

**Win-win partnership**

Belt and Road projects bear fruit in Egypt over past decade

WORLD, PAGE 6



**Simulation facility for space studies opened**

CHINA, PAGE 4



**Cultural bridge**

Student devoted to increasing allure of traditional Chinese folk music

LIFE, PAGE 16

# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中國日報 THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2024

## China, Sierra Leone vow to cement ties

Xi says two countries offer a model for Sino-African unity and cooperation

By XU WEI  
xuwei@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping pledged support to Sierra Leone on Wednesday for developing its agriculture, infrastructure and human resources, calling for stronger political mutual trust, win-win cooperation and coordination on international and regional affairs to elevate bilateral relations.

Xi hosted Sierra Leonean President Julius Maada Bio, who is making a five-day state visit to China, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing during a welcoming ceremony that included a guard of honor and a 21-gun salute.

The two leaders jointly witnessed the signing of bilateral cooperation agreements covering joint building of the Belt and Road, agriculture, economic development and implementation of the China-proposed Global Development Initiative.

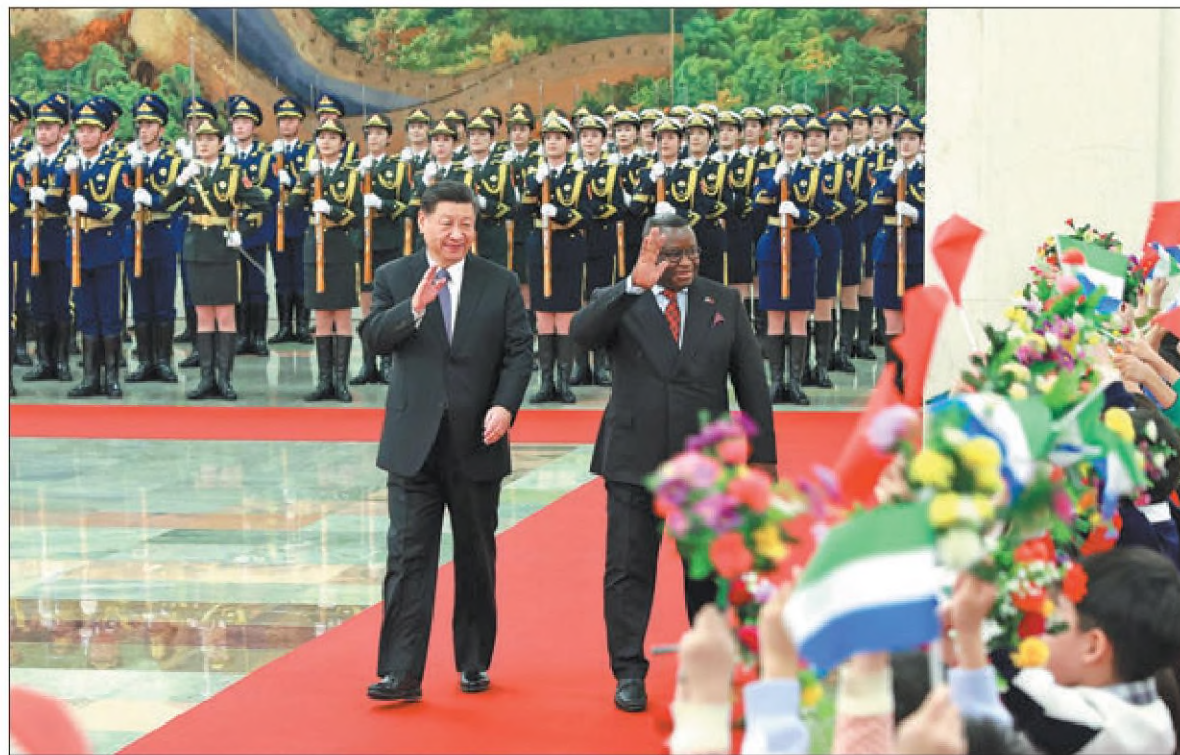
Xi told his guest that ties between the two nations "can be regarded as a model of China-Africa unity and cooperation."

"You are the first African head of state I have received this year. I believe your visit will promote the China-Sierra Leone relationship to a new level," Xi said.

China firmly supports the people of Sierra Leone in following a development path that suits their national conditions, and is willing to strengthen governance exchanges with the West African country, he said. He added that Beijing will encourage more Chinese businesses to invest in Sierra Leone.

According to the General Administration of Customs, trade between the two nations grew 23.9 percent year-on-year to \$1.63 billion in 2023. China mainly exports electromechanical products and metal products to Sierra Leone, and it imports wood as well as mineral products.

The Chinese president also appealed for stronger bilateral cooperation in United Nations



President Xi Jinping and President of Sierra Leone Julius Maada Bio acknowledge greetings during a welcoming ceremony for the visiting president at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Wednesday. WANG YE / XINHUA

Security Council affairs and joint efforts to safeguard the interests of Africa and developing countries.

Beijing welcomes Sierra Leone to actively participate in the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, he said.

Xi reaffirmed China's commitment to regarding developing unity and cooperation with African countries as an important cornerstone of its foreign policy.

China will adhere to the principle of sincerity, real results, amity and good faith, and strengthen mutual support and friendly cooperation with African countries, he said.

The nation will closely align its major initiatives for supporting industrialization, agricultural modernization and personnel training in

Africa with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and the development strategies of African countries, he said.

China is willing to work with African friends, including Sierra Leone, to successfully host this year's Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and advance China-Sierra Leone and China-Africa friendship, he added.

Bio, who is making his second state visit to China since taking office in 2018, expressed appreciation for China's support for his nation's socioeconomic development.

"The People's Republic of China has always been a reliable partner of the Republic of Sierra Leone," he said. "Sierra Leone and China share a bond that transcends geographical distance."

Sierra Leone adheres to the one-China principle, firmly supports

China in maintaining its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and supports China in safeguarding its core interests, he said.

Bio said his country is willing to learn from China's experience, strengthen bilateral cooperation in building the Belt and Road, and explore new areas of cooperation in infrastructure construction, trade, education and public services.

According to his official website, the Sierra Leonean leader will also take part in an investment roundtable, meet with key investors and attend a ceremony to confer on him an honorary doctoral degree from China University of Geosciences in Wuhan, Hubei province.

Yang Baorong, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of West-Asian and African

Studies, said there is huge potential for China and Sierra Leone, a country rich in mineral resources, to boost their bilateral cooperation.

"For Sierra Leone, strengthened cooperation with China can help the government contain rising inflation rates and create more jobs, thus ensuring its political stability," he said.

Jiang Hengkun, an associate researcher at the Institute of African Studies of Zhejiang Normal University, said the ironclad ties between China and Sierra Leone have been forged during their common fight against Ebola and COVID-19.

The visit showcased how China, as a member of the developing Global South, will continue to help African countries navigate their various risks and challenges, he said.

## Harmony core concept of Beijing's diplomacy

The Chinese government published a white paper in September titled "A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions", which presented "a new approach for international relations" and "new ideas for global governance".

Given China's relevance in the contemporary order, and the fact that no problem in the world can be effectively addressed without the nation's participation, it is necessary to understand what the Chinese government is proposing. But to allow ourselves to have a productive and open dialogue with Chinese ideas and initiatives, we need to reject the bad influence of the Cold War mentality.

As the white paper states, the objective of a community with a shared future that China has proposed "is not to replace one system or civilization with another" but to abandon "the old path of colonialism and hegemonism". That converges with the desires of the developing Global South.

China's legitimizing argument is that it has no history of colonization or aggression against other countries when it was one of the most powerful nations in the world. The philosophical premise of the Chinese proposal is the notion of harmony, a "core concept of Chinese culture", according to the document.

Chinese wisdom has centuries of intellectual accumulation and social practice, and how the Chinese deal with problems and seek solutions does not always coincide with those that Westerners are accustomed to. Being aware of this fact is essential to understanding the new Chinese diplomacy and possible misunderstandings.

During the 20th century, China dedicated itself to learning Western theories and practices to insert itself into the world institutionally, and now it is China that wants to offer its theories and practices to the world. In other words, China's new posture is accompanied by a new Chinese diplomatic code with its own semantics and pragmatics. This has become part of its repertoire in international relations and has great potential to change aspects that were well consolidated in the global diplomatic culture shaped by the West.

The moment is opportune. The white paper makes a realistic diagnosis of the current world situation: "Our world is at risk of plunging into confrontation and even war. ... The global economic recovery is sluggish, and unilateralism and protectionism are rampant." Faced with this scenario, it says, "instability, uncertainty and unpredictability are now the norm".

See *Diplomacy*, page 3

## Nation to remain key engine for global economic growth, say experts

By LIU ZHIHUA  
liuzhihua@chinadaily.com.cn

China is likely to register strong economic recovery this year, amid macroeconomic policy adjustments and unwavering reform and opening-up efforts characterized by aligning with high-standard international trade and economic rules, establishment of a national unified domestic market and the nurturing of new productive forces, said senior economists, trade experts and business leaders.

They also believe the country will remain a key growth engine for the global economy in the coming decades thanks to its sound long-term economic fundamentals, bringing golden business opportunities for foreign investors.

They made the remarks while dismissing views expressed in the Western media that suggested that China's economic prospects were worsening and that the country was reluctant to reform.

In an exclusive interview with China Daily, Justin Yifu Lin, dean

of Peking University's Institute of New Structural Economics, said that China has the potential to grow at 8 percent annually in the coming decades. The Chinese economy can grow beyond 5 percent this year, if the government adopts more proactive fiscal and monetary expansion policies to stimulate domestic investment and consumption, he said.

"China will still be the most dynamic growing economy, make the most contribution to global growth, provide driving force for

global growth and stability," said Lin, who is also vice-chairman of the Committee on Economic Affairs of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, China's top political advisory body.

The country is capable of adopting more proactive countercyclical fiscal and monetary policies, and providing more resources for private enterprises — the main players in China's foreign trade sector — to offset the impact of global economic slowdown and falling

external demand, and boost domestic investment and consumption, said Lin, who is also former senior vice-president and chief economist of the World Bank.

He said that Japan abandoned its industrial policy under external pressure and failed to achieve major breakthroughs in basic research and technologies after the late 1990s, which is exactly what China should avoid while boosting investment and productivity.

See *Growth*, page 3

## TYCOON'S RAGS-TO-RICHES STORY ECHOES COUNTRY'S RISE

Late head of Wahaha Group remembered for innovative ideas, humble lifestyle, concern for others

By WANG ZHUOQIONG  
wangzhuoqiong@chinadaily.com.cn

Bouquets of flowers have piled up in front of building No 160 at the headquarters of Hangzhou Wahaha Group, China's leading beverage maker, in tribute to its founder and chairman, Zong Qinghou, who passed away on Sunday at the age of 79. A memorial service was held for Zong in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Tuesday.

Earlier, past and present employees as well as visitors paid their respects to the business leader at the gray, six-story building, where



Zong, once China's richest man, conducted his daily work.

Among the bouquets were a pair of black cotton shoes, Zong's signature footwear, which reflected his simple and frugal lifestyle, along with a container of Wahaha AD Milk, a favorite drink of generations of consumers, especially in their childhood.

Leaders of private enterprises sent their regards. Geely Chairman Li Shufu praised Zong as a pioneer

of innovation and entrepreneurship in the private sector who was representative of modern Zhejiang merchants and their hardworking spirit.

"You have opened up new territories for the rise and development of China's food and beverage industry, and you are a model for the first generation of Zhejiang businesspeople," Li wrote.

Lei Jun, founder and CEO of the technology giant Xiaomi Corp, hailed Zong as a true legend, citing his book on marketing in 2002 as a source of inspiration for over two decades.

See *Entrepreneur*, page 2

## Precious haul



A woman carries a bag of food distributed to displaced people by the United Nations World Food Programme in Nampula, Mozambique, on Tuesday. Mozambique's government confirmed on Tuesday that tens of thousands of people have been driven from their homes amid a surge in deadly insurgent attacks in the northern part of the country since January. ALFREDO ZUNIGA / AFP

**INSIDE**  
China, Africa share similar tasks, goals  
Global Views, page 13

www.chinadailyglobal.com  
Member of ANN  
China Daily Global ©2024 All Rights Reserved  
Newsstand prices:  
US \$1 Canada C\$1  
UK £1 EU €1  
Kenya 50 Kenya Shilling  
Asia Pacific: Thailand 120  
thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat;  
Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

# PAGE TWO

From page 1

Zhou Hongyi, founder of the cybersecurity company 360 Security Group, lauded Zong's marketing theories on selling beverages as words of wisdom for his own entrepreneurial journey. "I hope his spirit can continue to encourage more Chinese entrepreneurs to work together," Zhou said.

In 2012, Zong claimed the top spot on the Forbes List for the Chinese mainland with a fortune of \$10 billion.

In 2020, he was named on the Hurun list as the richest man on the Chinese mainland. By March 2023, Zong ranked 121st on the 2023 Hurun Global Rich List with a wealth of \$15 billion.

Despite his huge fortune, Zong led a modest life and diligently worked from 7:00 am to 11:00 pm. He slept in a bedroom located in the same building as his office and was known for his calm and soft-spoken demeanor.

He preferred simple meals like porridge and noodles from the company canteen. The tycoon often traveled alone on business trips carrying a single suitcase and once went second-class on a bullet train, chatting to and befriending other passengers.

### Tough start

Born in 1945, Zong's early years were shaped by hard work at salt mines and tea farms in Zhoushan, Zhejiang. He once said the 15 years of menial labor had built his character and resilience.

Zong returned to Hangzhou in 1978, and in 1987, he took over a school shop and began selling sodas and ice creams. At about the same time he founded the Wahaha Group and teamed up with a nutrition expert at a local hospital to develop the company's first product, a nutritional drink for children.

The drink proved successful and led to the company's first major expansion. In 1991, with support from the Hangzhou government, the company acquired an indebted State-owned enterprise, the Hangzhou Canned Food Product Co.

Zong initially encountered opposition from the workers but won them over by explaining to them Wahaha's founding, how it operated and the benefits it would bring them. Three months later, the cannery began turning a profit.

Wahaha's early success was largely attributed to its sales system and vast distribution network. In 1994, when the country's credit system was still evolving, Wahaha began to foster strong financial links between producers and distributors.

The company's idea involved the upfront guarantee of money from the distributors to the producers, with the products delivered at a later date. This ensured a steady cash flow for the producers and fostered their loyalty to the distributors.

The money guarantee was usually the



"It (Wahaha) is my entire life, my dreams, values, label and purpose. It is proof of my existence in this world."

Zong Qinghou, founder and chairman of Hangzhou Wahaha Group

## Entrepreneur: Business booms in decades of reform

equivalent of 10 percent of estimated annual sales and was refunded with interest at year's end by the producers. This innovative risk-sharing model became a case study at many business schools.

### Famous brand

At its peak, Wahaha boasted more than 7,000 distributors, over 100,000 wholesalers and 5 million sales outlets across China.

"Wahaha is one of the few private enterprises in China that has been active in the consumer market since the beginning of the market economy and it is still developing rapidly," said Jason Yu, general manager of Kantar Worldpanel China, a market research firm.

"It is also one of the few Chinese brands with strong penetration, ensuring mutual benefits for the brand and distributors," he said.

Wahaha's sales model allows it to penetrate millions of retail outlets in China, including in rural areas.

This wide distribution network is unmatched by many international giants and domestic companies, giving Wahaha an edge in maintaining steady revenue flows in the era of the internet, Yu said.

In 1996, the company extended its portfolio to include bottled water, which solidified its market presence. In 2013, the company made 78.2 billion yuan (\$10.8 billion) in revenue, still the highest annual revenue recorded for China's beverage market.

"So far, no domestic beverage producer has surpassed that record," said Zhu Dapeng, a food and drink sector analyst.

Although consumers have more choices today, and many new brands achieve rapid breakthroughs using e-commerce, Wahaha has successfully maintained substantial revenue, Yu said.

Over the decades, Wahaha has also had many successful product innovations, such as Nutri-Express and AD Milk, which met the needs of consumers at the time

and reflected Zong's profound insight into the domestic consumer market, Yu said.

### Strong leader

Zong was also known for his firm leadership style, exemplified by his resoluteness during lengthy business disputes between Wahaha and French dairy giant Danone. A joint venture was formed in 1996 with the company producing bottled water and congee products and Wahaha's production doubled from 1996 to 1997.

However, a decade later, tensions arose when Danone tried to acquire a 51-percent stake in Wahaha's non-joint venture company at a net asset price of 4 billion yuan, along with the Wahaha trademark.

Zong strongly opposed the move and often faced the media alone.

In 2009, a settlement was reached and the Wahaha trademark remained with the Wahaha Group. "Let's not be afraid of international lawsuits. We don't bully others, but we also can't let others bully us," Zong said at the time.

Under his leadership, the Wahaha Group flourished. It diversified its portfolio to more than 200 products, including packaged drinking water, and protein, carbonated and tea beverages.

Since its founding 35 years ago, Wahaha has accumulated sales of 860.1 billion yuan, profits and taxes of 174 billion yuan, and tax payments of 74.2 billion yuan. The company now has 81 production bases and 187 subsidiaries in 29 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions across the country, with nearly 30,000 employees.

### Fluctuating fortunes

A State-owned investment company in Hangzhou holds 46 percent of the shares in the Wahaha Group while Zong and Wahaha's shareholding platform hold 53.2 percent.

The group operates without a deputy general manager, with production, sales, and other responsibilities handled by various directors. In 2012, Zong said in an interview that: "It (Wahaha) is my entire life, my dreams, values, label and purpose. It is proof of my existence in this world."

Last November, Zong made his final public appearance at a dealers' conference, the company's annual flagship event. Addressing attendees, he discussed his health issues and his decision to quit smoking. He added that retirement is a concept foreign to him.

In recent years, Zong's daughter Zong Fuli, 42, has emerged as a prominent figure in the company, gradually assuming key roles and responsibilities.

Since 2007, Zong Fuli, who studied in the United States from the age of 14, has managed the Hongsheng Beverage Group and invested in upstream businesses including sugar-free tea drinks and sparkling water products. In 2020, she was appointed deputy general manager of Wahaha's marketing unit.

Since 2015, Wahaha has grappled with shifting consumer behavior, tastes and the rise of online shopping. The new trend challenged its traditional distribution methods, leading to an 8-year sales decline and subsequent recovery efforts.

From 2015 to 2020, the company's performance hovered around 46 billion yuan, marking a 25 percent decrease from its peak in 2013.

In recent years, Wahaha has made efforts to diversify its interests, including the launch of shopping malls and forays into children's formula milk. It also expanded into health products and franchised Wahaha milk tea rights.

Despite a revenue decline from over 70 billion yuan in 2013 to above 50 billion yuan in 2021, Wahaha is still a formidable player in the industry and boasts revenues twice that of its closest competitor, Nongfu Spring. "Innovation of its product portfolio is still what Wahaha needs the most," said Zhu, the analyst.

### Concern for others

Social responsibility was at the top of Zong's agenda.

Having personally experienced poverty and hardship, he remained deeply connected with less fortunate people. In 2020, the company allocated 942 million yuan to build over 1,360 apartments for their employees in Shangcheng district, Hangzhou.

In 2013, during the two sessions, the annual gatherings of the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Zong, who was an NPC deputy, proposed establishing a tiered housing supply system to reduce housing costs. He also advocated exempting working-class people from paying personal income tax.

In 2020, when businesses in China encountered headwinds due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he called for enterprises to shoulder more responsibility to ensure the interests of employees are met and to keep employment steady.

Last year, he urged private enterprises to keep investing and developing their businesses to protect jobs.

Lily Xia, who operates a consultancy in Singapore for Chinese companies going overseas, said Zong had a deep impact on her personal and professional journeys. She began her career as a junior cashier with the Wahaha Group after graduating from a leading university in 1999.

When Xia won a running competition at the annual Wahaha Games, a corporate sports event, Zong presented her with a medal and gently patted her on the shoulder. "Keep going. You have great potential," he said. His words gave the young woman newfound confidence.

"He is a father to all of us, a guiding light," Xia said. "His sincerity, diligent work ethic and humble demeanor are inspirations for us as employees."

After four years with Wahaha, Xia was able to buy her first apartment in Hangzhou and pay for her MBA tuition fees in Singapore.

In 2012, Xia completed her overseas studies and later returned to work for Zong for a second time helping expand the group's international business.

Zong's real legacy was his ability to impart knowledge and values to his employees, teach them the importance of hard work and help others achieve their dreams, Xia said.

Ren Weifeng, a former secretary of Zong, said in a WeChat post that the businessman diligently looked at all the reports given to him. "Every night at nine, documents and reports would be printed out for him. With a pen, a pack of cigarettes and a cup of tea, he would review all the reports, making notes until midnight. The next morning, all departments would carry out their work according to his instructions. He did this every day," wrote Ren.



**Left:** The Wahaha Group's rise mirrored strong growth nationwide, such as at this electronics factory in Dongguan, Guangdong province, where workers inspect computer hard drives on Sept 3, 2009. **FORCE**  
**Below:** Customers scramble to buy clothes at the Beijing Exhibition Center in 1983. **WANG WENLAN / CHINA DAILY**

**Above:** Two customers are shown goods at a jeweler's shop in Isetan department store on Huaihai Road in Shanghai, Oct 1, 1995. **GERHARD JOREN / GETTY IMAGES**  
**Below:** A customer manager receives orders from retail investors who flocked to the Beijing Stock Exchange's Xiaoxitian branch on June 25, 1999. **LU BEIFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY**

**Above:** People crowd the hall of the Wuhan Central Department Store on Feb 5, 1988, to purchase televisions. **ZHOU GUOQIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY**  
**Right:** A worker checks the quality of bottled water on a production line at a branch company of the Wahaha Group on Feb 15, 2017. **ZHANG GUORONG / FOR CHINA DAILY**

## TOP NEWS

## Experts hail policymakers' support for finance sector

Moves seen as conducive to long-term stability of A-share market

By SHI JING in Shanghai  
shijing@chinadaily.com.cn

The importance attached by China's policymakers to the financial sector, which can be seen from capital injections into the stock market and efforts to better balance market innovation and regulation, is conducive to the long-term stability of the A-share market and the high-quality development of public companies, said experts.

Their comments echo a recent speech made by Xi Jinping, general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, in which he stressed upholding the fundamental principle of finance serving the real economy.

A diversified and professional system of financial products and services should be built, and market-oriented financial innovation and development must be constantly promoted under the rule of law, he said.

Xi made the remarks at the

opening ceremony of a study session attended by provincial and ministerial-level officials on Jan 16, themed on promoting high-quality financial development.

In a note to its clients circulated on Monday, analysts from world-leading bank group UBS estimated that the net capital inflow into the A-share market made by the "national team", such as Central Huijin, an arm of China's sovereign wealth fund, may have exceeded 410 billion yuan (\$57 billion) from the beginning of this year to Friday. Purchases of exchange-traded funds are the major source of capital inflow.

