026 Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics.

Cross-country skier Wang Qiang earned a gold medal with a 17.1-second lead over the runner-up in the men's 75 km skiathlon event at the National Winter Games.

To prepare for the games, Wang, who twice broke China's record in the event, had been training in Norway since last September, and continually improved by competing with top athletes around the world.

His hard work paid off, as he grabbed three golds during national cross-country skiing events last year.

Two years ago, China notched up nine golds, four silvers and two bronze medals to rank third in Beijing 2022, with the number of gold and total medals marking record highs in its Olympic Winter Games history.

Figure skating and snowboarding have also attracted more and more youngsters, further enlarging China's talent pool. The Chinese Figure Skating Association has lowered the threshold of the national level test, making it possible for beginners to take the starting level test after three to six months of training.

Data showed that the number of national-level testers saw an increase of 77.94 percent in 2023 compared to 2021.

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