As a long-term investor, the "national team" is "very unlikely to reduce holdings in the near future", wrote UBS analysts. Compared to the 1.24-trillion-yuan "national team" holdings for A shares at the end of the third quarter of 2015, a historic level, there is still potential for it to increase its A-share exposure

under extreme conditions, they said.

The benchmark Shanghai Composite Index shed 1.91 percent on Wednesday and the Shenzhen Component Index closed 2.4 percent lower. But the trading volume at the Shanghai and Shenzhen bourses exceeded 1.3 trillion yuan, up 35 percent from a day earlier.

Analysts from Shanghai-based financial services provider Noah Holdings find this volatility reasonable, as the A-share market rebounded recently.

The Shanghai Composite Index has surged nearly 4.5 percent since trading resumed after the Spring Festival holiday on Feb 19, mainly boosted by better-than-expected consumption data in the Chinese New Year, improving market liquidity and the artificial intelligence boom.

While fluctuations may not be avoided, it can be said that the A-share market is gradually bottoming out amid a marginal

improvement in companies' profitability, they said.

More important, the China Securities Regulatory Commission has responded in a timely manner to investors' concerns over corporate governance, returns to shareholders and reform of the trading mechanism.

Investors' outlook and their risk appetite, which were the major factors dragging down indexes in the previous months, have improved significantly, they added.

One example raised by the Noah Holdings analysts is the tighter grip over quant trading, a relatively novel trading method using mathematical models and programs to replace human beings to analyze stock prices and make investment decisions.

In the announcements simultaneously released by the Shanghai and Shenzhen bourses on Feb 20, the two exchanges said they will strengthen the monitoring and analysis of quantitative trading, especially high-frequency trading, in terms of mechanism, market entry, trading activities, information and institutions.

Quantitative trading made by northbound investors — those who purchase A shares via the stock connect programs linking the Shanghai, Shenzhen and Hong Kong exchanges, will be included in the reporting-based quant trading mechanism, according to the exchanges' announcements.

## US students impressed ahead of trip to China

By RENALI LI in Los Angeles  
renali@chinadailyusa.com

Before traveling to China next month, a group of students from the United States had a chance to experience Chinese culture — from trying calligraphy and making dumplings to applying Peking Opera makeup and learning about the Year of the Dragon — at the Chinese Consulate General in Los Angeles on Saturday.

They are among the 50,000 young people from the US whom China will invite to take part in exchange and study programs in the country over the next five years.

About 150 students from the Vaughn Next Century Learning Center and the International Studies Learning Center, both in the Los Angeles area, attended the "Perceiving China" event at the consulate.

When Michael Sosa, a high school senior at Vaughn Next Century, showed the audience his calligraphy rendition of the Chinese character for dragon, he said he would love to further pursue calligraphy.

"I always loved this style of writing; it's truly an art form and incredibly beautiful," Sosa told China Daily. "These experiences have refined me as a person, and it's truly exciting to share them with others, because then more people can become aware of these beautiful cultural experiences and traditions."

Sosa is one of 20 students who will visit China next month as part of Vaughn Next Century's international student exchange programs.

"I am very excited for this upcoming trip," Sosa said. "I'm looking forward to learning a lot about this important experience, as we don't really know much about it in American school systems."

Steve Holle, board president of Vaughn Next Century, said the school has developed a long-standing partnership with China. Before the pandemic, it regularly sent students to live with Chinese families and attend local schools, while also hosting Chinese students at Vaughn and arranging for them to live with US families.

During the exchange trip between Vaughn and its sister school in China, the US students will spend five days in Beijing and three days in Shanghai before returning home on March 22.

"This is the first trip we've initiated for the exchange program after

the pandemic, and we're looking forward to hosting the Chinese children," Holle said.

He said he believes that international exchanges can broaden the students' vision and improve mutual understanding between the US and China.

"Our American students can learn so much about China's history, art and everything. This is the way of education that you're learning from both China and the US," he said.

Yvonne Chan, founding principal of the Vaughn Next Century Learning Center, said that from 2012 until the COVID-19 outbreak, groups of Chinese students from Wuhan in Hubei province and Guangzhou in Guangdong province, as well as Shanghai and Beijing, visited the center for cultural exchanges and to experience studying in the US. They were warmly welcomed by their US peers.

"As an international public school ourselves, this exchange promises to be enriching. We eagerly anticipate Chinese students' visit here in August. Through this collaboration, we learn from each other, bridging the American dream with the China dream and aspiring to create the best global vision," Chan said.

Guo Shaochun, the Chinese consul general in Los Angeles, encouraged the students to experience riding on high-speed trains, savor Chinese cuisine, immerse themselves in Chinese culture and make friends with young Chinese people.

"I encourage you to listen to China with your own ears, observe China with your own eyes and measure China with your own footsteps," Guo said. "When you come back, please share your China stories with your friends."

The consul general's wife, Wang Wei, introduced Spring Festival customs and facts about the Year of the Dragon.

The students were impressed by the richness of Chinese culture.

Samantha Chan, a student at Vaughn, said it is important to recognize the differences among people from different countries.

"It's very exciting to learn about new cultures and diversify our perspectives. I'm hoping to learn a lot about food, culture, the way people behave and how it contrasts with here in America," she said. "I would definitely love to share my experiences when I go to China and when I come back."

## Learning by ear

A doctor teaches children how to do ear exercises on Wednesday at a kindergarten in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu province. An event was held to help children foster the habit of protecting their ears and welcome the upcoming International Ear Care Day, which falls on March 3.

SHI YUCHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY



## Diplomacy: Silk Road spirit inspiring

From page 1

The environment for global cooperation needs to be improved. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Risks Report 2024, almost two-thirds of nearly 1,500 survey respondents, including academics, businesspeople and government representatives, said the world would experience a stormy or turbulent period.

"Over the next decade, as dissatisfaction with the continued dominance of the Global North grows, an evolving set of states will seek a more pivotal influence on the global stage across multiple domains," the report said. After all, countries in the Global North practice selective multilateralism, excluding the Global South from development benefits.

According to the World Inequality Report, produced by the World Inequality Lab in 2021, the poorest 50 percent in the world own only 2 percent of the world's wealth (in purchasing power parity), while the richest 10 percent own 76 percent of the global wealth. Given this situation, it is not surprising that people from the Global South demand reforms to the current international order.

The world needs to talk about the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, which is an example of a new approach to international relations that is having concrete and positive impacts on the economies of participating countries. However, it is more than that.

The spirit of the Silk Road evokes openness to the circulation of new ideas and knowledge. It is no

coincidence that among the eight significant steps that China will take to support the joint pursuit of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation, announced by President Xi Jinping at the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, there are those to support people-to-people exchanges. These include the Silk Road International League of Theaters, the Silk Road International Arts Festival, the International Alliance of Museums of the Silk Road, the Silk Road International Alliance of Art Museums, the Silk Road International Library Alliance and the International Tourism Alliance of Silk Road Cities.

Why are these initiatives essential?

At a time when the Global North is haunting the world with wars,

xenophobia, internal divisions and the rise of an extreme right, China is developing a peaceful and development-oriented foreign policy with a series of initiatives — such as the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, in addition to the BRI. This could mean the emergence of what I call a new enlightenment multilateralism, in which science, culture and people-to-people ties involving different countries, no matter the political or economic system they have chosen for their societies, are seen as a treasure of humanity and not as a threat.

The author is a senior visiting research fellow at Peking University's Institute for Global Cooperation and Understanding and professor of international law at Fluminense Federal University in Brazil. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Students from the United States display their crafts during an open day event held by the Chinese Consulate General in Los Angeles on Saturday. RENALI LI / CHINA DAILY

## Growth: Green, digital upgrades of industrial, supply chains on track

From page 1

The economist said that China is unlikely to experience what Japan did as long as it promotes technological innovations and industrial upgrades and creates more investment opportunities for enterprises.

Wei Jianguo, former vice-minister of commerce, said that China is expected to announce more measures to deepen reforms and expand high-level opening-up during the upcoming two sessions, the annual gatherings of the nation's top legislative and political advisory bodies, to boost the confidence of all enterprises and fuel economic growth.

"Key measures are expected to include those accelerating the establishment of the unified domestic market, facilitating the development of new productive forces and enhancing the talent education system," he said. With innovation leading, new productive forces mean advanced produc-

tivity freed from traditional economic growth models.

He called for new policies to remove invisible barriers to regional markets and improve logistics efficiency while reducing the cost to form a unified market in China, which he said should be aligned with high-level international standards and encourage fair and full competition. This will provide a more enabling business climate for both domestic and foreign enterprises.

He said that China is on a fast track to upgrade industrial and supply chains with green, digital and intelligent transformations, as it has prioritized nurturing new productive forces. The key is to establish as soon as possible a unified and open technology factor market with orderly competition, complete systems and sound governance, he added.

"The consumption boom during the recent Spring Festival holiday demonstrated the resilience of the

Chinese economy. Its capability to attract foreign investors, especially in the high-end and green sectors, is set to increase as the country's economic recovery is picking up steam, while it continues to downsize the negative list for foreign investment and promotes high-quality development," Wei said.

Tian Xuan, vice-dean of the Tsinghua University PBC School of Finance, said that China's fast economic expansion with an average annual growth rate of 9.9 percent over the past three decades was a miracle. However, it is normal that a large economy such as China will not always register such high growth rates.

"China's growth rate last year — 5.2 percent — already beat many economies far smaller than it," Tian said.

Tian said he expects the Chinese economy to expand by 5 percent this year, as the scarring effect of the COVID-19 pandemic further fades and policy measures aimed

at boosting confidence, supporting the private economy and stabilizing the real estate sector deliver more solid effects.

He said the country has ample room for macroeconomic maneuver, including adopting more expansionary fiscal and monetary policies.

"It is true that quite a group of local governments and enterprises, especially property developers, are burdened with debt, but the central government's debt is quite low compared with international standards, leaving enough room for China to take on more central government debt and generate demand via government investment," said Tian, who is also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature.

"Balance sheet expansion of the central bank — that is, buying more assets — can also be an option for China to stabilize the capital market," he said, adding that the start of drafting a law on promoting the

private economy will also bolster the sector's confidence and spur private enterprises' contributions to the overall economy in terms of innovations, employment and tax incomes.

Xu Gao, chief economist at BOC International, said that China's economic performance in 2024 will likely be better than that of last year.

"The government is likely to roll out more policy measures to safeguard traditional growth drivers, especially real estate, to ensure the stable fundamentals of the Chinese economy," Xu said, adding that 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 emerging new productive forces.

Xu also said China is fully capable of avoiding the pitfalls faced by Japan, because China is much better off than the Japan of the 1990s in terms of macroeconomic

maneuver capability and policy adjustment room, despite similar challenges like tepid demand and wavering market confidence amid lingering real estate downturn.

Multinational companies have recently reiterated their confidence in the Chinese economy and their development prospects in the country.

Marc Horn, president of Merck China, said that in 2024, the company will continue to expand its footprint in China and seize the vast opportunities that lie ahead.

"As a multinational company that operates in more than 10 cities in China, Merck benefits from China's significant advancements in streamlined administrative procedures, market access expansion and intellectual property protection, all of which have led to a more open and vibrant Chinese market," he said.

"In the mid-and-long run, I am optimistic that China's economy will largely benefit from the current ongoing economic reforms, which targets a Chinese path to modernization driven by industrial upgrading, high-tech development, and green initiatives," he added.

## CHINA

## Suspected telecom fraudsters transferred from Laos

By YANG ZEKUN  
yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

The Ministry of Public Security announced on Wednesday that 268 telecom fraud suspects were recently transferred to China from Laos.

The suspects were involved in more than 1,570 cases across multiple regions nationwide. Among them, eight were suspected of being masterminds behind the scenes, and 54 were suspected of being key organizers of fraud groups. The cases are under further investigation, the ministry said.

In September, law enforcement authorities in Laos transferred 179 telecom fraud suspects to China, helping resolve about 270 major transnational telecom fraud cases, according to the ministry.

A statement from the ministry said that several significant telecom fraud cases have occurred in the provinces of Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Fujian and other places since last year. The ministry listed the cases for special oversight and organized local public security organs to conduct in-depth analysis and investigation.

The police found that multiple transnational telecom network groups operating in Laos were linked to over a thousand cases.

## 268 suspects

in telecom frauds were recently transferred to China from Laos, including eight suspected of being masterminds behind the scenes.

In January, the ministry dispatched a working group composed of police officers from public security organs in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Hunan, Guangdong, Chongqing and other places to Laos to engage in law enforcement cooperation. With support and coordination from China's embassy in Laos, significant progress was made, it said.

On Jan 21, law enforcement authorities in Laos, with the support of the working group, raided multiple fraud dens in Laos, arresting 154 suspects involved in fraud and seizing over 2,000 mobile phones and more than 400 computers.

Subsequently, based on leads provided by the working group, police in Laos apprehended another 114 suspects involved in fraud in Vientiane and Luang Prabang.

The 268 criminal suspects and related physical evidence were transferred to China through the Xishuangbanna border port in Yunnan province.

An officer from the ministry said public security departments have continued to intensify efforts to combat transnational telecom fraud crimes.

While achieving significant victories in cracking down on telecom fraud operations based in northern Myanmar, the ministry has also dispatched working groups to the Philippines, Cambodia, Laos, the United Arab Emirates and other countries for international law enforcement cooperation.

After multiple crackdowns, a large number of suspects involved in such crimes have been apprehended. Public security departments will continue to deepen law enforcement cooperation with other countries and regions, and resolutely curb transnational telecom fraud, the officer said.

According to the ministry, law enforcement authorities in Myanmar transferred over 44,000 telecom fraud suspects to China over the past year, including 171 backbone members of fraud groups and 2,908 people wanted by Chinese police.

## Dharma debate



Monks participate in the final dharma debating exam for the Geshe Lharampa degree — the highest academic degree of Tibetan Buddhism — at Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, Xizang autonomous region, on Wednesday. Twelve monks passed the annual exam and were accredited as Geshe Lharampas.

LI LIN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Patrols near Kinmen 'beyond reproach'

Coast guard's actions fully justified following recent maritime incident

By ZHANG YI  
zhangyi1@chinadaily.com.cn

A Chinese mainland spokeswoman said on Wednesday that its coast guard patrols in waters near the Kinmen islands, which are administered by Taiwan, were beyond reproach, dismissing complaints that the boarding of a Taiwan tourist boat had caused panic.

The mainland's coast guard began regular patrols this month around the islands, which face Xiamen and Quanzhou in Fujian province, following a deadly collision between a mainland fishing boat and a patrol vessel from Taiwan earlier in the month.

The fishing boat from the mainland was forcefully driven into waters near Kinmen on Feb 14 by Taiwan authorities, who claimed the boat had entered a "restricted" area, causing all four people on board to fall into the sea and resulting in two fatalities.

On Wednesday, Zhu Fenglian, spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, denied claims that mainland coast guard personnel boarding a Taiwan tourist vessel for inspection on Feb 19 caused panic and fear among many tourists.

She said the coast guard had been carrying out duties in its own

waters, maintaining normal order, and ensuring the safety of fishermen and tourists' lives and property in an open and transparent manner, which was beyond reproach.

"Taiwan is part of China, she said, with the waters off Xiamen and Kinmen having traditionally been fishing grounds for fishermen from both sides, and there was no such thing as "prohibited waters" as claimed by the island.

Zhu said the fundamental reason causing concern among people on both sides of the Taiwan Strait is that the Democratic Progressive Party authorities in Taiwan, for political gain, refuse to acknowledge the 1992 Consensus, which embodies the one-China principle.

"They are inciting anti-mainland sentiments, stoking cross-strait confrontation and tension," she said, urging Taiwan to promptly disclose the truth.

Li Peng, head of the Graduate Institute for Taiwan Studies at Xiamen University, said that it's reasonable and lawful for the mainland to intensify its regular law enforcement patrols in the waters near Xiamen and Kinmen.

The waters near Xiamen and Kinmen are part of China's internal waters, and both the mainland's coast guard and its fishery

authority have the responsibility and obligation to maintain the normal order of the waters, and protect legitimate rights and interests, including those of Taiwan fishermen, to prevent a tragedy from happening again, Li said.

The normalization of law enforcement patrols by the mainland is also an exercise of administrative jurisdiction and law enforcement in the waters, demonstrating the principle that both sides of the Strait belong to one China through practical actions, he said.

Taiwan authorities can only calm the indignation of compatriots on both sides by promptly disclosing the truth about the deadly collision, severely punishing those responsible, meeting the reasonable demands of the victims' families, and solemnly apologizing to them, he added.

Li said Taiwan should strengthen the management of its so-called patrol activities and enhance the restraint of relevant personnel to ensure that similar incidents do not occur in the future.

He said that, fundamentally, the DPP authorities need to adjust their hostile attitude toward the mainland, change their separatist "Taiwan independence" thinking, and recognize that compatriots on both sides are one family and belong to one country, a fact that cannot be changed by anyone or any force.

## Nation opens first simulated environment for space research

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin  
zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

China's first Space Environment Simulation and Research Infrastructure facility passed national-level acceptance review and officially began operations on Tuesday in Harbin, Heilongjiang province.

Developed by the Harbin Institute of Technology and the China Aerospace Science and Technology Corporation, SESRI is China's first large-scale scientific facility in the aerospace field, China Central Television reported on Wednesday.

SESRI will focus on addressing fundamental scientific and technological issues in a large research base for comprehensive space environments, spacecraft, life-forms and plasma interactions.

Referred to as the "ground space station", the ground-based facility is capable of simulating nine major space environmental factors — vacuums, high and low temperatures, charged particles, electromagnetic radiation, space dust, plasma, weak magnetic fields, neutral gases and microgravity.

Covering an area around the size of 50 soccer fields, it can be tailored to specific environmental factors based on scientific and engineering needs, allowing for multiple repetitions without being constrained by time and space, which enables the creation of safer and more convenient experimental conditions and research methods.

"It means that many experiments that previously required space travel can now be conducted on the ground," Li Liyi, deputy commander in chief of the project and head of the Institute of Space Environment and Material Science at Harbin Institute of Technology told Xinhua News Agency.

"Building such a basic scientific research platform that resembles the real cosmic space environment

is akin to bringing a space station to Earth.

"The facility is to ensure the safe operation of our country's spacecraft in orbit, support long-term human habitation, and enhance human capabilities in dealing with special and extreme space environments. It is now able to operate stably. Based on this research platform, we will be able to do more work in related research areas and provide research environments and conditions for scientists nationwide and worldwide in the future."

It took 18 years to finish the development of the project from initial discussions to official opening.

It began trial operation last year and has already served several domestic and international users, supporting the development of a variety of aerospace electronic components in China and the implementation of a series of major national aerospace missions, achieving several landmark results.

"The platform holds great importance to China in facilitating major breakthroughs in scientific and technological innovation, industrial transformation and upgrading, and the cultivation of highly skilled talent," said Han Jiecai, president of the Harbin Institute of Technology and an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

"We will continuously optimize the technical indicators of the facility, improve its scientific level, and promote scientific research and exploration based on the facility."

"We will strive to reveal more profound scientific laws, accelerate the formation of more independent intellectual property rights, and cultivate more world-class scientific and technological talent, making new and greater contributions to the significant leap of China from a major space power to a strong space power."

## Rare sight



People wearing tinted glasses fill in colors to experience the visual impairment of retinitis pigmentosa patients at Huashan Hospital in Shanghai on Wednesday. The hospital held an event to enhance public awareness of rare diseases ahead of Rare Disease Day, which falls on the last day of February. LIU YING / XINHUA

## Subsidies improve access to assistive devices for disabled, seniors

By LI LEI  
lilei@chinadaily.com.cn

Lozang Dawa, who lost his left leg in a car crash in 2016, never thought about getting a prosthetic leg until recently.

The 32-year-old, who lives in a rural part of Lhasa, capital of Xizang autonomous region, said he did not dare learn what one cost, fearing that only being able to dream about it would add to his family's financial strains.

"I was overwhelmed with grief and a sense of self-abasement after the accident," he said, adding that he used to be his family's sole breadwinner, working as a porter with a logistics company, but his younger sisters had since taken over that role.

Earlier this year, Lozang Dawa became one of the first beneficiaries of a regionwide program to compensate people for the full cost of up to 140 assistive items, ranging from hearing aids and wheelchairs to digital solutions such as screen-reading software.

In the course of a week, the ethnic Tibetan registered for the program, was measured and joined a rehabilitation training session for poten-

tial prosthetic leg users. Once it was fitted, his newfound ease of movement quickly helped him land a job with a local internet service provider that is expanding rapidly as China bolsters digital infrastructure in remote areas.

"My job abates the financial burden, and it also makes me more confident, independent," he said.

The China Disabled Persons' Federation said this month that the Xizang program is experimenting with a trial period to provide full coverage for 140 types of devices that fall into six disability categories, making Xizang the last provincial-level jurisdiction on the Chinese mainland to subsidize assistive devices. Such products are widely viewed as crucial in helping disabled people and older adults navigate various degrees of physical dysfunction and lead independent, dignified lives.

The federation said disabled individuals with Xizang hukou — residency documents — are eligible to apply for the subsidy. Residents age 65 and older, who often have various degrees of disability but do not hold certificates issued to disabled people, can also apply.

According to the World Health Organization, more than 2.5 billion

people worldwide need one or more assistive products, and with an aging global population and a rise in chronic diseases, an estimated 3.5 billion people will need them by 2050. But the WHO said that in many countries most people in need do not have access to such products.

China has an estimated 85 million disabled people who are prone to poverty due to limited employment opportunities, and about 40 million seniors wrestle with some form of physical dysfunction, according to government data.

The subsidy was first rolled out in Shanghai in 2003, with Beijing following suit in 2010. Between 2016 and 2020, a crucial period for the national antipoverty campaign, nine provincial-level jurisdictions began to offer subsidies, and the rest of the country raced to roll out such programs in the years that followed.

With the exception of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, jurisdictions have formulated catalogs of assistive devices eligible for compensation, and the compensation prioritizes those with financial difficulties, such as recipients of subsistence allowances and the jobless.

The lack of a list in Inner Mongo-

lia means that applications there must be verified on a case-by-case basis, which takes longer.

Fourteen jurisdictions, including Tianjin, and the provinces of Shanxi, Jilin and Jiangsu, provide full coverage to listed products.

Beneficiaries said such devices are crucial in helping them improve their quality of life, increase their independence, and enhance their ability to participate in various activities at home, at work, and in the community.

Liu Jian, 40, was diagnosed as being deaf at age 3, a possible outcome of a serious allergic reaction involving penicillin. His working-class parents wanted to buy him a hearing aid but could not afford one because it cost about 10 times his father's monthly salary.

An early beneficiary of the subsidy, he said the rolling out of the policy had eased the financial stress. Hearing aids now cost about 8,000 yuan (\$1,200) and they need to be updated every few years.

"Without the policy, the financial pressure would be enormous," Liu said. "But without a hearing aid, I would have problems making phone calls."

In recent years, jurisdictions

including Beijing and Shaanxi province have unveiled websites where applicants can browse products and place orders, with prices reduced by the subsidy. That saves buyers the trouble of paying full price upfront and claiming compensation later.

Guo Yuanquan, a Beijing resident who is paralyzed from the waist down, spent 30,000 yuan in 2018 on a sports wheelchair. The 39-year-old, who now works for a nonprofit group, paid the full price because such wheelchairs were not included in the catalog at the time.

The website now serves as a showcase of the latest technologies, and she browses it occasionally to check for updated versions of sports wheelchairs.

"I have been following a sports wheelchair listed at 10,000 yuan on the website," Guo said. "That is about 3,000 yuan cheaper than if I buy it elsewhere."

She said most brand-name products on the website were listed at steeply discounted prices as a result of negotiations between the authorities and manufacturers.

Yan Zhongqian contributed to this story.

## CHINA

## Police couple guard border at unique base

Xu Naichao and Li Wenna endure harsh conditions while serving at station built for them in village in Inner Mongolia

By YUAN HUI in Hohhot and ZHOU HUIYING

Since the first couple's border police station in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region was established two years ago, Xu Naichao and Li Wenna have been working together in the building in Tsagaanadgai village.

The village is part of Yingen township in Alshaa Left Banner, capital of Alshaa League.

Xu, 33, a border police officer of the Alshaa Border Management Detachment, and his wife Li, 35, who was an auxiliary police officer at the Alshaa Left Banner Public Security Bureau, are now responsible for managing a 3,145-square-kilometer border area and a 103-km border line, as well as providing security and voluntary services to the local residents.

Tsagaanadgai, a small, remote village 300 km from downtown Alshaa Left Banner, has about 180 residents.

Due to the harsh natural environment in the area, many young people have left it to seek a better life. Most of those who remain are the older generation of farmers and herders, guarding their own pastures and making their living mainly by raising camels and growing traditional Chinese medicinal herbs.

"The herders are very scattered," said Erentai, head of the Yingen police station. "The distance between each family is at least 20 km, and some are more than 100 km apart."

In early 2022, the detachment decided to establish a police station in the border area, and Xu was the first to sign up.

When Li got the news, she decided to support her husband's pursuit of career advancement, but also worried that this would further reduce the time they could spend together.

She then considered whether she should apply to work with a traffic police team closer to the police station.



Married police officers Xu Naichao (right) and Li Wenna tend two lambs while visiting a herder's home in Tsagaanadgai village in Alshaa Left Banner, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"When we learned about the young couple's situation, we had the idea of creating a couple's police station," said Chen Xiaorui, director of the detachment. "Through coordination with the local political and legal committee, Xu and Li were jointly assigned to the station."

The station opened on Feb 27, 2022. It is a brick-and-tile house with five rooms that was once a rest station for herders and passing truck drivers.

Though a native of rugged Alshaa, Li said the living conditions

at the station were harsher than she expected.

"There is no constant supply of water and electricity," she said. "We have to get water from a well 15 kilometers away, and there are no plumbing facilities for a laundry or restroom. Electricity is generated through solar panels."

Strong perennial winds have also troubled the couple. Over the past two years, their dedication to their work and their willingness to endure the harsh environment have won them praise from residents.

Upon their arrival, Xu and Li spent lots of time visiting the residents and getting to know their situations.

When they learned some seniors had underlying diseases, such as heart disease and high blood pressure, the couple coordinated with the Alshaa Red Cross to establish an emergency medical aid room at the police station. The room is stocked with medical equipment and common medicines, allowing local farmers and herders to seek convenient treatments for minor illnesses.

They also set up a convenience

store at the police station where residents can buy daily necessities.

In their spare time, Xu and Li help the residents with their work, including shearing camels, digging for medicinal herbs in summer, looking for lost camels while braving strong winds and sand and finding markets to sell the animals.

The couple have also spent time teaching older residents how to use smartphones and giving them equipment to boost their phone signals to help them better communicate with the outside world.

And as police officers, they are of course responsible for handling incidents involving crime and safety.

Some truck drivers and tourists passing through the area may get lost or run out of fuel, prompting them to seek help from the police.

"In January last year, a truck driver ran out of fuel on the road where there was no mobile phone signal or network," Xu said.

"After walking for a long time, the driver was able to get a signal on top of a small hill and called the police for help."

Xu drove more than 60 km before finding the stranded truck driver in the wilderness.

"The temperature had dropped to -20 C at night, and the truck couldn't start due to a lack of fuel when we found him," he said. "We brought him a bucket of diesel, a bowl of instant noodles and some hot water."

Xu told the driver how to reach the nearest town, where he could find a petrol station.

The police couple have a daughter who was born in June. They named her Momo, inspired by *shamo*, the Chinese word for desert.

Li's parents are taking care of her in Alshaa Left Banner.

Last May, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League and the All-China Youth Federation awarded Xu a China Youth May Fourth Medal for his outstanding performance.

"It was an honor shared with my wife, who has given me great support," he said.

Li said she is very proud of her husband, and their service has also benefited her.

"Working at the border police station has not only helped me understand my husband's persistence, but I also feel that my own value has been further realized," Li said.

Contact the writers at zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

## Three in Chongqing win chief technician titles

By TAN YINGZI and DENG RUI in Chongqing

Fifty-two-year-old laborer Huang Yong in Southwest China's Chongqing was overjoyed recently to be designated as a chief technician, the highest certified skilled worker in the country.

Chief technicians refer to workers who have a high skill level, good professional ethics and a lot of practical experience. They have abundant technical knowledge in their field, have made outstanding contributions in their field, possess great leadership qualities and are highly regarded in their industries.

Thanks to the new occupation rating system for skilled talent, Huang and two other workers became the first to receive the certification in Chongqing.

"I feel so proud because the new title has not only given me more recognition and respect, but also a brighter career," Huang said. "Many of my younger colleagues are paying attention to my promotion, which may inspire them to make more progress."

As China is striving to become a world manufacturing power, it needs a large number of skilled laborers. But the country is still grappling with a huge shortage.

There was a talent gap of over 19 million in China's top 10 key manu-

facturing sectors in 2020. That figure is expected to grow to 30 million by 2025, according to the Guidelines for the Development of Manufacturing Talent, a report jointly released by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

To encourage more young people to work in factories, the government has reformed the vocational skill level rating system to provide a more promising career path for skilled laborers.

In January 2022, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security started exploring the establishment of a new eight-level vocational skill grading system for skilled talent: apprentice, junior worker, intermediate worker, senior worker, technician, senior technician, special technician and chief technician.

Working in the polyvinyl alcohol production field at Sinopec Chongqing SVW Chemical Co for 35 years, Huang grew from an operator to a high-skilled technician.

Now as a chief technician, his salary package is equal to those in senior management positions at the company. "A front-line worker can make the same contribution as a scientist as long as one believes in perseverance and craftsmanship and keeps learning," he said.



Huang Yong conducts an inspection at a factory of Sinopec Chongqing SVW Chemical Co in Chongqing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"I feel so proud because the new title (chief technician) has not only given me more recognition and respect, but also a brighter career."

Huang Yong, worker at Sinopec Chongqing SVW Chemical Co

Another chief technician, 52-year-old Liao Ming, an operation and adjustment worker at Chongqing Tiema Industries Group Co, said that the new title means that the country is paying more attention to skilled talent.

According to Xu Chi, director of the human resources department at Tiema, the company will adopt an annual payment package for workers who have obtained a chief technician title. Moreover, bonuses based on one's achievements in

terms of cost savings, value creation, talent training and other creative work will be offered.

"Through the reforms, Chongqing will create an environment that appreciates and encourages skilled industrial workers and build a better career ladder for them," said Su Jing, deputy director of Chongqing Human Resources and Social Security Bureau.

Contact the writers at dengrui@chinadaily.com.cn

## Satellite helps distinguish various sources of light

Chinese scientists have turned to science satellite SDGSAT-1 as a tool to manage the impact of modern illumination sources on the urban environment, according to a recent study.

The study, conducted by scientists from the Aerospace Information Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, was published recently in the International Journal of Digital Earth.

According to the study, the constant need for decarbonization has led to the replacement of artificial light at night, or ALAN, with light-emitting diodes, or LEDs, inducing blue light pollution and its associated adverse effects. As a result, there is an urgent need to develop a tool to distinguish various illumination sources rapidly, accurately and on a large scale.

The scientists believe that the SDGSAT-1 can play this role by supplementing existing nighttime light data with multispectral and high-resolution features.

The scientists used Beijing as an example and found that their approach was highly effective in distinguishing the various types of light sources, boasting an overall accuracy of 92 percent for ALAN and 95 percent for streetlights.

The analysis of the SDGSAT-1 images revealed clear and distinct illumination patterns, which showed

spatial heterogeneity in ALAN along Beijing's 5th Ring Road, providing valuable information about how light pollution varies across different urban areas.

In addition, the scientists discovered statistically significant disparities across different types of roads and streetlights, illustrating the influence of urban planning and infrastructure on the prevalence of specific lighting technologies.

"This work emphasizes the crucial role of SDGSAT-1 in analyzing ALAN, providing valuable insights in urban lighting management," said the study.

Launched into space on Nov 5, 2021, SDGSAT-1 is the world's first space science satellite dedicated to serving the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The satellite is designed to provide space observation data for the monitoring, evaluation and study of interactions between humans, nature and sustainable development, according to its developer, the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Last September, SDGSAT-1 provided the world's first atlas of urban nighttime light remote-sensing data, lending support for the research on urban sustainable development. The atlas contains 10-meter resolution nighttime light data from 147 cities in 105 countries.

XINHUA

## Russian woman boosts ties between China, her nation

HARBIN — Looking back, Mitina Polina, a Russian woman who has lived in China for 18 years, feels that "karma" perfectly explains her bond with her adopted home.

"I never thought about learning Chinese before, let alone living in China," Polina recalled.

Born in 1985 in Krasnoyarsk Krai, she participated in a short-term exchange program in China during her college years. In early 2004, she spent more than 20 days in Jiamusi, Heilongjiang province. During her stay, she started learning Chinese and even underwent acupuncture

treatment adapted from traditional Chinese medicine skills, which deepened her understanding of the country and inspired her to learn more about the language.

After the short-term exchange, Polina made up her mind to really learn Chinese. She stayed up late every night to listen to Mandarin language tapes and practiced speaking with her Chinese friends in her hometown.

"In two years, I went from being unable to speak a complete sentence in Chinese to being able to communicate fluently with Chinese people," Polina said.

In 2006, Polina graduated from college and chose to continue her studies in China. Later, she attended Heilongjiang University for further language learning.

Her hard work paid off. After a year's study, she had gained a strong command of the language and landed a job at a travel agency in Harbin, the provincial capital.

"Our travel agency's work mainly involves designing itineraries for Russian clients in China and providing reception and service," Polina explained.

She not only needs to do transla-

tion work but also has to design travel routes, carry out promotional activities, book hotels and reserve vehicles during their trips. She quipped that she has to be "available 24/7".

As people-to-people exchanges between China and Russia have grown over the years, Polina's business now goes beyond tourism and includes medical care, shopping, foreign trade and helping more Russians study in China.

"Many Russian children receive medical treatment in China, and not only are their mothers happy,

giving a thumbs-up to traditional Chinese medicine, but I am also happy because they are able to solve problems through my service," she said.

To meet the growing demand of Russian students to study in China, Polina often shuttles between different institutions. "Although their demands are diverse, the goals of the students are the same — hoping to come to China to study. I know how important this is to them, and I also hope to help them achieve their dreams," she added.

Her agency now receives tens of thousands of Russian clients every year. Many Chinese people have also reacquainted themselves with Russians through Polina.

In her view, the Belt and Road Initiative has further promoted people-to-people exchanges between China and Russia, and she has become part of the "bridge" facilitating exchanges between the two countries.

Polina, who is married to a Chinese national, often participates in performances of ethnic dances, showcasing signature Russian culture to more Chinese friends.

"After 18 years in China, I have become accustomed to life here. Of course, there is still a lot of uncertainty in the future, but I believe that my 'karma' with China will continue," Polina said.

XINHUA

## WORLD

## Exploring China's ancient past

With easier access, US tourists invited to go beyond big cities to places like Xi'an

By MINGMEILI in New York  
mingmeili@chinadailyusa.com

By enhancing the frequency of flights, easing visa-application policies and relaxing entry restrictions, China is extending a warm invitation to American travelers to explore the country.

China's provincial travel and tourism departments are highlighting destinations beyond the famous cities of Beijing or Shanghai. They are introducing US travelers to lesser-explored cities with rich historical heritages and diverse cultural traditions that are undergoing new international development.

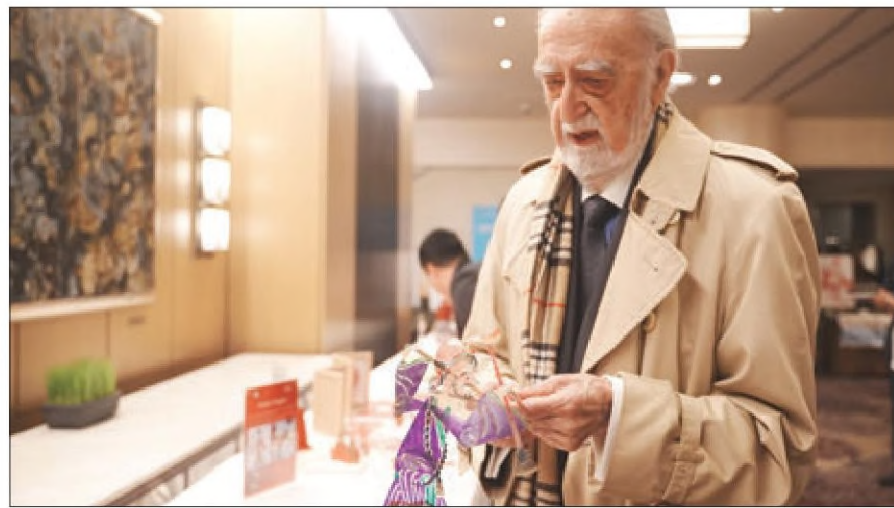
At the same time, the United States remains a favored travel destination for Chinese travelers. Both the US and China are actively working to resume their respective travel markets to pre-pandemic levels, enticing international travelers for deeper tourism and cultural exchange, and China is looking forward to working with the US Commerce Department to resume the China-US Tourism Leadership Summit in May in Xi'an.

Xi'an, the capital of Northwest China's Shaanxi province, hosted an invitation presentation in New York on Tuesday night to showcase the city, following the recent visit of a Zhejiang province cultural delegation to New York in early February.

Xi'an, which served as the imperial capital for 14 ancient dynasties, marked the starting point of the Silk Road and is considered the "birthplace" of Chinese civilization.

"There's a widespread joke in China about the problems of Xi'an — it's impossible to build a subway system, cause wherever you dig, you run into an undiscovered terrace, so the construction team is also nicknamed, the 'archaeology team,'" said Shang Jiyuan, the cultural counselor at the Chinese Consulate General of China in New York, starting with the joke and introducing one of the most famous landmarks, the Terracotta Warriors of Emperor Qin.

Xi'an not only has much historical and cultural heritage but also has hosted state visits between China and the US and welcomed two former US



Manos Angelakis displays a shadow puppet, an intangible cultural heritage of Shaanxi province, at a Shaanxi cultural and tourism promotion event on Tuesday in New York. JIANG LAI / CHINA DAILY

presidents, Ronald Reagan in 1984 and Bill Clinton in 1998, with elaborate Tang Dynasty (618-907), grand welcoming ceremonies.

The city also has taken part in people-to-people exchanges for a long time between China and the US.

"It's a personal interest to me, not just because the province has a rich cultural history, much of which we can explore and experience today, but also its desire and interest in cultural collaboration — probably the best example," said Bob Nederlander Jr, the founder, president and CEO of Nederlander Worldwide Entertainment.

He said his father once was a host of China's national ping-pong team and helped facilitate "Ping Pong Diplomacy" in the 1970s.

The company formed the first "Sino joint venue" in the live-performance industry and has brought eight Broadway shows to more than 25 cities in China since 2005.

Collaborating with the Shaanxi Tourism Group, the company also created a show, *The Sound of Silk Road*, with artists from Broadway, Berlin and Beijing, telling a story from a teenage boy's eyes, traveling back in time some 2,000 years.

"We had the opportunity to bring great Chinese culture to the US, and we hope one day to share that here with American audiences, particularly Broadway," he said.

The narrative of the Silk Road also

signifies the economic and diplomatic interactions of "Chang'an" (the historic name for Xi'an), onetime capital of two of China's greatest dynasties, the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-220 AD) and the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

"I think it's important to know a place like Xi'an, to really understand it, to know its historical significance, and maybe also not just to think of it as sort of one quick stop on a tour, but to think of it as a place to learn about in depth," Charles Riley, the director of the Nassau County Museum of Art, told China Daily.

Riley said that as a teacher who had spent time living and teaching in China, he believes that culture is a good way to form people-to-people relationships and help both countries understand each other better.

"When it really comes down to it, longer term — art, music, culture, food — the cultural side of it is probably the strongest bridge between the two countries," he said. "As a curator, I want to bring Chinese art to the United States, and I want to take Western art to China."

"China is big, and you have to go to many places; you have that option to take. Unfortunately, the pandemic came, so we stopped (going)," Alejandro Garrido, the director of Aviajar Tours and Travel USA, told China Daily. "But I hope that now (we're) going back again for travel... going to China and China to America." He said that

he is looking forward to making travel plans for his clients going to China.

"It's a good option to chat with both countries, that culture, the food, because what they have is a very important thing to share," he added.

Cathy Barbash, an art consultant, who was manager of the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1993, which made a historic trip to China in 1973, told China Daily that she has been working on China-US cultural exchanges for decades and believes that travel between the two countries will benefit both peoples.

"Xi'an is a combination of the amazing cultural heritage there and the warmth and creativity of the people," she said. "That culture is the one thing we can all agree on — that we love to learn more about each other's culture, and the warmth of that relationship continues no matter what else is happening."

Barbash said that she was happy to see the increase in flights.

"More flights and nonstops from New York to Beijing and Shanghai! That's what we need," she said.

"We are always looking for what's the new place to introduce to the US travelers, and we have such an opportunity to build that traffic and exposure for China to the US," Terry Dale, president and CEO of the United States Tour Operators Association, told China Daily.

## Childbirths fall to record lows in Japan, S. Korea

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo  
jiangxueqing@chinadaily.com.cn

Japan last year had the lowest number of births since record-keeping began, following the trend of its neighbor South Korea, where the fertility rate is already the world's lowest.

The health ministry announced on Tuesday that Japan saw a total of 758,631 births last year, a 5.1 percent decrease from 2022, continuing a downward trend for the eighth consecutive year.

The decline has come much earlier than anticipated, surpassing forecasts by the National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, which projected births falling below 760,000 in 2025.

Analysts attribute the rapid decrease in newborns to trends such as delayed marriages.

The number of marriages also hit its lowest level last year since the end of World War II, dropping to 489,281 unions, while divorces increased to 187,798.

Kanako Amano, a senior researcher at the NLI Research Institute, highlighted the correlation between declining marriages and birthrates in an interview with Kyodo News.

Amano emphasized the need for governmental intervention through labor reforms, including measures to boost wages in rural areas and address gender disparities, to encourage marriage.

The Japanese government is preparing legislative measures, including initiatives to enhance child allowances, for the current parliamentary session.

Additionally, the government also plans to require companies with more than 100 employees to establish and disclose targets for paternity leave uptake starting in April 2025. This move aims to promote

fathers' participation in child care, enabling parents to balance work and family duties more effectively.

Experts underscore the importance of paternity leave in redistributing household responsibilities and supporting women's workforce participation, key factors in encouraging higher birthrates in Japan.

## Downward trend

Neighboring South Korea is also grappling with the issue, as the country's fertility rate, already the world's lowest, continued its dramatic decline last year.

The average number of expected babies for a South Korean woman during her reproductive life fell to a record low of 0.72 from 0.78 in 2022, data from Statistics Korea showed on Wednesday.

That is far below the rate of 2.1 per woman needed for a steady population and well behind the rate of 1.24 in 2015 when concerns about issues such as the cost of housing and education were lower.

Since 2018, South Korea has been the only Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development member with a rate below 1, defying the billions of dollars spent by the country to try to reverse the trend that led the population to decline for a fourth straight year in 2023.

South Korea had previously projected its fertility rate is likely to fall further to 0.68 this year. Its capital Seoul, which has the country's highest housing costs, had the lowest fertility rate of 0.55 last year.

The government has spent vast amounts on trying to encourage more babies, offering cash subsidies, babysitting services and support for infertility treatment. But the birthrate has continued its chronic decline.

Agencies contributed to this story.

## BRI cooperation with Egypt hailed as 'fruitful'

CAIRO — China has succeeded in achieving "comprehensive development" and fruitful Belt and Road cooperation with many partner countries despite Western smear campaigns, an Egyptian expert on Chinese affairs has said.

"Economic and social development in China has picked up since the country began implementing its reform and opening-up policy more than 40 years ago, and China has ever since achieved high growth rates," Nasser Abdel-Aal, professor of Chinese language at Cairo-based Ain Shams University, said.

Abdel-Aal, also director of the university's Confucius Institute, said China has been seeking development partners abroad after achieving development success at home.

"The Chinese economic vision seeks to crystallize a just global system, and therefore it was necessary for China to launch global economic initiatives and urge major Chinese economic institutions to invest overseas," Abdel-Aal said.

He said the Belt and Road Initiative is the core of China's policy of seeking common development via economic cooperation and win-win partnerships with overseas partners.

"The fruits of cooperation within the BRI framework have undeniably appeared in many countries," he said.

The expert cited Egypt as an example, where a huge 20-tower business district is being constructed by a Chinese company at the

New Administrative Capital in eastern Cairo.

"Many Chinese companies have participated in Egypt's development process over the past 10 years, in the Suez Canal Economic Zone, the New Administrative Capital, the New El Alamein City and others," Abdel-Aal said.

## Positive results

The results of BRI-related cooperation are "positive" despite the smear campaigns by countries led by the United States, he said.

China and the United States, the world's two largest trading partners, are indispensable to each other, and each of them is aware of the other's role in the global economy, he said.

"The world is now one unit, and any failure or economic collapse in any region will affect the entire world," he added.

China's economic approach looks at the world from a different perspective. It does not strive to become "a superpower," but seeks global cooperation and joint development, the expert said.

The Egyptian professor noted that China's concept of human rights differs from that of the West, as China believes that the core of human rights is to provide a better life for the citizens.

"Therefore, China's primary goal is the well-being of the Chinese citizens."

XINHUA



Workers from China and Egypt take measurements at the construction site of the New Administrative Capital in eastern Cairo on Sept 24. XINHUA

## 4th round of water discharge starts amid anger

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo

Instead of responding to concerns of residents and neighboring countries, Japan commenced the fourth round of releasing nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear power plant into the ocean on Wednesday.

Approximately 7800 metric tons of nuclear-contaminated water will be discharged into the Pacific Ocean over a period of around 17 days, according to the Tokyo Electric Power Company, which operates the nuclear power plant and has defied the wishes of local fishermen and neighboring countries and regions.

Worse, starting from this round, Tokyo Electric Power Company will skip the process of temporarily storing such toxic water in a large tank to assess the tritium levels before its release. Instead, the company will

monitor the tritium levels as the water passes through pipes.

The discharge began in August, despite opposition. TEPCO even plans for the release to last for about three decades. The company estimates that a total of 31,200 tons of nuclear-contaminated water will be discharged during the fiscal year 2023 ending March.

In January, TEPCO announced its plan for fiscal year 2024, starting from April, to release approximately 54,600 tons of such water into the ocean in seven rounds. The water is expected to contain around 14-trillion becquerels of radioactive tritium.

Opposition to the discharge has long been voiced by Japanese citizen groups, leading to growing distrust and anger among the public.

Hisataka Yamasaki, co-representative of No Nukes Plaza Tokyo, a nonprofit citizens' organization also

known as Tanpoposya, criticized the government and TEPCO for betraying their promise not to discharge toxic water without the consent of the fishing industry.

He highlighted their falsehood regarding insufficient land for storage and said: "They have continuously deceived the public and international opinion with convenient explanations. Can they still claim it is safe in the future?"

## History of dishonesty

Yamasaki further emphasized the history of dishonesty from both the government and TEPCO, noting that criticisms regarding the lack of earthquake and tsunami countermeasures were raised even before the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011. Despite this, they persisted in asserting safety, a stance that remains unchanged today.

## Indonesia to begin OECD accession talks

By LEONARDUS JEGHO in Jakarta  
For China Daily

Indonesia is set to start holding accession talks with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which would see it become the fourth Asian nation to join the group.

Analysts in Indonesia have responded with cautious optimism, pointing to the daunting and time-consuming tasks the country will have to do to harmonize its laws and economic management policies with OECD standards.

OECD members made what they called a "historic" decision on Feb 20 to start accession discussions with Indonesia. Its office is now preparing a draft accession road map for the technical review process for the consideration of the

OECD Council at its next meeting. "The decision to open accession discussions will benefit both Indonesia and the OECD," OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said.

Indonesia's Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto said that the country has completed almost all things related to international trade agreements.

He said Indonesia's accession to OECD will support the government's priority programs like the green economy, digitalization, human resources development, good governance, and push Indonesia to get out of the middle-income trap soon, according to a report by the Solopos website.

The OECD said reviews by the more than 20 technical committees will focus on priority issues, including open trade and investment, progress on public governance, integ-

riety and anti-corruption efforts, as well as the effective protection of the environment and action to tackle climate change, to ensure Indonesia's alignment with OECD standards.

There is no deadline for the completion of the accession process. The outcome and timeline will depend on the country's capacity to adapt and adjust to align with the OECD's standards.

Following its 2025-45 National Long-Term Development Plan, Jakarta sets a target for achieving "Golden Indonesia Vision 2045", becoming a developed nation with per capita income equaling that of developed nations and its poverty rate reaching near-zero.

Last year, Indonesia's GDP per capita income was 75 million rupiah (\$4,790), according to the country's Central Bureau of Statistics.

However, Josua Pardede, an econ-

omist at Bank Permata in Jakarta, warned about potential frictions in harmonizing the country's laws and policies with OECD standards, especially the "free market principles" upheld by the organization.

Pardede said the government ending its long-held fuel subsidies could have serious economic impact as well as negative social and security implications.

Bhima Yudhistira, director of the Center of Economics and Law Studies in Jakarta, said joining the OECD could help Indonesia avoid a middle-income trap.

"But, Indonesia needs to prepare many things before officially proceeding to become a member," he was quoted by the Kompas news site as saying.

Launched in December 1960, the OECD's 38 members are mostly European and American countries.

The writer is a freelance journalist for China Daily.

## WORLD

## Apple reportedly cancels EV project, to focus more on AI

By AI HEPING in New York  
aiheping@chinadailyusa.com

After spending billions of dollars and a decade on research, Apple reportedly is dropping building an electric car and will use some of the project's staff to focus on artificial intelligence.

During the company's annual shareholder meeting on Wednesday, which was held virtually, CEO Tim Cook said that the iPhone maker is pouring money into AI.

He said the company sees "incredible breakthrough potential for generative AI, which is why we're currently investing significantly in this area. We believe that will unlock transformative opportunities for users when it comes to productivity, problem solving and more."

CNBC reported that Cook teased a major announcement coming this year.

"Later this year, I look forward to sharing with you the ways we will break new ground in generative AI, another technology we believe can redefine the future," Cook said.

Cook, who began the EV project after he took over as CEO from co-founder Steve Jobs in 2011, didn't mention dropping the electric car project, which Bloomberg News reported Tuesday; Apple had no comment on the report.

Unnamed sources told Bloomberg that the company told employees in an internal meeting Tuesday that it had scrapped the EV project and that many of the 2,000 people said to be working on the car project would be shifted to different roles, including in Apple's artificial intelligence division.

"This is a smart and long-awaited decision," Ray Wang, founder and CEO of Silicon Valley-based consultancy Constellation Research told the BBC. "The market demand for EVs is not there, and AI is where all the action is."

"Apple canceling this project is a sigh of relief for us," Dan Morgan, a senior portfolio manager at Apple shareholder Synovus Trust, told The Wall Street Journal. "When you looked at Apple's future initiatives, the car project was always the most far-fetched for Apple. This just isn't in their wheelhouse."

Instead, it is better that Apple will be redeploying engineers and investments into areas like artificial intelligence that could help its consumer electronics business, Morgan said.

Apple dropping the EV project comes as consumer and investor enthusiasm in the US for

electric vehicles is waning because of financing costs.

US automakers also have been shifting plans to account for the softer EV demand. Most recently, General Motors CEO Mary Barra said the company would begin to rely on hybrid sales in North America, and Volvo in Sweden said it was pulling future funding from its EV company, Polestar.

Part of the pressure automakers are feeling comes from a price war triggered by Elon Musk's Tesla, according to automotive analysts.

Musk started discounting some of Tesla's most popular models last year, driving down the average price of EVs and making it harder for legacy automakers to compete without losing money.

Last year, Ford said it lost more than \$64,000 on every EV that it sold. Since October, it has delayed the opening of one of its new EV battery plants.

Even the world's leading EV maker, BYD, said this week it doesn't want to be in the US market. In 2023, the company sold 3.02 million pure electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles to customers in China and abroad, up by 62.3 percent from the previous year.

"We're not planning to come to the US," BYD Americas CEO Stella Li told Yahoo Finance. "It's an interesting market, but it's very complicated if you're talking about EVs."

Auto industry observers say that BYD's cars deliver great value at prices that beat anything made in the West. Earlier this month, BYD unveiled a plug-in hybrid that gets decent all-electric range and will retail for just over \$11,000.

The company, backed by Warren Buffett's Berkshire Hathaway, said that the new variant aims to accelerate customers' conversion from gasoline-powered vehicles.

Apple never publicly confirmed that it would make an EV but had taken several steps over the past 10 years that suggested it was serious about such efforts.

When Apple started the project around 2014, the company imagined a fully autonomous vehicle. Apple eventually scaled back that to semiautonomous, where the vehicle automates only some parts of the driving.

Apple may be dropping its plans to develop an EV, but one of its largest partners, Foxconn, which manufactures iPhones, is diversifying into making electric cars, with sales due to start this year. CEO Young Liu recently told CNN that the EV business model "should be reinvented".



## Doctors on mission

Cuban doctors wave paper flags upon arrival at the Palmerola International Airport in Honduras on Tuesday. The team of 100 medical experts, including neurosurgeons, cardiologists, and endocrinologists, will stay in the country for two years.

ORLANDO SIERRA / AFP

## European leaders hit back at Macron remark

EU countries rule out sending ground troops to Ukraine; Russia rebukes move

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

France's transatlantic allies on Tuesday poured cold water on remarks by French President Emmanuel Macron who expressed on Monday that a future deployment of Western troops in Ukraine should not be "ruled out".

While Macron admitted after European leaders gathered in Paris for a meeting focusing on the Russia-Ukraine conflict that there was no consensus on the issue, he said "nothing should be ruled out. We will do whatever it takes to ensure that Russia cannot win."

Moscow has responded strongly to Macron's remarks. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said: "It is absolutely not in the interests of these countries, they should be aware of this."

"In that case, we would need to talk not about the probability, but about the inevitability (of direct conflict)," he said.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz rejected Macron's remarks, saying on Tuesday on X that "we agreed that everyone must do more for Ukraine in Paris yesterday. Ukraine needs weapons, ammunition and air defense. We are working on it. It is clear: there will be no ground troops from European countries or NATO."

Scholz pushed back on Monday

against domestic pressure, including in his governing coalition, to send Taurus long-range cruise missiles to Kyiv, citing the risk of Germany becoming directly involved in the conflict.

European Union and NATO members have made it clear since the beginning of the conflict that there will be no boots on the ground from their countries in order to avoid a direct and wider war with Russia.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani reiterated the message that support for Ukraine did not include sending troops. "When we talk about sending troops, we must be very cautious because we must not make people think we are at war with Russia," he said, adding that "we are not at war with Russia."

The White House also declared on Tuesday that it would not send troops to Ukraine.

## Disunity among nations

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told the media that "there are no plans for NATO combat troops on the ground in Ukraine."

Acting Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, regarded as the lead candidate to be the next NATO secretary-general, said the issue of sending troops was not the focus of Monday's talks.

Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico said after the meeting on Mon-

day that there was disunity on the issue among European leaders.

Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson expressed that "it's not on the cards at all for the moment".

After a meeting in Prague on Tuesday, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and his Czech counterpart Petr Fiala both rejected the notion that there were plans to involve their troops directly in the conflict.

European Commission spokesman Peter Stano, in reply to a question from China Daily, said this is part of a discussion of member states. "This has not been discussed at the EU level," he said.

French opposition parties have also lashed out at Macron's remarks. Marine Le Pen, Macron's major political opponent and the far-right leader in the French parliament, accused the French president of "taking a further step toward belligerence, posing an existential risk to 70 million French people".

Elysee has tried to defuse the tension, with Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne saying on Tuesday that the French president had in mind sending troops for specific tasks such as helping with mine clearance, production of weapons on site and cyberdefense.

"(It) could require a (military) on Ukrainian territory, without crossing the threshold of fighting," he told French lawmakers.

"It's not sending troops to wage war against Russia."

Agencies contributed to the story.

## China envoy embarks on shuttle diplomacy

By WANG QINGYUN  
wangqingyun@chinadaily.com.cn

China will send its special envoy for Eurasian affairs on a second round of shuttle diplomacy this week to promote a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, which has dragged on for two years.

The trip, kicking off on Saturday, will take Li Hui, special representative of the Chinese Government on Eurasian Affairs, back to Russia, the EU headquarters, Poland, Ukraine, Germany and France, nine months after Li visited these destinations with the same purpose.

China's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning, who announced the upcoming visit, said on Wednesday that the most urgent priority is to restore peace. "The sooner the peace talks begin, the less the damage is done," she told a regular news conference.

In February last year, China issued a paper expounding its position on the political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, calling for an end to the conflict.

All parties should support Russia and Ukraine in resuming direct dialogue as quickly as possible to gradually de-escalate the situation and ultimately reach a comprehensive cease-fire, the paper said.

Mao, the spokeswoman, said China has never given up efforts to promote peace and facilitate talks.

The country had in-depth communications with Russia, Ukraine and other various countries, playing a constructive role in addressing the crisis, she said.

"China hasn't sat idly by or added fuel to the flame, still less profited from the conflict," Mao said. "There's only one goal China hopes to achieve, that is to build consensus to end the conflict and pave the way for peace talks."

The United States and other Western countries denied plans to send troops to Ukraine, after French President Emmanuel Macron said on Monday that sending Western troops on the ground in Ukraine was not ruled out.

Commenting on the reaction, Mao called for all parties to work to build up favorable conditions for a cease-fire.

China will continue to play its role, carry out shuttle diplomacy, pool consensus and contribute China's wisdom for a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, Mao said.

## Russia bans gasoline exports from March

By REN QI in Moscow  
renqi@chinadaily.com.cn

Russia on Tuesday ordered a six-month ban on gasoline exports from March 1 to keep prices stable amid rising demand from consumers and farmers and to allow for the maintenance of refineries in the world's second-largest oil exporter.

The ban, first reported by Russia's RBC news network, was confirmed by a spokeswoman for Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, the Kremlin's point man for Russia's energy sector.

RBC, citing an unidentified source, said Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin had approved the ban after Novak proposed it in a letter last week. A second source told Reuters the decision had been made but the decree had not yet been issued.

"In order to offset excessive demand for petroleum products, it is necessary to take measures to help stabilize prices in the domes-

tic market," Novak was quoted as saying in his proposal by RBC.

Domestic gasoline prices in Russia are a sensitive issue for motorists and farmers in the world's biggest wheat exporter ahead of a March 15-17 presidential election, while some Russian refineries have been hit by Ukrainian drone attacks in recent months.

Russia and Ukraine have targeted each other's energy infrastructure in a bid to disrupt supply lines and logistics and demoralize their opponents.

The Kremlin has been working with Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest oil exporter, to keep prices high as part of the broader OPEC+ grouping which includes the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and key allies. Russia is already voluntarily cutting its oil and fuel exports by 500,000 barrels per day in the first quarter as part of OPEC+ efforts to support prices.

Last year, Russia banned gaso-

line exports between September and November in order to tackle high domestic prices and shortages.

According to Reuters, the new ban this time will not extend to member states of the Eurasian Economic Union, and countries and regions like Mongolia and Uzbekistan.

Meanwhile, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on Tuesday underscored the urgency of moving forward together with Western allies to unlock the value of frozen Russian sovereign assets to help Ukraine but said the US had no "preferred strategy" on how to do so.

On the front line, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu said on Tuesday the Ukrainian army has lost more than 444,000 soldiers since the beginning of the conflict and has been daily losing more than 800 soldiers and 120 various armaments since the beginning of 2024. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said earlier this week only 31,000 of his soldiers had been killed.

## CHINA DAILY USA

## NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,  
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8888

Fax: 212-537-8898

editor@chinadailyusa.com  
readers@chinadailyusa.com

Subscription: 212-537-8899

Advertising: 212-537-8916

Follow us on:

twitter.com/chinadaily

facebook.com/chinadaily

usa.chinadaily.com.cn

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

## WASHINGTON

National Press Bldg, Suite 1108

529 14th Street NW

Washington, DC 20045

Tel: 202-662-7249

Fax: 202-662-7247

## SAN FRANCISCO

235 Montgomery Street, Suite 900  
San Francisco, CA 94104

Tel: 415-348-8288

Fax: 415-348-8388

## SEATTLE

800 Fifth Ave, Suite 4100

Seattle, WA 98104

Tel: 206-922-2868

## HOUSTON

1001 South Dairy Ashford Suite 100

Houston, TX 77077

Tel: 713-595-7660

## CANADA | TORONTO

4711 Yonge Street, 10th Floor

Toronto, Ontario, M2N 6K8

Tel: 416-481-5706

CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices.

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

Vol. 38 - No.1282

## Security plans for Paris Olympics stolen from train

By JONATHAN POWELL in London  
jonathan@mail.chinadailyuk.com

A bag that contained potentially sensitive security plans for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games was stolen on Monday from a train at the Gare du Nord station.

Confirming a report by BFM television, police sources revealed on Tuesday that the bag in question

belonged to a 56-year-old engineer from Paris City Hall.

In his report to the police, the individual explained that he had placed the bag in the overhead luggage compartment of his seat during his journey around 7:30 pm on Monday.

When the engineer decided to change trains due to a delay, he discovered the theft, realizing that his work computer and two USB drives,

which contained data including the municipal police's organizational plans for securing the Olympics, had been stolen, Agence France-Presse reported.

According to two sources with direct knowledge of the matter who spoke to Reuters, the bag containing the stolen items was taken on a suburban train. However, the sensitivity of the data remains uncertain, as

the sources were unable to provide specific details.

The regional transport police have initiated an investigation into the incident, AFP said. To enhance security during the Paris Olympics, due to start on July 26, exceptional measures will be implemented, including the utilization of intelligent, algorithmic video surveillance technologies.

The comprehensive security strategy will involve a daily deployment of approximately 35,000 security force personnel, with 2,000 municipal police officers specifically assigned to safeguard the event.

Paris' military governor has revealed plans to deploy a temporary camp of 10,000 military personnel in the Bois de Vincennes public park located in eastern Paris, as part of security arrangements for the Olympics.

As a result of these measures, residents can anticipate certain zones

being accessible only via QR codes, along with other security restrictions.

The government has further advised Parisians to refrain from having parcels delivered during the Games, which are scheduled to run until Aug 11, followed by the Paralympic Games from Aug 28 to Sept 8.

For the first time in Olympic history, the opening ceremony of the Games will take place outside of a sports stadium. The spectacle of boats carrying athletes along the River Seine is expected to draw as many as 600,000 spectators.

## BUSINESS

JOIN THE CONVERSATION; FOLLOW US ON TWITTER · CHINA DAILY

## Experts stress China key to 6G

Greater global ties, not attempts to form factions, needed for unified tech standards

By MA SI  
masi@chinadaily.com.cn

Greater international cooperation is needed to formulate unified global 6G technology standards — and any attempt to form small groups to limit China's influence in next-generation wireless technology will only harm the interests of the global telecommunications industry, experts said on Wednesday.

The comments came after a group of 10 countries, including the United States and the United Kingdom, announced on Monday that they have endorsed a set of principles to underpin the development of secure and resilient 6G networks.

The move came as the research and development of 6G enters a crucial time window to identify critical technologies and formulate key standards.

Dong Yifan, an assistant research fellow at the Institute of European Studies at the Beijing-based China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, said this is the latest example of how US-led developed countries want to unite with their allies for a bigger say in formulating standards of 6G.

"They have lost their edge in 5G and (now) they want to regain their strength in 6G, which has turned into a key battleground for innovation and industrial transformation," Dong said.

"This is a typical US practice of forming a small group to contain China's weight in the international telecom arena, which will, in fact, slow down the development of the entire global telecommunications technology, given China's unparalleled advantage in the telecom industry."

China has built the world's largest 5G network, which boasted more than 800 million mobile subscribers at the end of 2023, according to the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.



A booth promotes 6G technology during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

China also accounts for 42 percent of the global declared patents that are essential to 5G technology standards, the largest share in the world, the ministry added.

China Galaxy Securities said in a research note that in the telecom industry, countries with core advantages in the previous-generation wireless technology are more likely to gain advantages in next-generation technology, thereby achieving further technological leadership and promoting healthy industry development.

In sharp contrast to the US government's closed mindset, China's top industry regulator has highlighted that 6G requires consensus and close cooperation from all parties involved in the global industry, academia, research and applications.

Zhang Yunming, vice-minister of industry and information technology, said in a 6G telecom conference in December that more efforts are needed to deepen international cooperation to promote the formulation of unified 6G global standards.

Several Chinese as well as foreign telecom and smartphone companies have participated in China's 6G technical trials and tests in 2023, as

6G is moving from a concept to a crucial stage of potential technological breakthroughs, said Wang Zhiqin, head of the IMT-2030 (6G) Promotion Group, a government-affiliated flagship platform for promoting 6G and international cooperation in the country.

Wang said Shanghai Nokia Bell, Ericsson, China Mobile, China Telecom, China Unicom, Huawei, ZTE, Vivo and Inspur have participated in China's 6G technical trials and tests in 2023.

China's 6G development adheres to the principle of open cooperation, strengthens international exchanges and has inked cooperation agreements with partners in South Korea, Europe and India, she said.

In June, the International Telecommunication Union approved a 6G vision framework, a foundational document for global 6G work, pressing the start button for renewed research and development across the world.

China Unicom is working hard to explore key potential technologies for 6G. The company expects to complete technical research and explore early application scenarios for 6G technology by 2025. The commercial launch of 6G in China

is expected to begin from 2030, according to China Unicom.

Earlier this month, China Mobile, the world's largest telecom carrier by mobile subscribers, successfully launched the world's first satellite to test 6G architecture, marking a milestone in its efforts to explore integrated space and ground communication technology.

The low-earth orbit test satellite is the world's first to employ 6G design architecture, and was jointly developed by China Mobile and the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Innovation Academy for Microsatellites.

Yang Guang, senior chief analyst at the global market research company Omdia, said: "China believes that mobile networks are important infrastructure that need to be built ahead of schedule. Once the road is ready, cars will come naturally. The underlying condition is that Chinese operators are all State-owned enterprises and need to bear considerable social responsibility."

But European and US telecom operators are private enterprises, and their first consideration is financial performance and their current objective is primarily to reduce costs, Yang said.

## 'New productive forces' top provinces' agendas

By CHENG YU  
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Several provincial-level regions across China have identified "new productive forces" and the development of the private sector as their top priorities during their first meetings after the Spring Festival holiday.

Such a focus, they believe, will help foster new economic drivers this year.

Compared with traditional productive tools that are driven by elements like labor, land and capital, new productive forces refer to technological innovation, data, smart or intelligent technologies and the like, which are free from traditional economic growth models, promise high efficiency and top quality, and are in line with the nation's new development philosophy for a strategic future.

The emerging consensus on such priorities is like a mobilization conference where the provincial-level regions release their blueprint and action plans for the new year, said Dong Yu, executive vice-president of the China Institute for Development Planning at Tsinghua University.

The new year's first meeting of South China's Guangdong province proved to be one of the province's largest top-level meetings. Party chief Huang Kunming said at the meeting that as a pacesetter, Guangdong should take the lead in reaching the level of a moderately developed economy and an innovative economy by 2035.

But, he added for good measure, there are still large gaps and deficiencies. "The key to achieving these goals is technological innovation, industrial development, and the continuous liberation and development of 'new productive forces'."

Similarly, Beijing has put new productive forces high on its agenda at its first meeting in mid-February, emphasizing that their development is essential and an important driver of high-quality development.

The national capital said it is necessary to give full play to its advantages and promote the formation of a new productivity development pattern, and drive new productive forces like key technologies, "new

infrastructure" and power batteries.

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

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

"The top priority is to establish as soon as possible a unified and open technology factor market with orderly competition, complete systems and sound governance," Wei said.

In addition, the private sector has been a priority in the first meetings of several provincial-level regions.

East China's Anhui province, for instance, has invited over 100 entrepreneurs to its first meeting of the new year, including top executives of electric vehicle maker BYD and battery maker Gotion High-tech Co.

More than 18 entrepreneurs were invited to speak during the year's first meeting of Fujian province. The provincial government said it will implement a strategy of advancing development with the participation of the private sector and more efforts will be made to drive high-quality development of private companies.

The first meeting of Shanghai focused on optimizing business environment for the private sector. The city emphasized that improving business environment should "always be on the way."

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

"The private sector also has a role to play in China's pursuit of high-quality economic development," Pan said. "This year, high-quality development will become a dominant direction of economic planning at the level of provinces and regions across the country."

## Shanghai rising magnet for foreign investment

By WANG YING in Shanghai  
wang\_ying@chinadaily.com.cn

The industrial and financial metropolis of Shanghai showcased its appeal as an ideal foreign investment destination on Tuesday, as 63 foreign investment projects with a combined value of \$6.47 billion were signed, along with several multinational corporations' new headquarters, research and development centers getting certified by the municipal government on the same day, sources said.

During Tuesday's ceremony, Shanghai's government also certified 34 regional headquarters of multinational corporations and 17 R&D centers, and announced 10 global partners of foreign investment promotion.

The new deals cover key sectors including biomedicine, electronic information, automotives, digital economy and green low-carbon, and 26 projects are valued at more than \$50 million each, according to local news portal Shanghai Observer.

"In 2020, we decided to move our

Asian headquarters from Singapore to Shanghai. I think it was a perfect decision considering the business environment that we have in China and specifically in Shanghai," said Frederico Freire Jardim, president of Asia with US-based Kraft Heinz during an interview before the ceremony that certified their Asian headquarters on Tuesday.

Jardim said Kraft Heinz has made a lot of investments in the city, and in the past few years, all the company's business and operations across Asia were managed by the head-

quarters in Shanghai.

Shanghai's actual use of foreign direct investment exceeded \$24 billion in 2023, the fourth year in a row that it has surpassed the \$20 billion threshold, said Hua Yuan, vice-mayor of Shanghai, during the city's annual business working conference earlier this month.

Experts attributed the influx of foreign investment to the city's constant efforts in improving the business environment.

On the first working day following the Chinese New Year, which

fell on Feb 18 this year, the municipal government announced its seventh edition action plan for creating a first-class international business environment.

Since 2018, the municipal government has optimized its business environment for better facilitating businesses on an annual basis.

Qi Xiaozhai, vice-chairman of the Commerce Economy Association of China, said the optimization of Shanghai's business environment is a result of the efforts made by all divisions of the government.

Qi said that by aligning with the best international standards, the local government has been simplifying procedures for business opera-

tions, devising innovative solutions to better support various trades, and responding to multiple requirements in a timely fashion.

"Shanghai has been spearheading a campaign to facilitate enterprises to expand business and continuously offer an environment of openness, impartiality and fairness over the years," said Zhao Guodong, general manager with Panasonic Information Systems (Shanghai) Co Ltd.

Concerning China's strong demand for IT, Zhao said more investment will be made in Shanghai and in China as a whole. "It is worth doing so for us to stay and grow along with this international city."

## Briefly

## CBS set to improve liquidity of bonds

The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, conducted a central bank bills swap operation on Wednesday to improve the liquidity of perpetual bonds. The three-month CBS, valued at 5 billion yuan (\$703.48 million), is open to primary dealers for bidding at a fixed rate of 0.1 percent, the central bank said in a statement. The CBS scheme allows dealers to swap the perpetual bonds they hold for central bank bills.

## Logistics sector remains stable

China's logistics sector remained stable in January amid unfavorable weather conditions in parts of the country, said the China Federation of Logistics and Purchasing. The index tracking the country's logistics market performance stood at 52.7 percent last month, edging down 0.8 percentage point from December.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## PV capacity set for rapid expansion, industry body says

By ZHENG XIN  
zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China's photovoltaic industry is poised to grow further this year, with domestic installed capacity and power generation expected to maintain rapid expansion, the China Photovoltaic Industry Association said on Wednesday.

The association forecasts new PV capacity addition of 190-220 gigawatts (GW) this year, with consumption and demand for solar energy in China projected to remain high and steady in the coming years, said Wang Bohua, honorary chairman of CPIA, during a PV industry conference in Beijing on Wednesday.

With continuous breakthroughs in PV technology and more diversified export market, renewable energy generation is predicted to play a dominant role in the power generation landscape by 2030, he said.

Manufacturing, installed capacity and exports of the solar sector are expected to show robust growth, he added.

According to Wang, investment costs associated with solar power stations in China witnessed a sub-



Employees work on a photovoltaic production line in Hefei, Anhui province. RUAN XUEFENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

stantial decline over the past year, and this is poised to have a positive impact on the country's solar energy sector, potentially contributing to increased accessibility and sustainability.

This favorable trend may further stimulate growth and investment in China's expanding PV landscape,

said Zhao Tianyi, an analyst at BloombergNEF.

After achieving a historic high in newly installed capacity in 2023, China's PV market is set to continue its momentum, maintaining a trajectory of high-level and high-quality development, Zhao said.

While the association has esti-

mated a domestic addition of 190-220 GW of new PV capacity this year, BloombergNEF is more optimistic, with a moderate scenario prediction of 255 GW in alternating current, she said.

According to the association, China's solar product exports were more diversified last year, with the share of the top 10 export destinations declining from 70 percent to 62 percent. Notable countries on this list included the Netherlands, Brazil, Spain and India.

European countries remain the country's major export market, constituting 42 percent of the total exports, while Asia's share rose from 36 percent to 40 percent.

Despite the optimistic outlook, Wang also warned of challenges, including solar energy consumption and land use concerns.

China has consistently been at the forefront of global research and development in solar power generation technology.

According to Wang Shijiang, secretary-general of the association, technological prowess has been evident in continuous breakthroughs, including the 33.9 per-

cent conversion efficiency in crystalline silicon-perovskite tandem solar cells set by China's solar energy giant Longi Green Energy Technology Co Ltd last year, yet another world record.

The PV conversion efficiency of solar cells is a crucial indicator and benchmark for evaluating the potential of PV technologies, while improved cell conversion efficiency and reduced cost of electricity are key drivers in the development of the PV industry, said Longi.

According to Jiang Hua, deputy secretary-general of the association, cost reductions and efficiency improvements are at the core of the photovoltaic industry, which is cost-driven. Continuously enhancing the conversion efficiency of photovoltaic cells is an effective measure to reduce the overall cost of photovoltaic power generation, he said.

China added 216.88 GW of new PV capacity in 2023, up 148.12 percent from 2022, when the country added 87.41 GW of solar. China's cumulative PV capacity reached 609.49 GW by the end of 2023, according to figures released by the National Energy Administration.

Investments in the Chinese PV market totaled 670 billion yuan (\$94.4 billion) in 2023, it said.

# BUSINESS

## Taicang major attraction for German enterprises

County-level city in Jiangsu province embraces the 500th such firm

By CANG WEI in Nanjing  
cangwei@chinadaily.com.cn

Taicang in East China's Jiangsu province has been emerging as one of the prime areas for German business investment in China as Beumer Group became the 500th German company to invest there earlier this month.

Beumer Group's logistics-related project is expected to generate an annual output value of up to 1.4 billion yuan (\$194.5 million) after reaching full production.

Wang Xiangyuan, Party secretary of Taicang, said the city has long been dedicated to fostering global exchanges and cooperation, particularly in its enduring partnership with Germany over the past three decades.

"This has positioned Taicang as one of the areas with the highest concentration of Sino-German enterprises and the most favorable development prospects in China," said Wang at a ceremony marking the 500th German company to invest in Taicang, which was held in Germany in late January.

As a leading global manufacturer of internal logistics systems, Beumer Group produces versatile products that align well with Taicang's logistics and trade sector, which has achieved a scale of hundreds of billions of yuan, Wang added.

"The city fully supports Beumer's development in Taicang and is dedicated to meticulously providing high-quality living, medical, and educational facilities for the company's employees," Wang said.

Eva Huang, CFO of Beumer Asia and China, said that upon learning of the company's intention to relocate its Shanghai office, the Taicang government initiated discussions with Beumer Shanghai's management at the end of 2020, maintaining close communication despite the COVID-19 pandemic.

Huang said that following the optimization of the control measures, the leadership of Taicang personally visited Beumer's headquarters in Germany to facilitate the project's implementation.

“This has positioned Taicang as one of the areas with the highest concentration of Sino-German enterprises and the most favorable development prospects in China.”

Wang Xiangyuan, Party secretary of Taicang

"Compared to other areas, Taicang is more attractive and has been known as a 'home for German enterprises', making it one of the most investment-worthy and development-oriented areas in the Yangtze River Delta. Hundreds of German companies have established themselves here. Statistics show that over the past 30 years, over 90 percent of German companies in Taicang have increased their investments or expanded their production."

The professional, efficient and swift response of the Taicang team, under the leadership of Party secretary Wang, from the initial contact to the finalization of the project, was also cited by her as an impor-



Employees of IMS Gear (Taicang) Co Ltd, a German manufacturer, work at a production facility in Taicang, Jiangsu province, in September 2022. Taicang saw the 500th German company settle in the city this month. HUA XUEGEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

tant reason for the decision to settle in Taicang.

"From setting up the investment entity to obtaining the construction permit, Beumer allocated only three months," Huang said. "Various departments, including the investment promotion bureau of Taicang High-Tech Industrial Development Zone, its China-Germany cooperation office, and the economic and development bureau cooperated closely with the Beumer team. They provided dedicated personnel to track and guide the Beumer project, while refining and optimizing the application processes at each stage, maximizing support for the project," said Huang.

"We anticipate that with our new investment and setup, we will achieve stable and long-term growth in Taicang."

In a span of 14 years, the first 100 German enterprises arrived in Taicang. However, it took only about two years for the arrival of the most recent 100 German enterprises to settle in the city.

Over the past 30 years, Taicang has continuously enhanced collaboration with Germany across economic, cultural, educational and sporting domains.

Wang said that Taicang is committed to providing top-quality services and creating a premier business environment that is market-oriented, adheres to the rule of law and is internationalized.

Guo Jun contributed to this story.



Visitors observe an ABB robotic arm packaging an item during the sixth China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. SHENG JIAPENG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## ABB eyes AI-robotics integration to push growth in various businesses

By ZHONG NAN  
zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn

ABB Ltd will integrate artificial intelligence with robotics across various sectors in China to sustain robust growth, senior executives of the Swiss-Swedish technology and engineering group said, as AI continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace, transforming numerous industries.

China is not only the world's largest robotics market but also a leading player in the global AI landscape, said Han Chen, president of ABB Robotics in China.

ABB plans to leverage this integration of AI with robotics in sectors such as automobiles, consumer goods, education and emerging areas like healthcare, retail and new energy.

"This strategic move aims to create additional value for customers by introducing new levels of autonomy in robotic applications across China," Han said.

Small and medium-sized enterprises will gain cost-efficient access to robotics due to lowered entry barriers and simplicity of use through AI, he added.

As an early adopter of a national AI strategy, China has implemented various comprehensive action plans and incentive programs, focusing on an "AI plus" approach.

The rapid development of AI in China has been fueled by a combination of factors, including robust market demand with diverse application scenarios, solid policy support, and advanced computing infrastructure,

said the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology.

According to a report by market research firm CCID Consulting, China's AI industry is expected to make great strides in the next 10 to 15 years, with market scale reaching \$240.4 billion by 2035, accounting for 30.6 percent of the world's total.

Sami Atiya, president of ABB's robotics and discrete automation business, said the group has already embedded AI into its business, with over 100 AI projects in process, of which several are located in China.

"As the development of generative AI continues at pace, we are experiencing a significant leap forward in how we work, learn and innovate," said Atiya, who also is a group executive committee member at ABB.

Machines are getting smarter, more capable and easier to use, lowering the barriers to automation for all companies. This advancement addresses the needs of its customers for enhanced flexibility and intelligence, especially in the face of critical skilled labor shortages and global uncertainties, he added.

To meet the growing requirement for AI-powered robotic solutions, ABB has invested in its facilities and AI innovation capability in recent years, including the inauguration of a world-class robotics megafactory in Shanghai with a new research and development center on innovation of AI, digitalization and software, the expansion of its existing robotics

factory in the United States and in Sweden to increase production capacity and develop next-generation AI-enabled technologies.

In January, ABB acquired Swiss startup SevenSense Robotics to enhance its competitiveness in next-generation AI-enabled autonomous mobile robots and also a majority stake in Bosnian software services provider Meshmind to further advance AI and software-driven automation.

AI has been quickly integrated into various sectors. Earlier this month, US-based AI research company OpenAI unveiled a new product named Sora, which is capable of generating "realistic" and "imaginative" 60-second videos based on brief text prompts.

As industrial-grade, large-scale AI models gradually emerge, AI will become increasingly embedded in various stages of industrial production. General AI is being applied in design, intelligent manufacturing, quality management and autonomous driving, said Chen Zhi, director of the Institute of Innovation and Development, which is part of the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development.

For instance, the integration of AI with electronic design automation is becoming a mainstream trend in chip design. AI large models enhance industrial robots' understanding of natural language commands, improving their information processing and perceptual execution capabilities, said Chen.

## Shenzhen aims higher with milestone in intercity air taxi flight

By WANG XU  
in Shenzhen, Guangdong  
wangxu@chinadaily.com.cn

A cutting-edge "air taxi" service, once operational, is expected to gain traction, as electric vertical takeoff and landing (eVTOL) aircraft developer AutoFlight conducted the world's first intercity demonstration flight in South China's Guangdong province on Tuesday.

The service, according to the company, will be a faster option for passengers shuttling between Shenzhen and Zhuhai in Guangdong as it will take only 20 minutes compared to a regular three-hour car ride presently.

AutoFlight's eVTOL aircraft Prosperity, which is capable of carrying five people, managed to complete a 50-kilometer unmanned ride on Tuesday. The aircraft took off from Shekou port in Shenzhen and arrived at Jiu Zhou port in Zhuhai after 20 minutes.

According to its maker, the aircraft, which is supported by domestically produced core modules, can attain a cruising speed of up to 200 kilometers per hour. It currently holds the world record as the only eVTOL capable of flying 250.3 km on a single charge.

The route is among the 100 eVTOL aerial vehicle routes planned by the local government to

“As the applications for low-altitude flights expand, low-altitude flight services are poised to move beyond specialized and high-end uses ...”

Guo Yi, investment feasibility study researcher at Shenzhen-based think tank China Development Institute

tap the low-altitude economy and facilitate transportation in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

Tian Yu, founder, CEO and co-chairman of AutoFlight, said, "We are thrilled to showcase AutoFlight's cutting-edge capabilities today in the world's first cross-sea and intercity eVTOL demonstration flight."

Highlighting the cooperation with local authorities and global partners in this field, Tian said he expects a future where safe, efficient and sustainable eVTOL flights become an essential feature of cities worldwide.

Shenzhen Eastern General Aviation Co Ltd, or Heli-Eastern, said it is considering the purchase of 100 Prosperity models, eyeing the booming transportation demand between key transportation hubs in the GBA.

China labeled the low-altitude economy as a strategic emerging industry last year, with more than 10 regions nationwide, including Shenzhen, already unveiling plans to develop the field in their 2024 government work reports.

As a pioneer embracing the low-altitude economy concept, Shenzhen has been a trailblazer in the unmanned aerial vehicle sector and has released crucial documents to support its infrastructure development.

Guo Yi, an investment feasibility study researcher at Shenzhen-based think tank China Development Institute, said: "As the applications for low-altitude flights expand, low-altitude flight services are poised to move beyond specialized and high-end uses, reaching a broader market. This shift is expected to catalyze the rapid growth of related industries such as low-altitude manufacturing and support services, presenting substantial developmental opportunities."

"Shenzhen, with its significant economic scale and vibrant development, boasts residents with strong purchasing power, which suggests a considerable latent demand for low-altitude services and the growing variety of application scenarios is expected to expedite the concentration and development of industry leaders in this area."

## Goose breeders in Heilongjiang benefit from 'ice-city' tourism boom

By ZHOU HUIYING in Harbin  
zhouhuiying@chinadaily.com.cn

4,912

number of goose breeding farms in Shuangcheng district of Harbin, Heilongjiang province, by end-2023

Wang Huilong and his wife have been busy renovating their goose breeding farm in Shuangcheng district of Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang province, even during the Spring Festival break. In fact, they are building new-style greenhouses in preparation for the upcoming breeding season in May.

"We have sold all of the 30,000 geese we raised last year, with a sales value of over 2 million yuan (\$277,810)," said the 39-year-old farmer of Tianjia village in the district. "I have planned to expand the breeding scale this year and am confident of getting a better income in the winter."

The tourism business in Northeast China, led by "ice city" Harbin, touched a historical high during the winter season, boosting sales of several related sectors such as locally raised white geese.

Apart from visiting scenic spots, many tourists to Harbin enjoy local delicacies such as *tieguodun*, or stewed meat and vegetables, made in a large iron pot.

"All the ingredients, including the meat, vegetables and steamed twisted rolls are cooked in a large pot. The different taste attracts lots of tourists," said Yao Lilong, general manager of a catering enterprise

that has 22 *tieguodun* restaurants across the city. "Among all the types of meat, goose is the most favored."

Wang began to raise geese in 2012, and in 2015, he established the Harbin Haitao Goose Farming Professional Cooperative, attracting other goose breeders.

In 2017, Wang expanded the breeding farm from his country yard to a four-hectare farm, with a capacity to rear 30,000 geese.

"Before 2019, most of the geese were sold to the southern regions, such as the provinces of Yunnan and Guangdong, and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region," he said. "In recent years, the proportion of (sales to the) local market has risen, especially after the boom in winter tourism."

"Our cooperative sold over 100,000 geese this winter," he said. "More buyers also contacted me for purchasing geese. I passed on the information to my fellow villagers and those in nearby villages, helping them sell their geese at favorable prices."

According to the district's live-

stock production service center, the district's goose population reached 1,114,730 last year.

By the end of 2023, there were 4,912 goose breeding farms in the district and 636,783 edible geese had been sold.

"We are striving to accelerate the pace of industrial management of the goose breeding industry," said Xia Wei, director of the center. "A one-stop industrial chain of goose production, incubation, breeding, feed production, slaughtering and processing, freezing and sales has been basically formed in townships, including Qingling, Dongguan and Xiqin."

There have also been new developments in ecological breeding.

"There are a number of reservoirs and rivers in the district with abundant water resources," he said. "These resources can help farmers implement a three-dimensional ecological model, such as an integrated fish-goose breeding system, which can further improve economic benefits."

"In the future, we will actively provide more support to large-scale goose breeding enterprises, such as launching loan discount projects," said Xia. "Moreover, we will intensify our services to farmers, providing them with scientific guidance for epidemic prevention and disease control, as well as free provisions of bird flu and other animal vaccines."

## BUSINESSFOCUS

## Countryside playing catch-up with EVs

Charging stations, favorable policies helping rural areas become more eco-friendly

By ZHENG XIN

zhengxin@chinadaily.com.cn

China's rural thoroughfares, once dominated by the droning of traditional internal combustion engines, are now far from cacophonous amid the ongoing quiet revolution of electric vehicles.

Encouraged by government initiatives and incentivized policies, residents in the vast expanses of China's countryside are increasingly making the switch to EVs, which industry experts believe will be the new frontier for electric mobility in the nation.

China's rural regions are expected to provide a new source of growth for what is already the world's biggest EV market, as new EV sales in small-sized Chinese counties and towns are still far behind first-tier cities, said Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association.

"As cities have taken the lead in adopting clean energy solutions, rural regions, fueled by government incentives — including subsidies and favorable policies — are emerging as the next growth point, switching from traditional internal combustion engines to electric alternatives," Cui said.

"As the overall market structure gradually improves, promoting the widespread adoption of new energy vehicles in county and rural markets represents a significant market opportunity and a vast untapped market," he said.

Figures released by the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers show that sales of NEVs in China's non-urban areas accounted for just 4 percent of total auto sales in rural regions in 2022, significantly below the industry-wide level of 25.6 percent.

While the proportion increased from 4 percent to 17 percent in 2023, a significant jump, it is still a considerable distance from the 40 percent penetration rate in first-tier cities, with substantial room for further development, the association said.

The cumulative volume of charging infrastructure nationwide reached 8.596 million units as of December, marking a year-on-year increase of 65 percent, according to the China Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Promotion Alliance.

China EV100, an industry think tank, estimates that demand for motorized travel in rural areas will stimulate a car market with a scale of 500 billion yuan (\$69.5 billion) by 2030.

The car ownership rate in rural areas of China will be close to 160 vehicles per thousand people by then, with a total ownership exceeding 70 million vehicles, according to a report by the think tank.

The Chinese government has been rolling out targeted measures to facilitate the electric revolution in the countryside.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, called for efforts to accelerate the construction and installation of charging facilities in rural areas in May. As part of the country's rural vitalization efforts, the government



expects to equip all counties with charging stations and all villages with charging piles soon.

The government also extended its preferential purchase tax policy for NEVs to the end of 2027 and released a guideline to support people in rural areas in purchasing and using NEVs, focusing on boosting the construction of charging facilities.

Jiang Linru, a researcher at the China Electric Power Research Institute under the State Grid Corp of China, said the policy is "unprecedented" and will substantially accelerate the development of rural EV development.

Eyeing the massive potential, local governments are already promoting the development of charging infrastructure in rural areas, facilitating the widespread use of EVs while situating charging stations along highways and within rural communities, aiming to alleviate concerns about charging accessibility.

Zhejiang province, for example, has announced plans to build more than 2.3 million charging stations by 2025, with no less than 900,000 in rural areas, to meet the charging needs of over 4 million NEVs.

It currently boasts more than 1.65 million NEVs, including over 350,000 units in rural areas. The province has almost completed building an NEV charging service network, in which vehicle owners can find charging poles in rural areas within an average driving distance of five kilometers, three kilometers on the outskirts and one kilometer within city limits.

It aims to further improve the network so that by 2025, motorists can find a charging station within five minutes and 30 minutes of driving



Top: A villager uses newly established facilities to charge her electric car in Badong county, Hubei province, on Feb. 2.

WEN LIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Above: A view of a charging station that utilizes photovoltaic storage systems in Yiyuan county, Shandong province, in May.

ZHU ZHENG / XINHUA

in urban and rural areas, respectively. The ratio of vehicles to charging stations is expected to be increased to 1.5:1 by 2025 from the current 1.6:1, it said.

In addition to Zhejiang, charging stations are cropping up along highways and in town centers from the terraced fields of Yunnan province to the northern plains of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

Espying the immense market potential, an increasing number of automakers are also jumping on the bandwagon to vie for a piece of the pie. Chinese auto brand Zeekr, for example, has built charging stations in the Xizang autonomous region, including one in Tashizom, the nearest administrative township to Mount Qomolangma in China.

Xin Guobin, vice-minister of the

Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said the enormous EV consumption potential in rural markets has not been effectively unleashed due to factors such as a limited range of applicable vehicle models and insufficient promotional efforts.

While China is home to the world's largest charging network for NEVs, most of them are located in cities, especially large ones. Only a small percentage of the piles and stations are located in the countryside, said Tong Zongqi, deputy secretary-general of the China Charging Infrastructure Promotion Alliance.

The lack of charging facilities as well as operation and maintenance services in rural regions remains the largest obstacle to the growth of the

domestic NEV industry, especially in rural areas, he said.

Long distances between villages and limited charging options have long been posing challenges for EV users, necessitating a more comprehensive and evenly distributed charging network, he added.

Yu Xiang, vice-president of NaaS Technology — a Chinese EV charging service company — which is also the first EV-charging company from China listed on the Nasdaq, said factors such as qualification to build charging stations on collective rural land and the dispersed nature of rural households also make construction of charging facilities in such areas quite challenging.

Furthermore, the overall rural power grid faces risks such as insufficient local power supply capacity, susceptibility to power outages and low voltage, he said.

Yu said NEVs in rural areas are fewer than in cities, leading to low utilization rates of charging facilities, which in turn results in insufficient layout of charging facilities.

"Currently, the public charging infrastructure in rural areas is distributed unevenly with low utilization," he said. "The construction of private charging stations is hindered by difficulties such as too few fixed parking spaces in many old neighborhoods and a lack of coordinated power connection planning."

Sun Chuanwang, a professor of energy and economy at Xiamen University, agreed, saying that the current construction of charging infrastructure in rural areas is lagging, despite the significant increase of NEV penetration into rural areas.

The rapidity and convenience of charging for NEVs urgently need

improvement, while the related operations, maintenance and servicing for NEVs are not yet well-developed, making it challenging to meet after-sales needs of rural users, said Sun.

The current public charging infrastructure in China's counties and rural areas is less developed compared with that in cities, with an overall shortage of facilities. Additionally, the distribution is uneven and the layout is deemed irrational, he said.

"Some stations lack vehicles for charging, while certain regions have no charging stations at all. Only a small number of charging facilities are available in town centers, power supply stations, government offices, and select scenic areas in rural regions, posing challenges in meeting the operational EV charging needs in rural areas," he added.

Sun said the vast geographical expanse of rural areas, high operating costs for maintaining charging facilities, and a lack of satisfactory returns on investment also make charging operators unwilling to invest in the construction of charging infrastructure in these regions.

Sun suggests encouraging more private capital to participate in the construction of rural charging infrastructure. An integrated development of "photovoltaics + energy storage + electric vehicle charging", which refers to harnessing energy from sunlight and storing excess energy for EV charging, will also facilitate the further development of rural charging facilities, he said.

Grid operators in the country are also working on the issues. China Southern Power Grid said the company has so far invested more than 8 billion yuan in advancing charging infrastructure in recent years. It had come up with 15,000 charging stations and 100,000 charging piles by the end of January this year, aiming to achieve complete coverage of charging infrastructure in counties and townships in southern parts of the country.

State Grid of China has been actively investing in the construction of public charging infrastructure in recent years, currently operating 179,000 public charging stations across the nation.

According to Xu Ke, deputy director of the charging service center of State Grid Smart Internet of Vehicles Co Ltd, accelerating the construction of charging facilities in rural areas has become a future development trend.

"Currently, private charging dominates charging infrastructure in rural areas, with public charging serving as a supplementary measure. However, with the gradual promotion of NEVs in rural areas and increasing charging capacity, demand for public charging is expected to rise," he said.

Given the current low ownership of NEVs in rural areas and the limited profitability of public charging stations, Xu suggested prioritizing the construction of public charging stations in high-traffic locations such as village committees and supermarkets.

By ZHENG XIN

With an extensive network of electric vehicle charging facilities and deployment of new battery technology, Hainan, a tropical island province in South China, could take the lead and provide a blueprint for the nation to go all-electric, according to a recent report.

In Hainan, a robust infrastructure of over 116,800 charging points ensures that urban EV owners are conveniently located within a kilometer or two of charging facilities.

This comprehensive network is a strategic initiative by the provincial government, aiming to phase out the sale of traditional fossil fuel cars by 2030 and achieve a notable 45 percent share of electric and hybrid vehicles among the island's automotive fleet.

Figures released by BloombergNEF show Hainan has taken the lead nationally in China's EV sales, with over 50 percent of new car sales being electric as of September.

The Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region trailed just behind at 46 percent, surpassing its target of

achieving a 30 percent representation of EVs in new sales by 2025.

Guangxi, home to many EV makers, offered a maximum subsidy of 5,000 yuan (\$695) for new EV purchases last year. Additionally, the region continues to offer a 50 percent discount on designated EV parking rates at a majority of public parking facilities.

Smaller regions and provinces can help spearhead a faster transition to EVs through comprehensive policy support, targeted promotional programs and investments in local EV supply chains, said BloombergNEF.

While megacities still have the highest EV penetration levels across the country, mid-sized cities, which traditionally made minimal contributions to China's EV sales, have overtaken them as the main drivers of growth, it said.

Despite the lack of indigenous EV and battery manufacturers in these areas, the increasing policy support and automakers' interest could pave the way for enhanced availability of EV models, subsequently stimulating demand, it added.

Mi Siyi, an analyst at BloombergNEF, said Hainan stands as the

## Hainan takes lead in green auto sector



Visitors check out electric vehicles during the 2023 World New Energy Vehicle Congress in Haikou, Hainan province, in December.

SHI ZHONGHUA / XINHUA

first and only region in China with such an ambitious target. The success of this initiative could potentially serve as a model for the entire country to transition to an all-electric automotive landscape in the future.

"Several factors have contributed to this. Vehicle ownership rates in mid-sized cities such as Haikou and Xiamen are much higher than in Beijing or Shanghai. This suggests most households there already own an internal combustion engine car and could be likely to upgrade to newer, premium models," she said.

"EVs, with low maintenance and intelligent features, are gaining popularity as a supplemental car. Sales of plug-in hybrid vehicles are rising quickly in mid-sized cities due to relatively low upfront prices and short refueling times," Mi added.

The island itself also possesses specific benefits for promoting EVs. Its moderate climate contributes to the extended life of batteries, a notable advantage compared to colder regions like Beijing, where winter temperatures frequently fall below freezing.

According to BloombergNEF, the Xizang autonomous region, Gansu

province and the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region saw EV shares in total auto sales jump to between 10 percent and 16 percent in the first three quarters of 2023 — up from just 1 percent in 2020.

Improving charging infrastructure and sales networks, combined with fleet-based electrification targets, help spur local EV sales. Still, extremely cold winters and hot summers could increase consumers' range anxiety, while high plateau and mountain landscapes also hinder the build-out of charging infrastructure, it said.

The National Energy Administration said Guangxi, together with the provinces of Guangdong, Hainan, Jiangsu and Hubei, had achieved comprehensive coverage of all towns by the end of last year, as the government has been promoting the layout of charging facilities across the country.

The government will further strengthen overall planning and continuously improve the charging network nationwide to better meet the needs of the public for purchasing and using new energy vehicles, said Zhang Xing, spokesperson of the administration.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## Congressional paranoia creates technical hitch that leaves sci-tech agreement in limbo

The six-month extension the United States government gave to the China-US Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement expired on Tuesday. It remains unclear whether it will be renewed, extended or, as some fear, simply abandoned.

Neither Beijing nor Washington has given any indication as to what may actually happen next. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told the media on Tuesday the Chinese side "has kept communicating" with the US side on the matter. The US State Department said it is negotiating to "amend, extend, and strengthen protections within" the agreement, but declined to confirm the US would extend the deal.

Given the present state of overall bilateral relations, and the resistance the 45-year-old agreement faces in the US Congress, any decision on either renewal or just another extension will not come easily. In this sense, even a belated extension of the agreement would be worth celebrating. Killing it would be a terrible mistake.

There is a prevailing belief in the US Congress that the agreement is unilaterally in China's favor. Some US politicians' growing fear of US science and technology boosting Chinese capabilities to usurp the US' technology leadership has resulted in their conviction it poses a potential threat to US national security. The best self-protection, some lawmakers advocate, is to scrap it and shut China out. Such a blinkered view has actually blinded them to the mutually beneficial aspects of the agreement.

Signed in 1979 by US President Jimmy Carter and Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, the science and tech-

nology cooperation agreement has served both sides well as an umbrella framework for bilateral cooperation in such fields as agriculture, energy, space, health, environment, Earth sciences and engineering, in addition to educational and academic exchanges.

China, without doubt, has benefited hugely from such cooperation. But so too has the US. Now as China is catching up quickly in such realms, the two countries have become each other's "biggest research partner, by a considerable margin", as Nature magazine pointed out in an editorial published on Monday. So much so that the US Environmental Protection Agency has called its relationship with China "one of its most significant".

Titled "Why it would be a dangerous folly to end US-China science pact", the editorial rightfully laments that "there is too much talk about the risks of collaboration — and too little about the benefits".

A seminar hosted by the Washington-based Institute for China-America Studies found that "in the event of the agreement's nonrenewal, the mutual confidence that sustains and underpins collaboration is bound to suffer". Such mutual confidence is critical to the kind of collaboration Washington anticipates from Beijing, from climate change to public health.

US Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Suzanne Clark is reportedly going to visit Beijing, leading a delegation of former US government officials. The visit is viewed by some US media outlets as the latest sign of the two countries trying to improve relations. Keeping the agreement alive will certainly be conducive to such endeavors as well as the overall relationship.

## Washington's overreaction in Pacific is telling

Reports that up to a dozen Chinese police officers are working in the remote atoll nation of Kiribati have again touched a nerve of the China hawks in Washington, obsessed as they are with their zero-sum game and geopolitical rivalry.

A US State Department spokesperson warned the Pacific island country on Monday that it should not "import security forces from China" as "doing so risks fueling regional and international tensions".

The warning came after Kiribati's acting Police Commissioner Eeri Arutiera told Reuters last week that uniformed Chinese officers were working with local police officers in community policing and a crime database program, besides teaching them kung fu. He said the Chinese police, who arrived last year on a six-month rotation, "only provide the services that the Kiribati Police Service needs or requests".

Kiribati is a nation of 115,000 people whose closest island is more than 2,000 kilometers away from Hawaii. As a sovereign nation, it is free to choose the partners it wants to work with in whatever areas. That Washington seeks to dictate how Kiribati should conduct its security-related cooperation with other countries reflects the prevailing hegemonic mindset in the US.

There is actually no justification for perceiving a small Chinese police presence tasked with helping maintain social stability in Kiribati as a cause for alarm. It only serves to show how eager US politicians are to grab at anything that they can use as a stick with which to beat Beijing.

China and the Pacific island countries have in recent years expanded exchanges and cooperation in many fields, including law enforcement, which has brought tangible benefits to local people. China has made it clear the productive engagement does not target a third party and that it does not have any intention of engaging in geopolitical competition with the US.

The US, on the other hand, regards its defense and economic assistance to the Pacific island countries as a means to counter China's influence in the region. Despite the Pacific island countries having described their foreign policy as "friend to all, enemy to none", the US has wielded its influence to try to persuade them to choose sides. For example, the US has been pressuring the Solomon Islands to scrap the security cooperation deal it signed with China in 2022.

For the good of regional peace and stability, the US must stop seeing the Pacific island countries as being in its own backyard, still less pawns in its geopolitical rivalry with China.

## Macron hoists Western govts by their own petard

French President Emmanuel Macron's statement on Monday that nothing was ruled out at a summit of Western countries on the Ukraine crisis, including putting European troops on the ground in support of Kyiv, has made a splash around the world.

The suggestion was instantly dismissed by other key members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, including the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany.

It is not only the brutality of the battlefield in Ukraine that has been displayed over the past more than two years, which deters them, but also the dire consequences that it would have — which Moscow has repeatedly warned of. Not to mention the problem these Western governments would have in selling such a move to the public at home, as more and more voices in these countries are asking why the money being spent on Ukraine is not being used to help the growing number of the homeless and destitute at home.

The intent behind Macron's words seems to have been to highlight how gung ho Western governments have become in pushing Ukraine to carry on fighting: "The people that said 'never ever' today were the same ones who said never ever planes, never ever long-range missiles, never ever trucks. They said all that two years ago."

Although that is certainly what has happened, it has been a tacit consensus among most Western leaders that as long as Russia does not go beyond Ukrainian borders to enter their territories, their troops will not get involved in the fighting.

Sending troops to Ukraine is still generally regarded as being a step too far, as that would signify an escalation of the Ukraine conflict from a regional one to a continent-wide war. They want to debilitate Russia without doing the same to themselves, and are quite happy for Ukraine to act as their proxy.

It should not be forgotten that while the Ukrainians are paying with their lives, Western countries are still haggling over which weapons should be provided for fear of angering Russia or overdrawn their own budget, and how the burden will be shared.

That's an important reason why the Ukrainians have always been in a fraught state in the conflict, even if the West has gradually increased its material support to levels unthinkable when the conflict began, as Kyiv is actually battling on two fronts — on the battlefield against Russia and in a PR war to squeeze ever more out of Ukraine's Western supporters.

With \$60 billion worth of US funding for Ukraine held up by Republicans in Congress, the burden has now shifted to Europe to help arm Ukraine.

It is clear that Western governments are willing to bolster Ukraine's fighting abilities up to a point in order to keep Russia mired in the conflict and steadily weaken its strength. But it is also evident that they don't want to be swept from office by a growing wave of public discontent or what would be a rapidly growing number of body bags.

The Ukraine crisis has cost enough lives, it can and should be resolved through peace talks.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## China's path to modernization through information revolution

At a recent conference on internet and cybersecurity, the top Chinese leader said China should strive to pursue innovation-based internet development and build China into an internet power.

In today's world, the rapid development of information technology has catalyzed new changes in social production, created new space for human activities, and expanded new areas for national governance. Whichever country better grasps the general trend of informatization will better adapt to and lead the development of the new productive forces, and win the new all-round competition of comprehensive national strength.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, the top leader has put forward a series of new ideas, new viewpoints and new conclusions on the internet and information technology, forming important thought on how to build China into an internet power. Over the past decade, under the

overall leadership of the Party, China has introduced a series of regulations and measures improving and strengthening the country's internet work, and achieved remarkable progress in promoting the construction of network content and cyber ecological governance. Cybersecurity has been further strengthened, and the cybersecurity system and capacity building have been significantly improved.

Information technology is increasingly playing a driving and leading role in China's economic and social development. The accelerated advancement of the rule of law in cyberspace has brought China's internet development onto a healthy and law-based track. At the same time, China has taken a more active part in improving international cyberspace governance and promoting the building of a community with a shared future in cyberspace.

Deepening international exchanges and cooperation in the

field of the internet and information technology is the only way to build a country into a cyber power. China has deeply participated in the building of global and regional multilateral internet governance platforms, and shared the fruits of internet development with other countries. Increasingly holding international exchange activities in the field of internet in China has made it an important contributor to the openness, sharing, mutual benefit and win-win situation of global cyberspace.

With more than 1 billion internet users, China should lead the trend of information revolution, accelerate the high-quality development of the internet and information technology, and use the new achievements to build itself into an internet power that guarantees its bid to become a modern socialist country and promote the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

— BEIJING YOUTH DAILY

## Evolving AI calls for online course monitoring

All "tutorials" on Sora usage have recently been removed from domestic social networking sites.

It's ironic that such courses were selling when Sora is yet to be publicly released. The rapid development of AI technology is a major challenge for people, who have to keep up with the pace and stay informed about new technologies. Learning by purchasing courses can be considered an economically convenient choice for those accustomed to the knowledge payment

model. These courses sell like hot cakes because they effectively address individuals' needs.

With AI gaining momentum, it's a natural market behavior for businesses to introduce products to keep up with the trend. However, vigilance and discernment are still needed for various related products on the market, especially those of varying quality and those that infringe on privacy, and the regulatory authorities should strengthen their supervision.

From its emergence to practical application, AI will undergo a long ever-changing process. How to deal with this process and how to navigate through it are questions that everyone needs to carefully and calmly consider. As AI gradually becomes integrated into our daily life, it's also essential to further explore how to create a healthy consumption environment, and establish clear boundaries and redlines for relevant practices.

— GUANGMING DAILY

## What They Say

## 'Fake patriotism' stunt wastes public resources

A man using an IP address registered in Hebei province has recently posted some screenshots on a major Chinese micro blog platform showing some files the user has prepared for charging Mo Yan, a Chinese laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature, with "insulting Chinese revolutionary heroes and martyrs", "belittling the Chinese people", "glorifying Japanese invaders", etc in some of his novels.

Meanwhile, he also organized an online survey inviting people to show their attitude toward the charge. He shared online dozens of paragraphs and sentences from Mo's works to justify and support his appeal.

Although lawyers say the possibility of the court officially filing his charge as a civil case is quite low — he didn't disclose whether the files have been accepted by the court or the case has been filed at last — the

incident itself is a farce from the very beginning.

After being attacked as a network stunt tapping into Mo's popularity, the person orchestrating the whole thing responded that he is doing what a "patriot" should do in a rule-of-law society to protect the motherland as well as those who sacrificed their lives for the country.

The post record of his account on the platform shows the number of followers surged markedly in recent days, hitting about 210,000, thanks to the heated discussion on Mo's novels the posts have triggered. Also the account's previous posts were mostly about populism-related topics, urging the Chinese people to be wary of the penetration of hostile and anti-China forces of various forms from home and abroad.

Although the poster has the right to see if a court will accept a lawsuit

against Mo on that charge, the way he chose to publicize his move proves it is only creating a public fuss, which, if successful, can transform him from a nobody to a "cyberspace celebrity", though short-lived.

He introduces himself as a "writer", but most authors hold an inclusive attitude toward literary works. Their analyses always shun deliberate misinterpretation of specific parts of a work or taking parts out of context to prove a point.

Given the effective management of China's publishing industry and the Chinese readers' picky tastes, the poster is speculating for publicity, rather than representing the general view of the public. The platform companies are obliged to screen such "fake patriotism" gimmicks, which are a waste of public resources.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

## CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

## Contact us at

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

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

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

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

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

## COMMENT

Huang Yiping

## Digital technology can boost economic recovery

China is advocating new productive forces, in which digital economy can play a crucial role.

The direct impact of digital technology was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it facilitated contactless transactions and shifted economic activities from offline to online. For instance, it helped boost e-commerce, food delivery, and remote research and teaching. Indeed, digital technology played a significant role in sustaining economic activities during the pandemic.

In post-pandemic economic recovery, the role of the digital economy has become even more direct, helping people continue e-shopping, and to order food online and participate in online seminars among other things. But more importantly, the digital economy has created "structural opportunities", basically involving long-term growth issues rather than cyclical factors.

## How to capitalize on digital opportunities

Can the structural and industrial transformation of the Chinese economy continue at the same pace? What role can the digital economy play in this transformation? And as China's rapidly aging population leads to a decline in labor supply and an increase in the demand for social healthcare, can digital technology, including artificial intelligence, offset the impact of shrinking labor supply?

China is transitioning from a middle-income to a high-income economy, with per capita GDP of about \$13,000. A study by Barry Eichengreen, a professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley, suggests a country's economy typically slows down after rapid development when its per capita GDP reaches \$15,000-\$16,000. China is already close to that stage.

There have been talks of China being possibly caught in the "middle-income trap". In reality, when China's per capita GDP increases by another \$2,000-\$3,000, only then it will face the question of whether or not its economy can continue to develop or will stagnate at that level.

The digital economy provides a "structural opportunity" for maintaining growth in that its contribution to the economy's structural significance is greater than its cyclical significance.

Why do national strategic plans frequently emerge in the field of the digital economy? And how to seize the strategic opportunities offered by the digital economy?

From a macro perspective, China is a global leader in the digital economy. For instance, in terms of the scale, market penetration, the number of unicorn companies and innovation in key areas, China consistently ranks second globally.

From a decision-making perspective, the



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

digital economy has brought about comprehensive changes in people's lifestyles, production methods and governance, activating the economy in many aspects. And from the government's perspective, the current challenge lies in achieving long-term growth and how to achieve the second centenary goal of developing "China into a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful".

The digital economy has made it possible to sustain economic development in the next phase. For instance, "data as a new factor of production" is a pioneering concept. If data are effectively utilized, they can

make the entire production process much more efficient. With the same capital, labor, land and technologies, proper data use can improve resource utilization and increase output.

A key reason for the slow economic recovery is the restrictions on the digital economy, including platform enterprises, which has undermined industry confidence. Although the government now proposes to support platform enterprises, the biggest problem is a lack of confidence in industries, which cannot be changed overnight. In fact, to boost industries' confidence and help increase investment, the government needs to issue more sustaina-

As long as the application of digital technology can improve operational efficiency, it will yield returns and be sustainable in the long term.

ble policies and change the economic fundamentals.

## Digital industrialization crucial for long-term growth

In the short term, however, the simplest way to boost economic recovery is through macroeconomic policies, including monetary and fiscal policies. For instance, in times of economic weakness, increased government expenditure can stabilize demand in the short term. Stable demand means enterprises will get orders, and will hire people and/or increase investment. This will increase employment, and thus consumption, and boost production and investment.

What are the different roles of digital industrialization and industrial digitization?

Digital industrialization is crucial for long-term growth. The production of computers, internet tools, storage devices and chips, which did not exist in the past, is part of digital industrialization. Its contribution to economic growth is actually in providing solutions to industrial digitization and supporting system problems.

The application of digital technology to an economy changes the operational characteristics of that economy. This can be described as "three rises and three declines", with the three rises being expanding scale, improving efficiency and enhancing user experience; and the three declines being cutting costs, controlling risks and reducing direct contact.

For example, in the financial sector, a single platform can now provide both payment and credit services to hundreds of millions of users, which traditional financial institutions did not provide in the past.

The most typical example of digital finance is the original Yu'e Bao, which pooled tens or hundreds of yuan from every user and became the largest investment fund in the country. It is because of digital technology that many things which were previously not possible can now be done. As such, digital technology offers many possibilities for transforming traditional industries.

An economy needs the cooperation of the market and the government to function smoothly. No economy can thrive by relying on just one of them. The point of contention

lies in what role the government should play and how much space the market has to maneuver.

When it comes to developing the digital economy, private enterprises are likely to play the biggest role, not least because private enterprises mostly rely on market mechanisms for their operation even though the government plays a crucial role in their success.

First, the government maintains the market order, which is essential for private enterprises' smooth functioning.

Second, the government has invested huge amounts in building and maintaining infrastructure, without which the digital economy cannot survive, let alone thrive. For instance, State-owned enterprises are behind the high internet penetration rate and digital network infrastructure. The development of digital technology, digital industries and the digital economy is not possible without the internet and internet networks.

And third, apart from supporting major investments, the government should create an environment to support original innovations. Although more than 70 percent of China's innovations can be traced to private enterprises, there are still many innovations that require public research institutions and universities.

How can entrepreneurs overcome the economic recovery challenges in the short term? How can they seize the structural opportunities created by the digital economy?

In the banking industry's digitalization process, we can see the "Matthew effect" — larger-scale enterprises that have invested a lot of resources, manpower and materials in digital transformation can expect better development outcomes. Some smaller-scale banks, too, have attempted digital transformation, but their efficiency has not significantly improved and their returns have remained minimal. Every enterprise needs to find its way of digital transformation.

Moreover, entrepreneurs need to make clear the vital pain points their enterprises face, and strive to solve such issues as much as possible. Addressing the above problems does not mean that entrepreneurs should lose their strategic vision. As long as the application of digital technology can improve operational efficiency, it will yield returns and be sustainable in the long term.

The digitalization trend is irreversible. And although everyone needs to participate in it, they should find the most suitable business endeavor for their enterprises and ensure they function well.

*The author is dean of the National School of Development at Peking University. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

Liang Haiming

## New security law will help consolidate HK's development

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government initiated a one-month public consultation on Article 23 of the Basic Law on Jan 30, proposing to enact a new "national security law" based on Article 23 which will cover five major offenses. This has prompted some foreign media and politicians to claim that any Article 23-based legislation will deal a serious blow to Hong Kong's economy and undermine its status as an international financial center.

However, from an economic and financial perspective, the positive impact of an Article 23-based legislation may outweigh the negative effects. National security is of paramount importance to a country, and closely related to its economic development. From the perspective of the theories of division of labor, labor theory of value, free market philosophy and gross domestic product, it is evident that a Hong Kong-enacted new "national security law" is necessary for both the Chinese mainland and the SAR.

## National security is a public good

Seen from the view of the public goods theory, national security can be considered a public good. For instance, by using the Article 23-based legislation, the mainland and Hong Kong can better protect national security and ensure the socioeconomic stability of the region.

Viewed through the lens of externalities theory, maintaining national security has positive effects on the entire economic system. Foolproof national security can attract foreign investors and businesses, provide a stable business environment and promote economic growth. It can also reduce crimes, minimize the threat of terrorism, and increase investors' confidence, thereby promoting business activities and investment.

Legislation on national security can boost the confidence of businesses and individuals on the mainland as well as in Hong Kong. An Article 23-based national security law can also provide a stable legal and institutional environment, protecting the rights of businesses and individuals, thus promoting investment and innovation.

National security is an important factor in maintaining social stability and vital to promoting economic development. Through the Article 23-based legislation, the mainland and Hong Kong can prevent and address internal and external threats and conflicts, maintaining social stability and promoting sustained economic growth.

## Proposed legislation can help boost development

An Article 23-based legislation will help better safeguard national security, which is necessary for boosting economic development and laying a solid foundation for the continued development of the mainland and the SAR, as well as maintaining Hong Kong's status as a global financial center.

First, the proposed legislation would serve as a risk management tool, which is necessary because the financial market is highly sensitive to the security situation. The threats of political instability, terrorism and war can lead to market fluctuations and cause panic among investors. The proposed law can minimize, if not altogether prevent, such risks, provide a stable legal system and reduce uncertainties while stabilizing the financial market.

Second, such legislation can boost global investors' confidence in Hong Kong's market. On the other hand, lack of security guarantee could reduce global investors' confidence, resulting in decreased investment and capital outflow.

Third, a new national security law could promote global financial cooperation and

The proposed law can also drive financial innovation and technological development, which are necessary for maintaining Hong Kong's competitiveness in the international market.

exchanges. In the current globalized economic environment, national security of countries is closely interconnected. As such, through an Article 23-based legislation, the mainland and the SAR can deepen cooperation with other economies, collectively address transnational security threats and help establish a more stable and secure global financial system. Such cooperation in turn could promote cross-border investment, trade and financial flow.

And fourth, such legislation would contribute to financial stability. An Article 23-based law can minimize the security threats to the financial system and maintain the stability of the financial market, while safeguarding the interests of financial institutions and investors. The implementation of such legislation will help build a stable and sustainable financial environment, and promote the development of both the mainland and Hong Kong.

To be sure, Hong Kong's economic development will be influenced by other factors, too, such as the international political environment, the global economic situation and market demand.

Some foreign investors, however, are still concerned about the impact of a new national security law and have adopted a wait-and-watch attitude toward the proposed national security law, which may affect their investment decisions.

Nevertheless, the SAR government is expected to adopt a transparent, fair and predictable approach in terms of implementing the proposed national security law, and continue to cooperate with foreign investors in order to enhance mutual trust and provide a favorable investment environment for them.

The purpose of enacting an Article 23-based security law is to enable Hong Kong to fulfill its constitutional duty to safeguard the country's sovereignty and national security. And there is no doubt that eliminating national security risks will have a positive effect on Hong Kong's long-term development and boost investor confidence.

From an economic perspective, the proposed legislation will help maintain social stability and a secure environment in Hong Kong, and reduce social unrest and violent activities, which are crucial to economic development, attracting and retaining investors, and promoting business activities and cross-border trade.

## Rule of law will facilitate stable development

Further, such legislation will strengthen the rule of law in Hong Kong, improve the region's legal environment and promote domestic and international capital flow. It will also promote economic diversification, facilitate the stable development of key industries such as finance and commerce, and attract more investments.

More importantly, the proposed law will enhance economic cooperation and ties between the mainland, with its vast market and development opportunities, and Hong Kong. And leveraging its unique geographical position and advantages, Hong Kong can serve as a bridge between the mainland and the global economy, and promote global cooperation in trade, investment and finance.

On the financial front, such legislation will consolidate Hong Kong's status as an international financial center and help maintain the region's financial stability, which is necessary to attracting domestic and foreign investors and maintaining the normal operation of the financial market.

The proposed law can also drive financial innovation and technological development, which are necessary for maintaining Hong Kong's competitiveness in the international market. The proposed legislation will create a more stable and secure environment for financial technology innovation, helping the SAR to attract more financial technology companies and entrepreneurs to the region. This will promote the transformation and upgrading of Hong Kong's financial industry, and increase the added value of the financial industry.

The proposed law will also facilitate the further integration of Hong Kong's financial sector with the mainland's financial market, and build a stable legal and policy environment and facilitate the flow of funds, talents and technologies between the two sides.

While the proposed legislation may have positive impacts on the economy of Hong Kong, it is important to recognize that Hong Kong's future economic development will be influenced by other factors, too, including the international political environment, global economic situation and market demand.

In short, despite external factors impacting Hong Kong's economic development, a new national security law will only have a positive effect on the region's long-term development and investor confidence, achieving win-win results.

*The author is chairman of the China Silk Road iValley Research Institute. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

## GLOBAL VIEWS



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

YU JIANG

## Similar tasks, similar goals

With the help of China, Africa is becoming a key force driving the transformation of the international system and global order

The African Union joined the G20 in September 2023, making it the second regional organization — after the European Union — to be included in the grouping. At a summit in Ghana held in November 2023, delegates from the AU and Caribbean Community agreed to establish the Global Reparation Fund that seeks compensation owed to millions of Africans enslaved centuries ago during the transatlantic slave trade. This represents an effort by African countries to increase their say in international affairs, and throw off the yoke of Western oppression and control.

On Jan 1, 2024, the BRICS group officially included five new members, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, doubling the bloc's membership to 10 nations, a move that caters to the shared desire of emerging economies and developing countries, and follows the global trend toward multipolarity. Currently, there are three BRICS member countries from Africa, giving the continent greater weight in the group. The latest expansion of BRICS has ushered in a new era in the cooperation of Global South, and helps enhance the representation and voice of the Global South in international affairs and foster a more just and equitable global order.

In 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed the principles of sincerity, real results, amity and good faith and the principles of pursuing the greater good and shared interests. Adhering to these principles, China-Africa cooperation has yielded fruitful results over the past decade, serving as a prime example of a new type of international relations.

First, political mutual trust has been strengthened. At the 2015 Johannesburg summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, the China-Africa relationship was upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership. Later in 2018, the two sides proposed to build a closer China-Africa community with a shared future. And at the Eighth Ministerial Meeting of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation held in 2021, the spirit of China-Africa friendly cooperation was encapsulated as "sincere friendship and equality, win-win for mutual benefit and common development, fairness and justice, and progress with the times and openness and inclusiveness".

Second, practical cooperation has been upgraded. In terms of trade cooperation, the China-Africa trade volume hit a record high of \$282.1 billion in 2023, a year-on-year increase of 1.5 percent. China has remained Africa's largest trading partner for 15 consecutive years. During the first half of 2023, China's industry-wide direct investment in Africa reached \$1.82 billion, jumping 4.4 percent year-on-year, while the country's contract volume for new projects in Africa was \$28.4 billion, a growth of 7.64 percent.

In the field of the digital economy, China and Africa have formulated and implemented a plan for digital innovation partnership to help Africa improve its digital infrastructure to harvest digital dividends by fostering the digital economy and developing digital education.

The two sides have also laid out the targets for mid- and long-term cooperation by adopting the China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035, and aligning the initiative with the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the AU's 2063 Agenda and the respective development strategies of African countries, to promote the building of an even closer China-Africa community with a shared future.

Third, mutual support is firm and strong. In recent years, Western countries have repeatedly smeared and attacked China on issues related to Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Xizang and the COVID-19 pandemic. African countries have stood by China on these issues in platforms such as the United Nations Human Rights Council, and the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly. In addition, China and Africa have joined hands in safeguarding the multilateral trading system that is inclusive, open and transparent. And thanks to their joint efforts, the 12th ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization achieved better-than-expected results.

As the world is confronted with tough challenges, China is committed to building a multipolar world that is equal and orderly and a global economy that is inclusive and open. Standing at a new starting point, China and Africa have a promising prospect of building a community with a shared future.

First, China's African policy closely integrates China's development with Africa's development. As the world undergoes profound shifts in the balance of power, the international community is attaching greater emphasis to Africa. To cozy up to Africa, some countries have made pie-in-the-sky promises; and in pursuit of their narrow self-interests are looking to turn Africa into a stage for major-power competition, forcibly impose their values on Africa and wantonly interfere in the internal affairs of African nations. China opposes hegemony and power politics, as well as the monopoly of a small number of countries over international affairs. China seeks mul-

tipolarity and believes that all countries, large or small, are equal, and that all nations, especially the vast number of African countries, can find their own places in a fairer global order.

Second, it is the shared pursuit of China and Africa to realize modernization. The two sides have produced impressive results in industrial and agricultural modernization since the Belt and Road Initiative was launched. Currently, Chinese people are marching toward the second centenary goal of building China into a great modern socialist country in all respects, and Africa is pushing ahead with its economic integration and modernization drive under the 2063 Agenda.

China and Africa support each other in exploring their respective modernization paths, and the two sides have similar goals and tasks. The success China has achieved in its modernization has prompted many African countries to "look to the East". In recent years, countries such as Ethiopia and Rwanda have realized fast development by combining experiences from China with their own realities.

Third, China and Africa have extensive and profound common strategic interests. Against the background of the collective rise of the Global South, China and Africa are jointly pushing the building of a global order that is more fair and just and creating a high-level China-Africa community with a shared future. Safeguarding world stability and peace is in the fundamental interests of the vast number of developing countries. Africa is striving to end its conflicts and wars. China and Africa should jointly pursue common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, and push for the settlement of global and regional hotspot issues through dialogue.

To solve the common challenges facing humanity, such as development deficits, security dilemmas, and mistrust among civilizations, China has proposed the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, and put forward the vision of building a human community with a shared future, gaining wide support from African countries. Going forward, China and Africa will cooperate more closely in tackling global challenges, building a fairer global governance system and a new type of international relations for a better future.

The author is vice-president of the China Institute of International Studies. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

FELIX DAPARE DAKORA

## Keep politics out of science

China-Africa STI Cooperation under FOCAC is a model for global scientific exchanges and collaboration

Based on the discovery of Chinese coins and porcelain in East African archaeological sites, China-Africa relations date back centuries, which explains the strong ties between China and Africa. China's contribution to Africa's development has been immense. China assisted African countries to gain independence by supporting liberation movements, especially in Southern Africa. From these political ties, China-Africa relations also grew in the areas of trade, investment and economics under the auspices of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, a triennial summit of African and Chinese leaders. As a result, bilateral trade between China and Africa rose from less than \$11 billion in 2000 to \$282.1 billion in 2023.

At the 2015 Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Summit, President Xi Jinping pledged \$60 billion in aid to support agriculture, infrastructure and skills training in Africa. The Plan for China Supporting Africa's Agricultural Modernization was announced in August 2023. The ingredients of that plan include deepening synergy and policy consultations on agricultural development strategies between China and Africa; enhancing Africa's agricultural industrial chain and added value of products; increasing agricultural technology cooperation between China and Africa; and strengthening China-Africa cooperation on scientific and technological innovation in agriculture. But more importantly, China announced the China-Africa Agricultural Science and Technology Innovation Alliance Initiative in November 2023 to promote extensive collaboration among Chinese and African scientists and build a platform for China-Africa agricultural science, technology and industry synergistic development.

It will be beneficial if the FOCAC Summit in 2024 agrees to include scientific and technological innovation as its third pillar, in addition to trade and political affairs. Such an arrangement would permit intense discussions on the future of science, and scientific cooperation and collaboration between China and Africa, especially in this era of militant and hegemonic politicization of research and its products. Under these circumstances, Africa and China must re-group to define and pursue scientific and technological innovation of common and mutual interest under the banner of the FOCAC. A forum of Chinese and African scientists working together at each FOCAC summit would be a powerful approach to intensify scientific cooperation and collaboration between China and Africa.

The 2023 International Science and Technology Cooperation Initiative of the Chinese government recognizes science, technology and innovation as an important engine for the development of human society, and for addressing global challenges. There is no doubt that recent times have witnessed unfair practices in global scientific cooperation, including the exclusion of individual scientists from scientific meetings and conferences on the basis of their race and/or origin.

China's International Science and Technology Cooperation Initiative, which seeks to promote open, fair, equitable and non-discriminatory international science and technology cooperation, and develop science for the benefit of all regardless of borders, could not have come at a better time. But more importantly, China's commitment to set up a global scientific research fund and increase scientific and technological assistance to other developing countries is laudable and highly praise-worthy, and should be emulated by countries of the Global North.

Given the ongoing politicization of scientific research and cooperation often done in the name of national security, it is time that a code of conduct is drawn up by China for international science and technology cooperation. China is a global leader in science, also a leading producer of highly cited scientific journal articles and a major source of patents and other innovations.

China is a global leader in science, also a leading producer of highly cited scientific journal articles and a major source of patents and other innovations.

ic journal articles and a major source of patents and other innovations. China now produces a large number of science, technology, engineering and mathematics graduates in the world. Furthermore, China presently has one of the world's largest and highly productive academic systems, and should therefore not be left out in the world of science. To ostracize China at some scientific meetings and conferences will be to the detriment of the global scientific community.

There is therefore an urgent need to keep politics out of science. Otherwise, the grand challenges facing the world today — such as climate change, food security, health, energy security — will be difficult to resolve in a world of splintered science. There have been recent instances where academic relations and collaboration between China and Western countries have been dealt a blow. In 2023, the Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen-Nuremberg in Germany decided to suspend collaboration with the China Scholarship Council, a national body for funding Chinese students and researchers both locally and internationally. Some universities in the United States, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands also ended collaboration with the China Scholarship Council.

It is, however, not just China that is facing these challenges with scientific collaboration with the West. International students from the Global South are also facing difficulties getting visa to study in some countries of the Global North. For example, visa approval rate has dropped sharply for students from Pakistan, the Philippines and Nigeria wanting to study in Australia, and in 2023 many African students could not obtain visas to study in the US. Under these circumstances, China and Africa must work closely together using the FOCAC summits to define STI objectives of mutual interest to both parties.

The author is a fellow and former president of the African Academy of Sciences and a professor at Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

## LIFE

## FROM THE FRONTLINE

On Lunar New Year's Eve, usually a time of family reunions around the dining table, a city wall built more than 2,000 years ago in Jingzhou, Hubei province, was drawing enthusiastic crowds.

Visitors took boats on the moat around the walls to the entrance gate, which was decorated with Spring Festival couplets and red lanterns. After passing through the brick wall, a fortification in ancient times, they were able to climb up onto it and enjoy a bird's-eye view of the city.

Actors clad in costumes from the 2,500-year-old Chu culture greeted visitors with good-wish envelopes, while costumed dancers playing the roles of heroes from the city's history invited onlookers to join them, and get into the festive spirit.

Wang Yan, an operating manager of the Jingzhou city wall attraction, says that the Lunar New Year's Eve activities lasted until 9:30 pm. She remembers that, years ago, workers were usually on break during the festival because most Chinese organized celebration dinners with their family and then watched TV together at home. Few people used to venture out at night, unless it was to see fireworks displays.

"It's been an obvious trend that in recent years people are going out, especially to cultural sites, to celebrate Spring Festival," Wang says.

During the festival this year, the 11-kilometer-long wall welcomed tens of thousands of visitors every day from across the nation, and closing time was extended from 5:30 pm to 9:30 pm.

The wall, which dates back 2,600 years, was originally made of mud and was used primarily as a military defense. It was rebuilt several times under different dynasties and the current brick wall was rebuilt during the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911). It is one of the best preserved city walls in China, and has seen the passage of numerous household heroes and historical events, especially during the late Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) and the Three Kingdoms (220-280).

Jingzhou is widely known because of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, one of the four classic novels of Chinese literature. The epic saga is a compilation of legends and history and features prominent rulers, military officers and generals. Liu Bei and his two generals, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, all well-known heroes of the late Eastern Han Dynasty and in literature, once ruled and guarded Jingzhou.

Wang, who was born in the city, says that the wall is a key part of its life, and that the names of its gates are also the names of bus stops and markets.

"In recent years, more and more residents have started to explore the stories behind the city wall. It's like a cultural awakening. Its DNA is ingrained in local blood," Wang says.

Ma Xinwei and his wife drove to Jingzhou on the first day of the Lunar New Year from Chongqing in the southwest. After lunch, they



Jingzhou Museum invites visitors to explore dragon-related elements in its collections on display during this year's Spring Festival. Some items in this category include a celadon pot with a dragon-shaped handle (left), a set of chime bells engraved with dragon patterns (middle), a jade pendant (top right) and a porcelain plate with cloud and dragon patterns (above right). PHOTOS BY DENG ZHANGYU / CHINA DAILY

# Jingzhou turns history into modern attraction

Actors clad in traditional costume greet visitors as Spring Festival sees culture take to the streets, **Deng Zhangyu** reports.



**Above:** Binyang Tower on the east of the Jingzhou city wall is the entrance gate favored by visitors who climb onto the wall and enjoy a bird's-eye view of the city in Central China's Hubei province.

**Right:** Visitors take in the sights on a street themed on the Three Kingdoms (220-280) during the Spring Festival in Jingzhou. They were entertained by performers wearing Chu-style costumes.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



visited the wall with their two nephews, who are primary school students.

Ma was born in Jingzhou and works in another city about an

eight-hour drive away. He and his wife planned to explore more of the city's cultural stories this year.

"Compared to staying at home, enjoying delicious homemade food

and watching TV or playing mah-jong and cards with my family, I prefer to spend my holiday in more interesting places," says the 35-year-old Ma, adding that many of his friends also chose to visit cultural sites during the holiday.

The couple planned to spend the following day at Jingzhou Museum, which was organizing a special activity for visitors to explore the dragon-related elements in its collection.

The garden-like complex houses 130,000 artifacts and artworks, most of which are related to Chu culture. Twenty kings ruled the Chu state over the course of 800 years, and many of the items at the museum were unearthed in tombs discovered around the city.

Yang Kaiyong, deputy director of Jingzhou Museum, says that visiting

museums during Spring Festival has become more popular in recent years. Last year's daily numbers peaked at 20,000.

Jingzhou Museum had shows planned to attract visitors during the holiday, and, to improve service, it closed for three days before the Lunar New Year to prepare for the expected influx.

In celebration of the Year of the Dragon, visitors were invited to look for dragon-related elements engraved on the jade, lacquer and bronze ware in the collection. The items, either in the shape of dragons or featuring dragon patterns, were used as containers for food, cups for alcohol, decorative pieces for nobility, musical instruments and ritual vessels.

"To cater to increasing demand, our museum remained open during the eight-day holiday and many of our visitors during this period were local residents," Yang says.

Young people often visited just to have a cup of coffee or a piece of cake decorated with patterns from the museum's collections, despite the long queue.

Yang says, now that people are better off, they are becoming more focused on enjoyment, and interest in the Chu culture has rapidly increased in Jingzhou.

According to the Jingzhou Cultural and Tourism Bureau, the city put on around 30 cultural activities during the holiday, and attracted some 4 million visitors.

Its key tourist attractions are all related to culture, among them the Chu King's Mausoleum with its large chariot horse pits, the ancient city wall, and residences formerly inhabited by well-known historical figures. Even Jingzhou Fantawild Oriental Heritage, a franchise theme park, makes use of Chu culture for the keywords describing its attractions.

One of the park's most popular projects is a recounting of the life of Warring States Period (475-221 BC) poet Qu Yuan, whose verses are an icon of Chu culture.

Yang Fan, director of Jingzhou Cultural and Tourism Bureau, says that a decade ago she could never have imagined that people in such a comparatively small city would spend hours lining up for museums and cultural programs.

She says that Jingzhou held a Chu culture festival last year, which attracted many visitors and which will be held once every two years from now on. It is also building a new archaeological heritage park on the site of the former Chu state capital. In addition, there are lots of workshops named after craftsmen who are inheritors of traditional skills from ancient times, and performers, visitors and locals wearing Chu-style costumes are a common sight on the street.

"As we sit on a rich mine of culture, we're making an effort to present more high-quality projects to satisfy growing cultural demands," Yang Fan says.

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

## Exhibition highlights unique origins

By **ZHENG CAIXIONG**  
in Guangzhou  
[zhengcaixiong@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:zhengcaixiong@chinadaily.com.cn)

A special exhibition in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, showcases unique Bronze Age civilizations and long-standing Chinese culture.

The exhibition, *Nurtured by the Same Water, Bronze Age Civilizations in the Yangtze River Basin*, demonstrates the unique temperament and styles of the three ancient Chinese cultural circles of Ba and Shu, Jing and Chu and Wu and Yue, as well as the cultural atmosphere of mutual integration and promotion.

The exhibition in Guangdong Museum in this southern metropolis displays a collection of 137 sets of precious exhibits from the Yangtze River Basin, including 54 first-class cultural relics, depicting the politics, military, culture, society and life in the ancient Chinese dynasties in the region, one of the cradles of Chinese civilization.

Major exhibits include bronze masks, swords and ancient chime bells, which were unearthed in the area.

The exhibition, which opened on Feb 6, will run until June 2. It is

co-organized by 18 museums and cultural units from the Yangtze River Basin.

Ye Wei, curator of the exhibition, says it allows visitors to experience, and get a sense of, the unique charm and cultures of Bronze Age civilizations along the winding Yangtze River.

"Meanwhile, throughout the exhibition period, visitors can also participate in various related activities, including interactive digital exhibitions, and making rubbings of bronze ware patterns, to gain a deeper understanding of the Bronze Age civilizations," says Ye, who is also deputy research librarian of the collection management department of Guangdong Museum.

The exhibition consists of four parts, including "Ba and Shu Shine Together", "Heroes Rose Together", "Unity in Diversity" and "Unification of the Country".

Of them, the first part "Ba and Shu Shine Together" interprets the ancient Shu civilization, represented by the Sanxingdui Site, Jinsha Site, and Xindu Majia Wooden Coffin Tomb, from the perspective of the Yangtze River Basin, showcasing the mystery and uniqueness of the Ba and Shu civilizations

from multiple perspectives.

Ba and Shu were regions associated with modern-day Chongqing municipality and Sichuan province, named after ancient Chinese states during the Shang (c. 16th century-11th century BC) and Zhou (c. 11th century-256 BC) dynasties.

Ba and Shu were the two most important ancient states coexisting in the area during the pre-Qin period (before 221 BC).

The section "Heroes Rose Together" reveals the grandeur of the feudal kingdoms, the unique and romantic customs of the Jing and Chu, and the advocating of boating and martial arts practice by the ancestors of the Wu and Yue, highlighting the distinctive characteristics of the Bronze Age civilizations in the middle and lower reaches of the Yangtze River.

"Unity in Diversity" analyzes and compares the Bronze Age civilizations in the Yangtze River Basin with the diverse integration pattern of Chinese civilizations in the Central Plains region.

It interprets the characteristics of the open and inclusive Bronze Age civilizations in the Yangtze River Basin, as well as the diversity, exchanges and mutual learning

of civilizations in the regions near the Yangtze River and Central Plains.

The "Unification of the Country" section tells the story of the integration of Bronze Age civilizations in the Yangtze River Basin with other Chinese civilizations.

During the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), there were constant disputes among feudal states, and the power of various states grew and waned.

At that time, Qin and Chu were both powerful states and their regional cultures had a very important impact on the development of Chinese civilization.

In the Yangtze River Basin, the influence of Chu culture is particularly prominent.

In 316 BC, Qin conquered Ba and Shu, greatly changing the geopolitical landscape of the late Warring States Period.

Consequently, the dominant trends of Chu culture in the Yangtze River Basin changed accordingly.

With the destruction of the six states by the Qin state, and the subsequent unification of the country, the Bronze Age civilizations of the Yangtze River Basin, which had been in turmoil for thousands of years, merged with



*Nurtured by the Same Water, Bronze Age Civilizations in the Yangtze River Basin* at Guangdong Museum is the first such exhibition held in Guangdong province to showcase the Bronze Age civilizations in the Yangtze River Basin. It displays 137 rare exhibits from the region. PHOTOS BY ZHENG ERQI / CHINA DAILY

main civilizations of China.

The Yangtze River, the longest in China — and the longest in the world to run through a single country — originates from the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau and bisects

the entire nation before meeting the East China Sea. The Yangtze River Basin has the most abundant copper resources in China, leading to the rise of Bronze Age civilizations and cultures.

## LIFE

## Dying with dignity, living with love

A woman's experience of losing her mother and a cancer diagnosis launched a quest of understanding that ultimately inspired a journey to become a hospice volunteer and, consequently, an author, **Yang Yang** reports.

On July 6, 2019, 62-year-old Xu Shu came to the palliative care unit at Beijing Haidian Hospital, the Haidian Section of Peking University Third Hospital, as a volunteer photographer. She hesitated. She knew that on the hospice beds lay cancer patients who, with life expectancies of no more than six months, usually suffered from severe pain.

She knew how miserable they may look and sound.

Three years before, when her mother received chemotherapy, Xu heard the wailing of a terminal cancer patient at the same ward.

"It's so appalling. All the other patients became nervous when they heard the howling because that might also be their future," she recalls.

Her mom told her she'd rather die in a coma.

Xu's mother had lived with cancer for three years. But it was still hard for Xu to prepare for her unexpected death.

In her final days, her health deteriorated quickly. Xu didn't know what could be done at home. So, she sent her mom to the hospital.

It was a Sunday in mid-July. The ward's air conditioner was blowing cold blasts onto the bed to prevent cross infection. The nurse said nothing could be done about it.

The pharmacy didn't have opioids because it was the weekend. But Xu was still able to obtain transdermal patches that she thought could help her mother get through the night.

Before she drove her exhausted father home, she helped her mother lie down, covered her with a blanket and applied pain-relieving medicinal liquor on her dying purple toes. Her mom asked her to take good care of her father and said, "See you tomorrow."

Those were her last words.

Xu wanted to return to the hospital but was too tired. Thinking the nurses would attend to her mother, she fell asleep.

She returned early the next morning and was surprised to receive an official notice that her mother was in critical condition.

Xu rushed to her bedside. She found her mother couldn't move her facial muscles — and her hands were tied to the bed.

She asked her mom what had happened, but she could only move her head. A nurse explained "the patient" had been writhing in pain, so they'd secured her arms so she wouldn't disconnect the infusion tube. A night nurse had mistakenly peeled off the two transdermal patches, which no longer worked after they were reapplied.

"The pain was so intense that she had a stroke," she says.

Xu was devastated, thinking about how lonely, desperate and pain-stricken her mother was in that cold ward while she slept at home.

The hospital only allowed half-hour visits each day.

After the stroke, her mother was not able to say a word. And before Xu was ready, her mother died alone in the ICU.

When she rushed to the hospital, she found fluid was oozing from a hole in her mother's chest. But she recalled she'd told the doctor to not do any invasive procedures.

Xu was overcome with sorrow, regret, self-blame and despair. Half a year later, she was diagnosed with breast cancer.

She sent her father to an elder care center while she received treatment. And she and her husband spent the following year and a half traveling the world.

In Britain, she lay on a lawn outside a beautiful graveyard, where she found people appeared more relaxed when confronted with death. In Kenya, she saw beautiful wild animals and shot great memories with her camera.

But travel didn't allow her to entirely escape her sadness. She had to stop and contemplate her own death, "which is inevitable."

"If I wanted to continue traveling blithely, first, I needed to answer the question that kept coming to me: If my cancer progressed, where and how am I going to die? I don't want to undergo my mother's pain. I don't want to die at the hospital in lonely



**Top:** Xu Shu delivers a lecture, in October, about her thoughts on death as a cancer patient and a hospice care volunteer at Peking University. **Above left:** The cover of Xu's book *Chongqi Shengming* (Life Anew) that recorded her experiences and thoughts related to death, hospice care and life. **Above right:** From 2020 to 2022, Xu volunteered to look after cancer patients in the palliative care unit of Beijing Haidian Hospital. **Below:** Xu traveled to different places to see the world and take photos. She recalls the experiences as she enjoys a cup of tea in Kashgar, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

despair. I was wondering if there is any better way to die," she says.

"If, in the end, I get symptoms that can't be dealt with at home, where can I go to relieve the symptoms and die not so alone and helpless?"

#### Final comforts

China's population is rapidly aging. In 2017, the National Health Commission released a guide for palliative care and a list of the first five pilot cities.

Beijing Haidian Hospital became one of China's first to provide professional palliative care in hematology and oncology in July of that year. And Qin Yuan, a professor of palliative care at the hospital, happened to live in the same apartment building as Xu's parents.

Xu learned for the first time about palliative care and the new unit at BHH from Qin's WeChat post: "At palliative care wards, terminal cancer patients can relieve pain and die with decency in the warm company of hospice caregivers, family members and friends."

In 2018, Xu drafted a will clarifying what medical care she doesn't want if she's terminally ill — intubation, treatment and examination that causes severe pain, to be kept alive in a vegetative state and so on.

In July 2019, Xu became a volunteer photographer for BHH's hospice. Before she stepped into the palliative care ward, her body tensed up when she thought of the miserable scenes she'd see.

She forced herself to go forward.

To her surprise, when she pushed open the door, she saw a sunny room where flowers were blooming in the small pots on the windowsill. She heard volunteers greet each patient warmly, and they responded with friendliness.

She saw a veteran volunteer holding a patient's hand, casting cherishes

ing looks at him while talking with him. Other volunteers were helping patients wash and cut their hair, as if they were family or old friends.

There was no wailing, no unbearable suffering. Every patient seemed relaxed in the company of at least one family member.

Xu was amazed by such a warm scene, so full of love, but also felt confused at how the volunteers did what they did.

"The patients here were lucky. At the darkest times of their lives, there were people holding their hands, caring for them, loving them and accompanying them to face their deaths. They were safe. They were not lonely," she says.

Xu decided that she would receive palliative care at the end of her life. She at first volunteered as a caregiver out of selfish intentions — she wanted to secure a bed for herself in the future. And she also wanted to help those patients and to reduce her own guilt.

However, becoming a qualified palliative caregiver requires mastery of various kinds of knowledge.

They need proper training to better understand life and death from philosophical and psychological perspectives so that they won't fear death or feel too sad or frustrated when the patients they care for — and about — die.

"The lectures about life and death that I attended saved me. It helped me see my mother's death from a new perspective and rid myself of

“Death is as saintly as birth. I'm completely in awe of and obedient to it. ... Death can come at any time. Then, I will be happy to go. But now, I will live each day well.”

**Xu Shu**, hospice volunteer and book author



the deep sorrow, self-blame and depression I'd felt," she says.

"Death is not the end of a life but the start of a new journey. Such an idea helps console many people, including doctors who have to face many deaths every day."

Xu also learned aromatherapy to massage concentrated plant-based oils onto patients' skin to help them relax and sleep.

Another important thing volunteers must learn is to express their care and love through eye contact and body language. For example, caregivers should look at patients with warm and determined eyes, and should hug people in a way that will let them feel secure and warm.

By studying, reading and practicing, Xu gradually mastered related knowledge and skills. She learned how to provide individualized care for patients to enable them to spend their final days in decency and comfort. In the end, peaceful deaths console both the dead and the living.

Xu recalls that a middle-aged patient whose mother kept asking nurses to change his bed sheets.

"She was very rude. Later, we learned that her son used to be a very clean person but hadn't been able to bathe for months after falling ill because his skin hurt. The mother felt like changing the bed sheets was all she could do for him," she recalls.

So, Xu and another volunteer offered to give him aromatherapy. To persuade his mother, they first tried it on one leg.

They applied essential oils on his limb, and massaged it very carefully and gently. The dead skin came off without hurting him. The mother

burst into tears and became friendly toward them from then on. The three later performed aromatherapy on his whole body together.

"Every patient is my teacher," Xu says.

"At the palliative care unit, I learned to respect every life that will soon pass on. They inspired me to think about the value and meaning of life, and to reflect on my own."

#### Life before death

Xu started to re-examine her life, and, in particular, her relationships with her parents, husband and daughter.

She stopped being a people pleaser. She readjusted her relationships with her family. She reconciled with her mother in her mind and, most importantly, learned to talk to, admire and cherish herself.

When her cancer returned, she found she didn't fear death anymore.

"Death is as saintly as birth. I'm completely in awe of and obedient to it," she says.

"Death can come at any time. Then, I will be happy to go. But now, I will live each day well."

When her mother was terminally ill, Xu did not know what to do at home, so she had to send her to the hospital, leaving her to die alone there. When her father, who had Parkinson's and Alzheimer's, reached his last period of life, she knew what to do. And when she was not sure, she turned to Qin and Professor Ning Xiaohong from the palliative care unit of Peking Union Medical College Hospital.

"When a family member is going to die, be generous and give him or her more love, even if it's just your touch or hugs, which are better than a thousand words," she says.

"Let them feel how you really love and cherish them. And they'll leave this world surrounded by your love."

Chinese people of her father's generation are, in general, not used to affectionate touching and hugs, and typically feel embarrassed when their children tell them they love them.

Bit by bit, Xu brought her father to accept all her expressions of love through words and body language. She also help him imagine, through visualization, the fulfillment of wishes related to major life concerns like education, family and career.

In the end, he died peacefully, with her by his side.

Xu felt pleased that she could use her knowledge to help him through this process.

She wrote an essay reflecting on her mother's and father's deaths, and her own very different experiences and feelings. She sent it to Qin and Ning as a kind of summary of what she'd learned and practiced. Ning encouraged Xu to share her experiences with more volunteers, since the contrast between her parents' deaths was too stark.

After she shared her stories with them, she was invited to write a book.

Last year, *Chongqi Shengming* (Life Anew) was published by Guangxi Normal University Press.

Starting from her early life, Xu tells her stories about dealing with life and death in concise language.

The book is rated 8.8 out of 10 on the major Chinese review site, Douban. Many readers comment that they're inspired by the writer's thoughts on life and death, and knowledge about palliative care.

Beijing Haidian Hospital has increased its palliative care beds from six to 50. According to a municipal plan, by 2025, every community in Beijing will build a hospice center with at least 50 beds, which adds up to more than 1,800 citywide.

An old Chinese saying goes: "You can't know life before you know death." Xu says she rediscovered her life at age 62.

Today, she's learning to use drones to take photos of the world's most splendid views. She prints some of these travel photos and brings them to the hospital's palliative care unit.

"Patients there will choose the ones they love and hang them in front of their beds," she says.

"I'm happy to give them some warmth in this way."

Contact the writer at yangyangs@chinadaily.com.cn



Xu's experience as a hospice volunteer encouraged her to reflect on her life and she started doing things she was interested in. She learned to take photos with drones and in September Xu operated a drone over a prairie in Chifeng, Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

## LIFE



Zheng Xiaohui (right), a Chinese student, plays *erhu* alongside another Chinese student, Ma Ruomeng, who plays *pipa*, in Milan, Italy, in September 2023. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Building bridges

Architecture student forges cultural connections in Europe through street performances of traditional Chinese music, **Zhao Ruixue** reports in Jinan.

Dressed in *hanfu* and adorned in delicate makeup, Zheng Xiaohui, a Chinese student in Milan, Italy, has been conducting street performances playing the *erhu*, a traditional two-stringed bowed instrument, to promote her country's culture to the world.

Hailing from Weifang, Shandong province, Zheng is currently pursuing a master's degree in architecture and urban design at the Politecnico di Milano. In her spare time, however, she has taken to the streets, performing in Italy and France, captivating passersby with her *erhu* performances.

During her first street performance in Milan in April last year, many sat down to listen to her and some also attempted to play the *erhu* themselves. The enthusiastic response from the audience cheered her up.

Currently, she does three or four street shows a month.

Zheng's proficiency in playing the *erhu* has instilled in her the confidence to perform in public.

She began learning to play at the age of 9 as her parents sought to cultivate her focus and dedication. Zheng practiced one to two hours a day throughout her childhood. During her time at Xi'an Jiaotong University, she was part of the school's Chinese orchestra, where she honed her musical skills and collaborative abilities.

"The *erhu* has become an integral part of my life, akin to a close friend," Zheng says.

Her decision to take her talent to the streets was sparked by daily encounters with street performers in Milan, especially after she watched a video of a violinist's street performance that caused many people to dance, creating a great atmosphere.

"I was so touched, and found that music has a great power to bring people together," she says.

Zheng then decided to share the beauty of the *erhu* with the world, hoping to spark curiosity and appreciation for this traditional Chinese instrument.

She applied for a pitch near a canal in Milan to perform.

Zheng prepares for every performance. She carefully selects a diverse repertoire that combines traditional Chinese folk music with popular Italian classics, such as *Jasmine*, *Horse Racing* and a reworked version of *Bella Ciao* tailored for the *erhu*.

"I made some simple adaptations to make *Bella Ciao* more suitable for the *erhu*," says Zheng.

Her performances have received positive responses, with audiences often expressing their



**Above:** Zheng Xiaohui performs the *erhu* on a street in Milan, Italy, in 2023. **Below:** Zheng plays the *erhu* alongside a French musician, Matthieu Lecoq, in Paris in September 2023.

“Every time the audience appreciates my performance and wants to learn more about the *erhu*, I am encouraged and feel it is meaningful to spread Chinese culture by doing street performances.”

**Zheng Xiaohui**, Chinese student in Milan, Italy



appreciation for the enchanting melodies and even dancing or tapping their feet to the rhythm.

Children often dance to the lively tune of *Horse Racing*, sometimes you see an elderly man swaying to *Goodbye, My Friend*, and even an Italian woman doing tai chi to Chinese music, says Zheng.

"Music is a bridge for cultural communication, transcending language barriers," she says.

To enhance her performances and expand the allure of Chinese traditional folk music, Zheng collaborates with other musicians, integrating instruments such as the *pipa* (a four-stringed Chinese lute), cello, and saxophone alongside the *erhu*.

"I will continue to explore ways

of collaboration with both traditional Chinese culture and Western culture, not just musical instruments, but also opera singing, street dancing and *bianlian*, the traditional Sichuan opera face-swapping performance," she says.

Her efforts extend beyond live performances, as she shares her street performances online to showcase the charm of the *erhu* to a global audience.

Zheng says that music is a powerful tool for cultural exchange and understanding, fostering meaningful connections.

"Many people asked me about the *erhu*, such as how many strings it has, and some people have made observations about how I play the instrument," she says.

Through her performances, she has not only sparked curiosity about the *erhu*, but has also inspired cultural appreciation.

"One Italian woman purchased a traditional Chinese *hanfu* outfit after being captivated by my winter attire during a street performance," says Zheng.

"Every time the audience appreciates my performance and wants to learn more about the *erhu*, I am encouraged and feel it is meaningful to spread Chinese culture by doing street performances," she says.

Looking ahead, Zheng has aspirations to organize her own concerts to provide a platform for a wider audience to appreciate the beauty and cultural significance of Chinese folk music.

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

## Tsinghua field trip strikes a chord with Latin American youth

When Wang Yijun started to learn to play the *pipa* (a four-stringed Chinese lute) when she was 6, she probably could not have imagined that one day she would be performing at the Santiago Sculpture Park in Chile.

The performance by the third-year undergraduate student at Tsinghua University majoring in history took place on a sultry day in January during her winter vacation.

She was wearing a beautiful traditional *hanfu* style scarlet gown, holding a pear-shaped *pipa* with a huge smile on her face. Groups of people waited in line to take pictures with her and asked her to play something as she sat in front of the Tsinghua University booth at the Joyful Spring Festival celebration in Santiago. The event was co-hosted by the Chinese Embassy in Chile, the Municipal Government of Providencia in the east of the capital, the Confucius Institute at the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, and the Chilean Dragon and Lion Dance Association.

The booth was designed by students from the Global Competence Overseas Practice Course and was divided into three categories, which included cultural products from Tsinghua, ethnic and intangible cultural heritage handicrafts and a photography exhibition of the Chinese countryside by Tsinghua students.

From Jan 11 to 25, a group of 11 students and two professors from Tsinghua University went to Chile and Argentina as part of a public interaction team to improve international competence and cultivate intercultural exchange among young people.

Alongside the cultural products on display, a student from Argentina, Jennifer Wei, became a temporary recruit specialist at the booth, and introduced Tsinghua University's international programs. She drew on her personal experience to depict its vibrant overseas study experience and set up a Q&A session for anyone who wanted to continue their education in China.

After hearing the introduction to Tsinghua, residents wrote their impressions of China on a poster. Some of them knew a bit of Chinese, scribbling the characters for "I love China" or "Happy Year of the Dragon". Some of them wrote, "thank you for coming and hope to see you very soon". A colorful and meaningful drawing completed by people from Chile displayed their captivation with China's seemingly exotic culture.

More than 10,000 people passed by the booth. Niu Qingbao, Chinese ambassador to Chile, and Ignacio Sanchez, the president of Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, also visited the booth. They recognized the effort of the Tsinghua teams and expressed their appreciation.

During the trip, Wang also played at a cultural exchange activity at the Argentina Citizens Martial Arts Club. The students from Tsinghua performed after a showcase of kung fu skills by members of the club. Wang played Li Huanzhi's *Spring Festival Suite* and Luis Fonsi's *Despacito* on her *pipa*, presenting cultural fusion, as well as accompanying singing performances by

“Face-to-face communication enhanced the possibility of future collaboration, and the connectivity between Chinese and Latin American young people is stronger than ever.”

**Hu Yu**, dean of Tsinghua Institute of Culture and Creativity

other students. All the students and club members sang the 2008 Olympics theme song *Beijing Welcomes You* together, and danced through to the end of the event.

There are more than 300 members of the Argentina Citizens Martial Arts Club, only three of whom are Chinese. It promotes kung fu to Argentines. Chen Min, the founder of the club, says, "I thought about going back home, but the cultural exchange here is more important. Look at the students! They really enjoy Chinese martial arts."

The Spring Festival celebrations continued in Buenos Aires, especially in its Chinatown district. Visitors from all over the country gathered to see the dragon and lion dances, traditional musical performances and creative activities.

Chinese Argentine Carlos Lin was an unusually busy master of ceremonies, running around Chinatown and delivering live narration in both Spanish and Chinese.

He grew up in Chinatown in Buenos Aires, and witnessed the development of the Argentine Chinese community. Moreover, he says he is going to turn an old house in the area into a cultural center and make it a hot spot of communication and exchange between the two countries.

Hu Yu, dean of Tsinghua Institute of Culture and Creativity, says that the institute has plenty of experience in renovation in China, and the key to cultural exchange is talent. Zhao Yuezhi, humanities chair professor of Tsinghua University, also mentioned that young talent could be provided by Tsinghua University, and international collaboration between the institution and local residents will form a new ecology of intercultural communication.

Although the 14-day trip has concluded, the cultural exchanges between Chinese and Latin American youth have sown promising seeds despite the distance.

"Face-to-face communication enhanced the possibility of future collaboration, and the connectivity between Chinese and Latin American young people is stronger than ever," says professor Hu.

The author, Zhu Dunhua, is a graduate student at the School of Journalism and Communication at Tsinghua University.



Wang Yijun, holding her *pipa*, poses for pictures with a resident in front of the Tsinghua booth at the Joyful Spring Festival event in the Santiago Sculpture Park in Chile. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY