

Travel boom

Wanderlust gives boost to economy, consumption

BUSINESS, PAGE 8



Doctors in Seoul rally for colleagues

WORLD, PAGE 5

History on display

Museum has placed achievements of Qin, Han dynasties in a wider context

CULTURAL HERITAGE, PAGE 14



CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 MONDAY, MARCH 4, 2024



Shenzhou XVII mission commander Senior Colonel Tang Hongbo conducts an extravehicular mission outside the Tiangong space station on Saturday. LI HE / XINHUA

Shenzhou XVII astronauts complete space repair task

By ZHAO LEI
zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

The Shenzhou XVII crew conducted their second spacewalk outside the Tiangong space station on Saturday, completing the first repair operation by Chinese astronauts, according to the China Manned Space Agency.

The agency said in a news release that mission commander Senior Colonel Tang Hongbo and crew member Lieutenant Colonel Jiang Xinlin returned to the Wentian science module at 1:32 pm after floating for nearly eight hours outside the colossal orbital station. The third crew member, Lieutenant Colonel Tang Shengjie, stayed inside Tiangong to

provide support, it said. With the cooperation and assistance from ground controllers and the space station's robotic arm, the team completed all their assigned tasks, the agency said.

It was the 15th spacewalk carried out by Chinese astronauts. During the spacewalk, Tang Hongbo and Jiang repaired damage to parts on the Tianhe core module's solar wings that was caused by tiny space debris. After the repairs, the wings resumed normal operations, the release said.

The duo also checked the condition of the space station's external structure, it noted.

The spacewalk was the third for Tang Hongbo, who is also the first

person to return to the Tiangong space station.

Wang Ya'nan, chief editor of Aerospace Knowledge magazine, said extravehicular repair operations are sophisticated and challenging.

"Repair operation is a very important task for astronauts during their stay inside a space station, because it is vital to fix broken parts so as to avoid safety hazards," he said. "During a repair task, astronauts need to cooperate with each other and ground controllers and usually need the assistance of robotic arms, and they must be familiar with required procedures and maneuvers."

According to Wang, solar wings

are most susceptible to external damage, because they are large and thin, making them fragile when hit by space junk.

The Shenzhou XVII astronauts, who are the sixth crew to inhabit the Tiangong space station, arrived at the colossal flying outpost on Oct 26 to take over from their peers in the Shenzhou XVI mission.

The crew performed their first spacewalk on Dec 21, completing a host of tasks including carrying out test repairs.

They are scheduled to wrap up their spaceflight at the end of April and will hand over the Tiangong space station to the Shenzhou XVIII crew before returning to Earth.

Xi greets Sharif on election as Pakistani PM

Countries urged to advance traditional ties, upgrade the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

By XU WEI
xuwei@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping extended congratulations to Shehbaz Sharif on Sunday on his election as Pakistan's prime minister, in a diplomatic gesture underscoring the ironclad ties between the two neighbors and their shared commitment to upgrading the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

The congratulatory message came as Sharif, 72, was elected to a second term by the newly formed Parliament of the South Asian country on Sunday.

Xi expressed in the message his belief that under the leadership of Sharif and the new Pakistani government, and with the united efforts of all sectors in Pakistan, the country will surely secure new and greater accomplishments in the cause of national development and progress.

He emphasized that the two nations should carry forward their traditional friendship, strengthen exchanges and cooperation in various fields and jointly build an upgraded version of the CPEC, a landmark project of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The two sides should build a closer China-Pakistan community of shared future in the new era, creating more benefits for the peoples of both countries, he added.

Premier Li Qiang also sent a congratulatory message to Sharif on Sunday.

The CPEC, which has included a variety of infrastructure projects such as roads, railways and oil and gas pipelines, has brought direct investment of \$25.4 billion to Pakistan, created a total of 236,000 jobs, and built 510 kilometers of highways as well as an 886-km-long high-voltage power transmission line, according to the Chinese embassy in Pakistan.

Sharif returned to the role he held until August last year, when Parliament was dissolved ahead of the elections and a caretaker government took over.

He said on social media platform X last year that the CPEC "has

emerged as a bedrock of Pakistan's socioeconomic trajectory", helping the nation solve its crippling energy shortages and building high-quality infrastructure.

Liu Zongyi, director of the Center for South Asia Studies at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, said the upgrade of the CPEC is set to usher in more tangible benefits for the Pakistani people going forward.

He said he expects that the new Pakistani government will prioritize economic growth and the improvement of public well-being, adding that the support from China will continue to be pivotal for the nation's development.

"As for the CPEC, it is important for the two nations to explore more projects that can deliver more tangible benefits to the residents involved and further improve regional connectivity," he said.

Liu Jieyi, spokesman for the second session of the 14th Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee, also named the CPEC as one of the exemplary projects of the Belt and Road at a news conference on Sunday ahead of the annual session of the CPPCC National Committee, China's top political advisory body.

Taking a question from a Pakistani journalist, Liu said the corridor has "made tangible contributions to Pakistan's national development and regional connectivity".

In an article published in February, Pakistan Ambassador to China Khalid Hashmi said that the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor showcases a people-centered development concept that aligns with China's development philosophy.

"Pakistan is eager to learn from China's successful experience," he wrote.

The two countries should bolster people-to-people exchanges and encourage visits by entrepreneurs, scholars, students, youths, artists and media members, share their success stories, experiences and practices, and promote mutual learning, he added.



Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan's prime minister-elect and leader of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party, speaks during a news conference in Lahore on Feb 13. ARIF ALI / AFP

Advisers focus on drive for modernization

By ZHANG YI
zhangyi1@chinadaily.com.cn

National political advisers will continue to focus on advancing China's modernization, providing suggestions and building consensus to harness wisdom and strength in achieving the country's development goals.

Liu Jieyi, spokesman for the second session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the nation's top political advisory body, outlined these goals at a news conference on Sunday, one day ahead of the annual event.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and also the 75th anniversary of the CPPCC. "Throughout its 75-year history, the CPPCC has played a pivotal role in



Special Coverage, pages 2-4

various historical periods," Liu said.

Over the past 12 months, the 14th CPPCC National Committee, which started its five-year term last year, has fulfilled its role as a consultative body, conducting thorough investigations and consultations while imposing democratic oversight on central tasks and making fresh contributions to the development of the Party and the country, he said.

The CPPCC National Committee has conducted 94 consultations for advisers and officials to exchange ideas. Many of the sug-

gestions were translated into policies and measures, which helped propel economic and social development, Liu said.

These meetings focused on various issues including building a new development paradigm, accelerating the implementation of the innovation-driven development strategy, optimizing the development environment for private enterprises, enhancing the influence of Chinese culture and improving the policy system for supporting childbirth, the spokesman said.

The CPPCC National Committee has increased the frequency of consultations in order to fully reflect the opinions and suggestions of the public, Liu said.

The top political advisory body also carried out 138 activities to strengthen the support role of research and investigation for

political consultation, he said.

It has also established a system for thematic research, with the vice-chairpersons of the CPPCC National Committee leading advisers from various backgrounds to conduct in-depth research on crucial topics, including promoting the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt and advancing the governance of new pollutants, Liu said.

Political advisers were encouraged to conduct surveys at the grassroots level and among the public, he said. "They have directly delved into communities and rural areas, listening to real voices and observing real situations from residents and farmers," Liu said.

Efforts have been made to transform the results of consultation and advice into effective contributions to serve national governance, he added.

Key transformations needed to galvanize China's economic resurgence

INSIDE
Movement for a green future
Global Views, page 13

www.chinadailyglobal.com
Member of ANN
China Daily Global ©2024 All Rights Reserved

On the back of a strong 5.7 percent growth rate in 2021, US President Joe Biden boasted that for the first time in 20 years, the US economy had grown faster than China's.

The boast was misleading. China's economy grew one-and-a-half times faster, registering 8.4 percent growth in 2021. Undeterred, Biden bragged in a Twitter post in December 2022 that the US would "grow faster than China's economy" in 2022.

Despite registering one of its weakest growth rates since the inception of reform and opening

WORLD WATCH
By Sourabh Gupta

up, China's growth rate of 3 percent in 2022 was again one-and-a-half times faster than that of the US, which saw growth of 1.9 percent that year.

In August last year, on the back of one of the US' strongest labor markets in over 50 years, Biden misstated China's growth as being "close to 2 percent a year" and tauntingly

referred to its economy as a "ticking time bomb". When year-end numbers were tallied up, China had grown at a pace double that of the US in 2023 — 5.2 percent compared versus 2.5 percent.

With the Congressional Budget Office projecting a US growth rate of 1.5 percent in 2024, the open question now is whether China's economy will grow three times or faster than that of the US this year.

Western detractors, who have leapt on China's post-COVID economic stumbles to pour scorn on the idea that the Chinese economy

will overtake that of the US in aggregate size, should set aside space to eat their words. China's economy will not only exceed that of the US within the next decade but, should the productivity level of Chinese workers over the next quarter of a century attain that of South Korean workers today (a reasonably foreseeable prospect), the Chinese economy could outgrow the US economy in size by a factor of two.

China's demographic dividend might have approached the point of exhaustion, but there is as yet

ample pent-up growth potential awaiting release in its ongoing transitions from state to market and from rural to urban areas.

Be that as it may, China cannot rest on its present and future economic laurels. It must continue to prioritize three major structural transformations.

The first is deepening the structural transformation of the domestic science and technology ecosystem. Having been burned by dependence on Western

See Transformation, page 7



TWO SESSIONS

Advisers diligent in shaping environmental policy

Proposals aim to have tangible impact on people's daily lives, international cooperation

By ZHANG YI

zhangyi@chinadaily.com.cn

Gu Shuzhong, a national political adviser and environmental policy professional, had already submitted five proposals to this year's two sessions before the annual political event opened on Monday.

His proposals focus on environmental governance and green development, including suggestions for further improving the river and lake chief system — in which government heads are designated to be in charge of protecting water bodies within their jurisdiction — and accelerating the establishment of an interprovincial compensation mechanism for the production and sale of grain.

Gu's suggestions are based on research and investigation in the past year while serving as a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body.

As integral players in multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, CPPCC members serve as advisers for government, legislative and judicial organs, and are tasked with putting forward proposals on major political and social issues.

About 2,100 national political advisers will gather in Beijing on Monday to attend the annual conference, along with that of the National People's Congress, the top legislative body, making up the two sessions.

Last year, the CPPCC National Committee added a new group focused on the environment and natural resources, consisting of professionals and officials in related fields.

It was the first time a new group had been launched by the top advisory body since a group focused on economics was added in 1993. In response, many provincial CPPCC committees also launched their own groups to focus on the environment and natural resources.

Gu, a senior research fellow from the Institute of Resource and Environmental Policy of the Development Research Center of the State Council, said the move reflects the central leadership's attention to the issue.

At the National Conference on Ecological and Environmental Protection held in Beijing in July, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, stressed that the coming five years will be critical to the building of a "Beautiful China."

Xi, who is also China's president and chairman of the Central Military Commission, said the country should make remarkable achievements in building a Beautiful China, support high-quality development with a high-quality ecological environment and accelerate the advancement of modernization featuring harmony between humanity and nature.

He said the committees of the CPPCC at all levels should intensify efforts to conduct special consultation and democratic oversight in boosting ecological conservation.

Ding Xuexiang, a member of the Standing Committee of the CPC Central Committee Political Bureau



Boats ply a waterway in an ecological scenic area in Changzhou, Jiangsu province, in December. SHI BAIRONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Gu Shuzhong

and China's vice-premier, urged political advisers to leverage their professions while taking part in a group meeting of advisers from the environment and resource group during the two sessions last year.

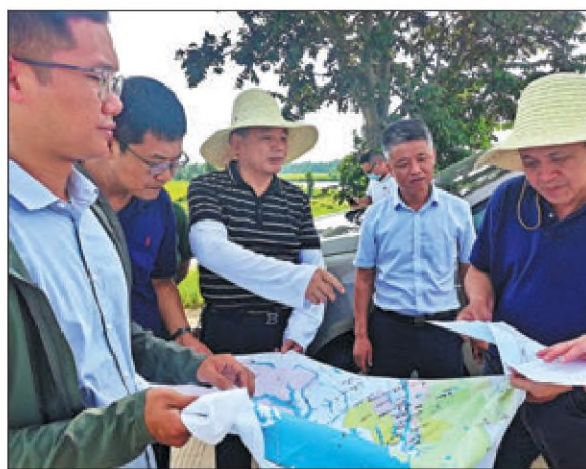
He underscored the need to accelerate socioeconomic development with a comprehensive green transformation, proactively and steadily work toward the targets of carbon dioxide peaking and carbon neutrality, enhance capacity to ensure the supply of key energy resources, and sort out prominent ecological and environmental problems that directly affect people's lives.

New focus

Gu said in recent years China has achieved historic, comprehensive and pivotal accomplishments in environmental governance. Looking to the future, whether it is green, low-carbon development or the construction of a Beautiful China, there are still many challenges and difficulties that require political advisers to provide suggestions.

With 85 members, it is the ninth-largest of the 34 participating groups in the 14th CPPCC National Committee. The members' professional backgrounds include ecological environment, natural resources, water projects, urban planning, forestry, meteorology, transportation, chemistry and law.

About 40 percent are government officials, including Huang Runqiu, minister of ecology and environment, Zhang Jianhua, director of the National Energy Administration, and officials from the Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Natural Resources.



Political adviser Wei Yuansong (right) conducts field research at Poyang Lake near Nanchang, Jiangxi province, in July 2022. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Some 30 percent are experts and scholars in related fields, including university presidents, directors of research institutes and academicians from both the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering.

In addition, about 20 percent of the members work for energy and chemical companies, including China National Nuclear Power, Sinochem Holdings, State Grid and China Rare Earth.

Gu said bringing these high-ranking officials, senior executives and experts together allows for in-depth exchanges from the perspectives of management, operation, academia and more, giving them the opportunity to truly complement each others' strengths.

"As a scholar, I have learned a great deal from those officials and executives, helping to make my proposals and suggestions more practical," he said, adding that over the

past year, he has participated in several research and consultation meetings, covering topics such as a mechanism to realize the value of ecological products, and a recycling and utilization system for the green energy industry.

Members in the group have focused on how to achieve both economic prosperity and environmental sustainability — that is, how to simultaneously or collaboratively achieve high-quality development and high-level protection, he added.

Wei Yuansong, a member of the National Committee of the CPPCC, who focuses on water pollution control technology at the Research Center for Eco-Environmental Sciences, Chinese Academy of Sciences, said the professional team helps enable the CPPCC to better carry out its work and provide support for the country's construction of an ecological civilization.

Last year, Wei and other members participated in several major research projects, all led by leaders of the CPPCC, involving national water networks, ecological protection in the Yangtze River Economic Belt and other important national plans.

Following these research projects, the members jointly authored reports that were provided to relevant decision-making departments for reference and some of the suggestions were also incorporated into relevant documents, he said.

Last year, members of the environmental and resources group submitted over 160 proposals to the CPPCC National Committee, and they delivered speeches at consultative sessions and meetings attended by government officials.

Additionally, they submitted more than 200 pieces related to public sentiment and social information and participated in inspections, research projects and instances of democratic supervision, according to the CPPCC National Committee.

Global influence

Both Gu and Wei said climate change and its mitigation are global concerns that no country can afford to ignore and represent a significant area for collaboration.

Gu said unlike politics, economics, culture and technology, climate governance is a common topic for many countries, particularly for the United States, as well as between China and Europe.

China has been actively participating in global climate governance, notably by setting clear goals to reach peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

"This commitment marks the first time a developing country has set a clear schedule for peaking

emissions and achieving carbon neutrality," Gu said.

Through a series of policy documents, China has outlined a roadmap and even detailed plans for achieving these targets, demonstrating that China's efforts to address climate change are not merely rhetoric but are being translated into action, he said.

"China's ambitious carbon plans have received strong recognition and support from the international community," he added.

Gu said both cooperation and discord exist between China and the US in global climate governance. Fundamentally, this reflects the differences and even conflicts between developed countries represented by the US and developing countries represented by China, particularly regarding their respective responsibilities in addressing climate change.

"This is a normal phenomenon. It is essential to engage in both cooperation and contention, contributing significantly to addressing global climate change," he said.

Due to the presidential election in the US this year, there is a possibility of further changes or even reversals in US climate and energy policies, Gu said, adding that it is necessary for China to pay attention to this and adjust strategies promptly while steadfastly adhering to established goals and pathways.

However, cooperative efforts to address climate change have become a cohesive factor in the relationship between China and the US, he said.

Since 2014, Wei has worked to provide scientific and educational assistance for the Belt and Road Initiative. "Over the years, this work has made me realize that developing countries are eager to improve their ecological environment," he said.

"Through learning, research and investigation into China's experiences in ensuring the safety of drinking water, developing nations have recognized that our country's practices and experiences are worth learning from," he said.

In recent years, Beijing has engaged in international scientific and technological cooperation with the US, the European Union and other countries on sponge city construction, Wei said.

Sponge cities have planning and infrastructure aimed at preventing flooding, and increasing water storage.

"This collaboration has not only enhanced the capability and level of sponge city construction but has also made other countries increasingly recognize the value of Beijing's experience in the field," he said.

Meanwhile, developing countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative are undergoing rapid urbanization, particularly in tropical regions, where urban stormwater control and risk management are facing increasingly severe challenges and require assistance, he added.

Wei suggested that Beijing fully utilize its position and advantages as a hub for international exchange and science and technology innovation to promote its experience in sponge city construction in developing countries involved in the BRI.

Online
See more by scanning the code.



From left: Chinese and Egyptian builders work together to measure a building under construction in the central business district in New Cairo, the African country's new administrative capital area, in December. XINHUA
Photovoltaic panels generate electricity at a Sino-Thai joint venture project in Chonburi province, Thailand, in November. It is Thailand's largest photovoltaic project to be installed on top of a factory building. WANG TENG / XINHUA
Whooper swans feed at the Rongcheng Swan National Nature Reserve in Shandong province in January. LI XINJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY





TWO SESSIONS

PERSPECTIVE

Expert hails China's global initiatives

Nation's experience, wisdom can help resolve world problems, analyst says

By XING YI in London
xingyi@chinadaily.com.cn

China's three major global initiatives on development, security, and civilization have been welcomed by the majority of the world, and the West needs to gain a better understanding of them, said Keith Bennett, an analyst of international relations.

"In a step-by-step process, China is setting out its view of the world — not only the view of the world as it is, but a view of the world as it should be, and what kind of world humanity should be aspiring to," said Bennett, co-editor of the online platform Friends of Socialist China, as he discussed the Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative.

He added that the two sessions, the annual gatherings of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, provide an important window for the West to learn about China's domestic policy and its global vision.

NPC deputies and CPPCC members come to the sessions representing all walks of life, and the government report is a result of many deliberations and wide-ranging consultations.

"A lot of people in the West say that China is unpredictable. But actually, China puts forward its policies and its philosophy and its proposals very clearly," said Bennett, who studied Chinese history and politics at the University of London in the late 1970s and has visited China more than 200 times.

"I think whether people support China, or they don't support China, they actually should understand China first," said Bennett, who is also a long-time member of the Society for Anglo-Chinese Understanding, which was founded in 1965 to promote understanding and friendship between the British and Chinese people.

Bennett said the three initiatives outline China's experience and wisdom that can be used to deal with current world problems, such as how to achieve growth for developing countries and how to resolve conflicts in the Middle East.

Since President Xi Jinping proposed the Global Development Initiative at the 76th Session of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2021, the initiative has received a warm welcome by the majority of countries in the Global South, as its philosophies and policies are "in the interests of



Keith Bennett

the majority of the people in every country", Bennett said.

According to China's Permanent Mission to the United Nations and Other International Organizations in Vienna, more than 100 countries and international organizations have voiced support for the GDI, and over 70 countries had joined the Group of Friends of the GDI by the end of last year.

"This reflects the fact that development is still the most pressing need for the majority of humanity," Bennett said.

"But what are the things that people need to realize development? Peace and security?"

In that regard, the Global Security Initiative was put forward by Xi at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in April 2022, stressing the importance of upholding a vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries and adhering to non-interference in internal affairs.

Last year, the reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia under a China-brokered deal was a remarkable achievement of the initiative, Bennett said, adding that he has observed how China has been assisting in reconciliations in various regions.

"All three initiatives are linked as a whole. It's like you put one on top of the other to make the house," he said, adding that the Global Civilization Initiative, which was introduced by Xi during the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting in March last year has been indispensable in realizing those achievements.

"In the Western capitalist countries, Samuel Huntington's ideas of a 'clash of civilizations' find a strong resonance... but at base, it is a racist conception which constructs a hierarchy of civilizations, elevating that of the West and placing them in an adversarial and antagonistic relationship to one another," he wrote in another recent commentary.

"In stark contrast, the Global Civilization Initiative makes clear that the history of humanity, spanning thousands of years, has seen a variety of civilizations come into being, develop and thrive, and this has in return promoted the overall development of human society," Bennett said.

Off the plane from plateau



Members of the Xizang autonomous region delegation to the 14th National People's Congress arrive in Beijing on Sunday for this year's session. TENTSSEN SHINDEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Hunan farmer to represent peers

By ZOU SHUO in Changsha
zoushuo@chinadaily.com.cn

Unlike most of her peers who left their rural hometowns to find work in big cities, 34-year-old Ning Fenfang left her job in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in 2017 and now farms more than 66.7 hectares of land.

Ning, a member of the Tujia ethnic group, is from a mountainous village in Cili county in Zhangjiajie, Hunan province. She rents her farmland and hires villagers to work it. More than 300 housewives have worked part-time on her land, making more than 10,000 yuan (\$1,389) per year.

Ning was elected as a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress last year, which has motivated her to continue her farmwork.

The central authorities have often stressed the importance of "holding the rice bowl firmly in our own hands", meaning that farmers should work harder to make sure their farmland is not wasted, she said. "NPC deputies from the grassroots need to consider rural farmers' needs and bring their voices to the two sessions," she said.

During this year's annual gatherings of the NPC and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Ning will suggest including greenhouses in agricultural insurance plans, as recent freezing rains battering her hometown have destroyed many of the structures.

Although her daily life is centered around farming and agriculture nowadays, Ning said it is very rare for young people to become farmers in rural areas.

In 2012, Ning left her hometown to take a sales job in Hangzhou. She returned in 2017 to look after her mother and grandmother, both of whom were ill, and started working as a village official a year later.

While working in the village, she



Ning Fenfang takes a break in a paddy field in Cili county, Zhangjiajie, Hunan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

found that with many young people leaving to work in cities, much of the farmland had been deserted.

In 2020, Ning decided to resign from her post in the village and become a full-time farmer, growing rice and rapeseed.

However, as she knew little about farming, it was much more difficult than she imagined.

"The heat and scorching sun were the first things I had to deal with. I could not open my eyes because I was sweating so much, and although I was covered in ultraviolet light-proof clothing, my skin started to peel due to sunburn," she said.

Ning also experienced tremendous pain in her neck and back due to the intensive labor.

At first, she didn't farm much and her investment was low, so she didn't feel very pressured to succeed. But in 2021, she spent 79,000 yuan on a plowing machine and decided to expand the scale of her farmland. "I did not tell my husband about buying the machine, as I knew he would not agree," Ning said. "He did not speak to me for several months."

Ning's husband was running a small business in Zhangjiajie at the time. Eventually, he returned to the village to help her with the farmwork, but he said he would only stay for several months before returning to his business in the city.

However, as Ning was starting to increasingly invest in the farmland, he ultimately decided to give up his business and remain in the village to work with her.

Ning later bought more agricultural machines and even an unmanned aerial vehicle to help with the farming as she continues to rent more land. "I have invested millions of yuan in farming, and most of the money is borrowed from banks, families and relatives, so there is no turning back," she said.

She also founded a center for housewives in the village to work her farmland during busy hours. She pays the villagers every day for their work. She also plans to explore the agricultural tourism resources in Zhangjiajie so that children living in cities can experience farming.

What the NPC deputies and CPPCC members say



Tuo Qingming, NPC deputy, head of Ya'an education examinations authority, Sichuan province

I suggest that the nation offers free medical services to children under 6 years old and seniors above 75 years old. The free medical services for children will improve their health, the quality of the population and the birthrate, while the free services for seniors can raise their awareness of the need to receive medical treatment in a timely manner and lower their families' medical cost burdens.



Dong Mingzhu, NPC deputy, chairwoman of Gree Electric Appliances

I again suggest that the nation raise the threshold of individual income tax to 10,000 yuan (\$1,400) per month from 5,000 yuan. Since various allowances and exemptions, including those related to education and elder care, have in essence lifted the threshold to around 10,000 yuan, officially raising the threshold will reduce the cost of inspecting the qualifications for such exemptions and reduce falsifications.



Lyu Guoquan, CPPCC National Committee member, director of the general office of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions

I suggest that the legislature include the right of workers to "rest during off hours" in relevant laws. Some employers require employees to join work groups on instant messaging platforms and arrange work during their off hours, violating their right to rest and privacy. Legislation on the issue can better deter employers from illegally arranging for extra work after hours. The nation should also issue explanatory documents to define extra work done online and necessary compensation.



Zhou Shihong, CPPCC National Committee member, partner at Grandall Law Firm Hefei, Anhui province

Skyscrapers are a product of the development of modern construction technology, yet they also bring risks and costs, such as in disaster prevention and the mitigation of fires, as well as in the costs of energy consumption and demolition after they're no longer in use. If the drawbacks and risks outweigh the advantages, we shouldn't build so many high-rise and ultra high-rise buildings. In addition to rules regulating skyscrapers in metropolises, high-rise buildings between 27 meters and 100 meters in small and medium-sized cities urgently need regulations and restrictions due to the large number of them and the increase in the pace of their development. Legislators and supervising departments should roll out rules to strictly restrict the construction of high-rise buildings and ban ultra high-rise ones.

LIANG SHUANG

Food security to feature prominently at meetings

In September, I was given a tour of the China Agricultural University campus in Beijing shortly after the success of a three-year trial in which home-grown genetically modified corn and soybean crops were planted.

A researcher shepherded me through half a dozen labs packed with bulky machines that hummed as they analyzed genetic samples. Operators in white lab coats sat back to back, bending over test tubes and culture medium pads loaded with genetically modified corn cells.

The cells are candidates for the next-generation corn varieties, with all the traits a farmer could dream of: nutritious, higher-yield and drought-tolerant, with stronger resistance to diseases, pests and herbicides. A poster in the corridor touted an innovation that is key to developing homegrown GM crops. Lai Jinsheng, a CAU professor, and

his colleagues have developed two pairs of "scissors" for editing crop genes.

I was told that prior to their work, 17 such scissors had already been developed in Western countries. Using those scissors to engineer crops for mass production would result in hefty fees due to copyright. My guide said though our own scissors might not be as "sharp", they can do the same job, but the job would take longer. Having them in our toolbox means a lot, given the technology blockade initiated by some Western nations as China races to modernize from farming to manufacturing.

China has long resolved to be self-reliant in terms of its food security. It is increasingly turning to cutting-edge technology underpinning game-changing innovations to make that happen. Lai's gene-editing scissors are just one example. The laser-focus on absolute food



Li Lei
Reporter's log

security partly stems from the country's long history. In the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), the Qi state was one of the largest and most powerful in ancient China. Its ruler, Duke Huan, adopted a scheme proposed by his famous adviser, Guan Zhong, to inflate the price of silk products and persuade its rival states, Lu and Liang, to abandon food crops and switch to mulberry trees, an important source of silkworm feed. In just three years, the two states descended into chaos due to food shortages and were later subdued by Qi.

In another example during the Spring and Autumn Period, Gou Jian, king of the Yue state, urged

food production and worked with his queen in the fields to serve as a model for his people. Meanwhile, he gifted boiled seeds to Yue's powerful rival state, Wu. As the cooked seeds couldn't be planted, a famine ensued, leading to Wu's eventual demise.

As China steps up its modernization drive, agriculture and related work in rural areas are said to be among the thorniest tasks. Technology has been deemed a solution to address the challenges. "The socialist modernization won't be complete without agricultural and rural modernization," President Xi Jinping told the annual rural work conference in 2022. "We need to rely on science and technology as well as reform to speed up the building of strong agriculture," he said.

At the latest central rural work conference in December, the "dual drivers of technology and reform" were listed as a crucial avenue in

building a strong agriculture. The No. 1 Central Document, an important annual policy statement released last month, reiterated the strategy as China works to promote self-reliance in high-level science and technology, foster new growth drivers and develop "new productive forces" — an emerging catchphrase in policymaking — that can drive strategic emerging industries.

Agriculture has dominated political talks and legislative efforts given its importance as the foundation of a healthy economy and national security. State Council Information Office data showed that from 2020 to 2022, about one in every 10 suggestions made by legislators and political advisers at each year's two sessions — the annual gatherings of the National People's Congress, the top legislature, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee, the top political advisory body — were

forwarded to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

In December, the NPC Standing Committee passed the Food Security Law after three reviews in just six months, proof that food security is a priority for the legislature.

At the two sessions this week, more rural-themed suggestions are expected. Hu Peisong, a member of the 14th National Committee of the CPPCC, told me that he would submit a proposal seeking to bolster farmers' income through methods such as the promotion of enhanced food crops.

Deng Qianchun, a deputy to the 14th NPC, suggested stepping up technology aid to Africa to increase the yields of oil crops such as sesame, an arrangement that will not only help raise the income of Africans, but also meet China's own crop needs in the short term.

As China charges ahead with its socialist modernization goals, agriculture is bound to receive unprecedented political attention this year.

Contact the writer at
lilei@chinadaily.com.cn



TWO SESSIONS

New laws help to safeguard nation's security

Legislative upgrades bolster ability to protect sovereignty, counter espionage

By CAO YIN
caoyin@chinadaily.com.cn

China's ability to safeguard national security and tackle external challenges is becoming stronger as it upgrades its legal toolkit for dealing with foreign affairs, experts said.

Lauding the formulation and modification of several laws last year, Huo Zhengxin, a law professor at the School of International Law at the China University of Political Science and Law, said: "Establishing a comprehensive system of foreign-related laws and regulations is the cornerstone of strengthening the rule of law in this regard."

In September, China passed a law on foreign state immunity that said Chinese courts, in principle, do not exercise jurisdiction over foreign countries and their assets. However, there were some exceptions, such as lawsuits arising from commercial activities or the performance of labor contracts. The law came into effect at the start of this year.

A law on foreign relations passed by the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, in June stressed that China's sovereignty and territorial integrity must not be harmed. That law came into effect on July 1.

Earlier, Chinese legislators also revised the Counter-Espionage Law after finding that traditional and nontraditional security threats are intertwined and that various types of espionage and intelligence activities are becoming more complicated.

Huo said that amid a complicat-

ed global situation, the rule of law must be the basis for meeting challenges and preventing risks, with optimized legislative and judicial measures to resolutely protect national sovereignty, security, dignity and core interests.

"To reach the goal, legislation should come first," he added, calling for the expedited establishment of an open and transparent legal framework for foreign affairs to help oppose interference or long-arm jurisdiction by other nations.

Huang Jin, deputy head of the China Law Society, also emphasized the importance of promoting foreign-related lawmaking, saying "an enriched legislative toolkit, or a more complete legal system, will provide stronger support for enforcement and other legal activities."

The NPC Standing Committee also promulgated the Food Security Law last year to consolidate national security.

Under the law, a grain reserve system was established, and new technologies and devices were allowed to be widely applied to prevent natural and biological disasters.

In addition, from May to November, Chinese legislators inspected whether the Seed Law was being implemented effectively in areas including the provinces of Hainan, Sichuan and Hunan to stimulate the vitality of the agricultural industry.

Zhao Leji, chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, said in December that the inspection required a profound understanding of the implementation of the law, given that agriculture is one of China's fundamental core industries.

Health services in remote areas need reinforcement

By WANG XIAOYU
wangxiaoyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Since Ma Fuchang, a public health expert in Qinghai province, became a deputy to the National People's Congress in 2018, he has maintained a simple credo: "You go deep into the grassroots, obtain firsthand information and seek truths from facts."

Over the past year, Ma, head of the nutrition and health department at the Qinghai Center for Disease Prevention and Control, has visited more than 20 county-level regions across the vast, sparsely-populated province in Northwest China.

He examined local hospitals, disease control facilities, primary and middle schools, and other education institutes, as well as temporary settlements for residents affected by a powerful earthquake in December.

"Through on-site investigations, talks with local people and officials as well as reading materials, I strive to obtain a thorough understanding of the medical demands of the public," he said.

Ma, who carries out surveillance of chronic disease and nutrition, as well as teenagers' health monitoring and education at the provincial CDC, said that he has also made use of his professional background to set out proposals and bolster them with evidence and facts.

During the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, Ma said that capabilities and infrastructure at various levels of CDC centers improved significantly.

However, problems such as a lack of disease control professionals and weaknesses in their professional skills still exist. Some workers have to juggle surveys of

infectious diseases as well as prevention work on chronic diseases at the same time.

Ma said that in Qinghai, where many residents are scattered across remote, high-altitude outposts, the health service radius per capita stands about six to eight times the national average.

For example, Sangrima township in Guoluo Tibetan autonomous prefecture is more than 600 kilometers from the provincial capital of Xining, where Ma is based.

"Due to weak capacities of primary-level public health workers and less developed information systems there, the costs of providing standard public health services for local residents are very high," he said.

Ma said that this year he will propose strengthening and retaining disease control and prevention teams, especially in large but thinly populated places like Qinghai.

"Authorities are to consider factors such as natural and geological conditions, disease profiles and health service radius per capita, and assign more staff slots for the four provincial-level regions with an area of over 500,000 square kilometers," he said.

Those four regions are Qinghai and the Xizang, Xinjiang Uygur and Inner Mongolia autonomous regions.

Since 2018, Ma has put forward over 30 proposals using his on-the-ground findings and professional knowledge.

While emphasizing the importance of delving into the grassroots, Ma said that it is also important to keep learning.

"I should not only be familiar with my own area of expertise, but also expand my knowledge and abilities in various aspects of economic and social development and law so as to enhance my ability to make suggestions as an NPC deputy," he said.



Class in session

Lawmaker Wang Meiqin explains the two sessions — the annual meetings of China's top legislature and political advisory body — to students at a primary school in Haian, Jiangsu province, on Friday.
ZHAI HUIYONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

NPC deputy urges promotion of science in schools

By ZHAO YIMENG
zhaoyimeng@chinadaily.com.cn

It's crucial for primary and secondary schools to embrace scientific and technological innovation, as young students are key talent for the nation's long-term innovative development, said a deputy to the National People's Congress, China's top legislature.

Xu Weilin, an NPC deputy and the rector of Wuhan Textile University in Hubei province, suggested selecting lecturers from higher education institutes to serve as science instructors in primary and secondary schools.

"Educators in higher learning institutes gradually realize that it's not enough to emphasize innovation only in universities," Xu said. "We should nurture students' interests in science and technology starting in



Xu Weilin

primary schools." Exploring students' interests and knowledge will help cultivate talent with innovative thoughts and strong minds, he said.

"For instance, inventors such as Isaac Newton, Thomas Edison and Alfred Nobel all showed their interests and strong desire for innovation and practical operation early in their lives," he said.

Since making a suggestion to the NPC during last year's two sessions, the largest annual political event in China, Xu has found that more efforts have been made to bring scientific knowledge and practices into schools and cultivate younger students' interests in innovation.

"The national and provincial authorities for science and technol-

ogy have ramped up efforts to popularize science and technology among young students," Xu said.

A campaign aiming to invite 100 academicians to popularize science and technology in 100 schools nationwide was launched in October during the Donghu Forum held in Wuhan, Hubei's provincial capital.

"As the mechanism has been set up, academicians truly become the science guides of primary and secondary school students, sowing the dream of building a technologically powerful nation in the hearts of more children," Huang Fengchao, the principal of a junior middle school in Wuhan, said during the launch ceremony.

During the campaign's first seminar in Wuhan last month, Sun Heping, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, delivered a lecture on the "magic gravitational field" to about 2,000 teacher and student representatives.

Academicians and experts in Hubei will visit schools and give science lectures to students, discussing cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence and hot topics including the control of new infectious diseases, officials from the provincial science and technology department said at the seminar.

Xu said a number of science workshops named after academicians and experts have been established.

Xu's workshop, funded by Wuhan's Jiangxia district government, has been given annual targets for the number of lectures to be delivered in schools and the number of publications to be issued.

Universities are also building science and technology museums to

give younger students more access to scientific knowledge, Xu said, adding that a textile museum covering 2,000 square meters has been built at Wuhan Textile University.

Xu went to several schools last year to give lectures on traditional and modern textiles, ranging from topics closely related to people's daily lives to a material's application in aerospace.

"I noticed that China has been strengthening science popularization in recent years," he said. "School students have shown interest in science and learned about related majors in colleges."

More efforts should be made to popularize science with appropriate methods rather than regarding exam scores as final goals, he said. Teaching methods were important as students' scientific curiosity varied in schools at different levels, which posed more challenges to educators.

"Those who popularize science with appropriate methods would not put more burdens on younger students," Xu said.

Given the tight schedules of top academicians and experts, Xu said more trained personnel need to engage in the mission, especially high-level researchers in universities and scientific institutions, because "they are grasping the pioneering science and technology, and it only takes simple training in lecturing methods to help them become competent in popularization work."

Xu said he hoped scholars recognized as national-level talent could volunteer to deliver three to five lectures a year, and even establish bases with individual schools to normalize cooperation.



University teachers help primary and middle school students test a water rocket at Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics in Jiangsu province on July 17, 2021. YANG BO / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

What to expect at two sessions in pivotal year

The annual sessions of China's top legislature and political advisory body will offer the world a window to observe the country's development and understand its policy direction for the following year.

The second session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the nation's top political advisory body, opens on Monday and the second session of the 14th National People's Congress, the top legislature, will open on Tuesday.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and is a crucial year for the realization of the goals and tasks of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25). In such a significant year, what issues are especially worthy of attention at the two sessions? Here are some pointers.

Economic goals

At each year's two sessions, the annual economic development goals of the world's second-largest economy are among the most anticipated announcements.

The development goals for 2024 are expected to be unveiled in the government work report, which will be deliberated at the NPC's annual session. The report usually includes the country's targets for gross domestic product growth, inflation, the ratio of deficit to GDP, employment, and foreign trade and investment, among others.

The Chinese economy rebounded last year, with high-quality development solidly advanced, important progress made in the construction of

a modern industrial system, and the foundation for safe development consolidated.

China's provincial-level regions recently unveiled their growth targets for 2024 in government work reports delivered to local people's congresses. Their 2024 GDP growth targets vary from 4.5 percent to 8 percent, with the majority expecting to expand their economy by over 5 percent.

"The economic goals should be both in line with our development potential and within an appropriate range, and more importantly, they should give priority to the quality of growth," said Han Baojiang, a professor at the Party School of the Communist Party of China Central Committee (National Academy of Governance) and a national political adviser.

New growth drivers

"New productive forces", an emerging catchphrase in China's policymaking, are expected to be a hot topic.

The concept refers to productive forces derived from continuous science and technology breakthroughs and innovation that will drive strategic emerging and future industries.

The Central Economic Work Conference, held late last year to chart economic development in 2024, said China would "promote industrial innovation through technological innovation ... to foster new industries, new models and growth drivers, and develop new productive forces."

"New productive forces are crucial to promote self-reliance in high-level science and technology," said Yuan Yuyu, NPC deputy and chairman of Medprin Regenerative Medical

Technologies Co, adding that his focus at the two sessions will be on how to strengthen original and disruptive innovation.

High-level opening-up

China's attitude and plans concerning opening-up are closely watched around the world.

At the Central Economic Work Conference, China pledged to expand high-level opening-up and reinforce the stable performance of foreign trade and foreign investment.

A series of recent policy measures sent a clear signal that China is firmly committed to expanding opening-up. For example, the country announced that it will remove all restrictions on foreign investment access in the manufacturing sector, and five new measures are already facilitating the entry of foreign nationals into China for business, education and tourism.

Zhang Junkuo, a national political adviser and former deputy director of the State Council's Development Research Center, said that amid rising anti-globalization sentiment and intensifying geopolitical tension, "it is particularly important for China to respond to uncertainties in the external environment with its certainty in opening-up."

Reforms in key areas

Advancing reforms in key areas and crucial sectors will also be a focus of attention for national lawmakers and political advisers.

Accelerating the building of a unified national market is a concern for Jin Li, a national political adviser and vice-president of Southern Uni-

versity of Science and Technology.

"It's important to break down local protectionism and market segmentation," Jin said, calling for the accelerated establishment of unified market institutions and rules in areas such as property rights protection and fair competition.

Many are also keen to boost the confidence of private enterprises.

Gao Zicheng, an NPC deputy and president of the All China Lawyers Association, said China needs to further optimize the development environment and stimulate internal driving forces and the innovative vitality of private enterprises.

Whole-process people's democracy

The two sessions display China's whole-process people's democracy in action, as national legislators and political advisers — ranging from farmers to State leaders — gather in Beijing to deliberate on bills or discuss affairs of State.

This year also marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of the NPC and the 75th anniversary of the founding of the CPPCC.

The people's congress system is a foundational political system for upholding the unity between leadership by the CPC, the running of the country by the people, and law-based governance.

The CPPCC is an important organ for multi-party cooperation and political consultation led by the CPC. It is a major channel for socialist consultative democracy and a specialist consultative body.

XINHUA

WORLD

Negotiators push for truce in Gaza Strip

Aid airdropped for civilians amid worsening humanitarian situation

CAIRO — Mediators reconvened in Cairo on Sunday in search of a formula acceptable to Israel and Hamas for a lasting cease-fire in Gaza, after foreign governments resorted to airdrops to aid desperate civilians in the Palestinian enclave.

Delegations from Hamas, Qatar and the United States had arrived in Egypt for "a new round of negotiations" toward a truce in the Gaza conflict, state-linked Al-Qahera News reported on Sunday.

Their goal has been to secure a truce by the start of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan starting on March 10, but hopes have been dampened by a series of failed talks.

The negotiations have centered on a proposal to pause the fighting for six weeks and for Hamas to free hostages in return for the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails, and greater aid deliveries.

A senior US official said on Saturday that the framework for a six-week pause in fighting was in place, with Israel's agreement. Now it depends on Hamas agreeing to release hostages it has held in Gaza since its attacks on southern Israel on Oct 7, he said.

Israel launched the offensive in response to the attack by Hamas, whose militants poured over the border from Gaza, killing 1,200 people and abducting about 250 people, according to Israeli tallies.

At least 30,410 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's military offensive on Gaza, the Gaza health ministry said on Sunday.

After five months of conflict and the Israeli blockade of Gaza, Palestinians are in a desperate situation. The United Nations says a quarter of the population — 576,000 people — is one step from famine.

Jordan and the US on Saturday jointly carried out airdrops of aid to Gaza, the first time that the US has participated in the multinational humanitarian effort.

Two aircraft from the Jordan Armed Forces airdropped in the northern Gaza Strip, while three aircraft belonging to the US Air Force airdropped in the south, the state-run Petra news agency reported.

The US Air Force said its three planes carried 66 bundles containing about 38,000 meals.

Jordan has been airdropping supplies directly in Gaza and sending aid planes to Egypt's North

US' Palestine policy denounced

Tens of thousands of protesters marched in California on Saturday, denouncing the US' Palestine policy, especially the Joe Biden administration's pro-Israel stance.

Protesters marched through the main streets of downtown Los Angeles with Palestinian flags, chanting slogans against Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

A middle-aged man was seen handing a placard with a portrait of Aaron Bushnell and shouting his words: "I will no longer be complicit in genocide."

Bushnell, a serviceman of the US Air Force, died after setting himself on fire outside the Israeli embassy in Washington on Feb 25 to protest against US support for Israel's attacks on Gaza.

Several other similar demonstrations were held in other California cities on Saturday, including in San Francisco.

XINHUA-AGENCIES

Sinai since November last year. Some of the operations involve cooperation with other countries, including the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt.

The US has for months been calling for Israel to allow more aid into Gaza, something Israel has resisted. Some experts said being forced to resort to costly, inefficient airdrops was the latest demonstration of Washington's limited influence over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

Israel denies restricting humanitarian aid for Gaza civilians.

As the conflict dragged into its fifth month, fears have been raised over rising tensions.

Yemen's Houthis vowed on Sunday to continue targeting British ships in the Gulf of Aden following the sinking of the UK-owned vessel Rubymar.

The US military confirmed on Saturday that the vessel had sunk after being struck by an anti-ship ballistic missile fired by Houthi militants on Feb 18.

AGENCIES-XINHUA



Doctors hold up placards reading "Opposition to the increase in medical schools" during a rally against the government's plan to raise the annual enrolment quota at medical schools, in Seoul, on Sunday. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY

S. Korean doctors rally for colleagues

SEOUL — Thousands of senior doctors rallied in Seoul on Sunday to express their support for junior doctors who have been on strike for nearly two weeks over a government plan to sharply increase the number of medical school admissions.

The rally came as the government said it would begin to take steps on Monday to suspend the medical licenses of nearly 9,000 medical interns and residents for defying government orders to end their walkouts, which have disrupted hospital operations.

"The government's absurd medical policy has triggered immense resistance by trainee doctors and medical students, and we doctors have become one," Park Sung-min, a senior member of the Korea Medical Association, said in a speech at the rally. "I'm asking the government: Please, stop the threats and suppression now."

Protesters chanted slogans, sang and held placards criticizing the government's plan. There were no reports of any violence at the rally.

As of Thursday night, 8,945 of the country's 13,000 medical interns and residents were confirmed to have left their work sites, according to the health ministry. The government had repeatedly said they would face a minimum license suspension of three months and indictments by prosecutors if they did not return by Feb 29.

Blow to medical services

The striking doctors are a fraction of South Korea's 140,000 doctors. But they account for about 30-40 percent of the total doctors at some major hospitals, where they assist senior doctors during surgeries and other treatments while training. Their walkouts have subsequently caused numerous cancellations of surgeries and medical treatments at the hospitals.

Senior doctors have staged a series of rallies backing the young doctors but have not joined the walkouts. If they also launch strikes, that would pose a major blow to South Korea's medical service.

The government wants to increase the country's medical school enrollment quota by 2,000 starting next year, from the current 3,058, to better deal with the country's rapidly aging population. Officials say South Korea's doctor-to-population ratio is one of the lowest among developed countries.

But many doctors vehemently oppose the plan, saying medical schools cannot handle such a sharp increase in the number of students. They say the recruitment plan also does not address a chronic shortage of doctors in essential but low-paying specialties such as pediatrics and emergency departments.

Doctors say adding too many new doctors would also result in an increase in public medical expenses since greater competition would lead to excess treatments. However, critics say the doctors simply worry about receiving a lower income due to the rising number of doctors.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Briefly

BURKINA FASO '170 people executed' in attacks on villages

About 170 people were "executed" in attacks on three villages in northern Burkina Faso a week ago, a regional public prosecutor said in a statement on Sunday. Aly Benjamin Coulibaly said he received reports of the attacks on Komsilga, Nodin and Soroee villages in Yatenga Province on Feb 25, with a provisional toll of "around 170 people executed".

UNITED KINGDOM Chancellor plays down talk of big tax cuts

Chancellor of the Exchequer Jeremy Hunt said there had been a deterioration in the economic forecasts on which he is basing the annual budget statement that he will give this week, and he played down speculation over big pre-election tax cuts. The forecasts produced by Britain's official budget watchdog "have gone against us", Hunt told the Sunday Telegraph newspaper in an interview. Hunt and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak are under pressure from within their Conservative Party to cut taxes in Wednesday's budget to boost the party's flagging fortunes before a national election expected to take place this year.

MALAYSIA Relatives of plane crash victims mark 10 years

Relatives of passengers on a Malaysia Airlines plane that mysteriously vanished 10 years ago pushed for a new search on Sunday as they spoke of enduring grief and the struggle to find closure. Flight MH370, a Boeing 777 aircraft carrying 239 people, disappeared from radar screens on March 8, 2014, while en route from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing. Despite the largest search in aviation history, the plane has never been found. About 500 relatives and their supporters gathered on Sunday at a shopping center near Kuala Lumpur for a "remembrance day". They lit 239 candles, one for each passenger lost on the flight.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Envoy: Rumors about China's economy unfounded

By MINLUZHANG in New York mintuzhang@chinadailyusa.com

The Chinese deputy consul general in New York, in response to speculation about China's economy, said that "the overall positive trend of China's economy remains unchanged".

Deputy Consul General Qian Jin on Friday noted the recent narratives in the US media about China's "economic slowdown," "lack of momentum" and "global drag" that downplay China's economic development prospects, assertions that are "far from the truth", he said.

In a statement sent to media, Qian emphasized that as the world's second-largest economy, "China has established a solid foundation for long-term development".

Amid global economic uncertainty, "the Chinese economy made stable and sound progress in 2023, with total economic output exceeding 126 trillion yuan (\$17.64 trillion), up 5.2 percent year-on-year", he said.

A report by the International Financial Forum said that China contributed 32 percent to global economic growth in 2023 and is the largest engine of the world economy, Qian said.

"The fundamentals sustaining China's steady growth in the long run have not changed, and the

The fundamentals sustaining China's steady growth in the long run have not changed, and the world has shown confidence in China's economy this year."

Qian Jin, China's deputy consul general in New York

world has shown confidence in China's economy this year," Qian said. He said that the International Monetary Fund's senior resident representative in China predicted that the Chinese economy would maintain sound growth in 2024 and continue to account for one-third of global economic growth.

The Economist Intelligence Unit predicted that the fundamentals of China's economy in 2024 will be further cemented.

"The recent Lunar New Year festivities showcased China's economic vitality, boosting market confidence for the year ahead," Qian said.

According to data from the

Chinese Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the eight-day Spring Festival holiday (Feb 10-17) saw more people go on trips, with domestic tourists spending about 632.69 billion yuan in total, up 7.7 percent compared with the pre-pandemic level in 2019.

In foreign trade, imports and exports by Chinese private enterprises increased by 3.1 percent, accounting for 53.5 percent of the country's total, according to Qian.

China's exports of the "new three" products — new-energy vehicles, photovoltaic products and lithium-ion batteries — surpassed 1 trillion yuan (\$140.71 billion) for the first time, with a growth of nearly 30 percent, according to the Chinese Ministry of Commerce.

"This indicates a continuous improvement in the structure of our export commodities," said Qian.

In 2023, the number of foreign trade entities with import and export records exceeded 600,000 for the first time, "indicating that foreign trade business entities are also growing and optimizing", Qian said.

"China opens arms and sincerely welcomes companies from all over the world to continue investing in China. China will continue to create a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment," he said.

"No matter how the world situation changes, China's door of opening-up will not be closed and will only open even wider," Qian said.

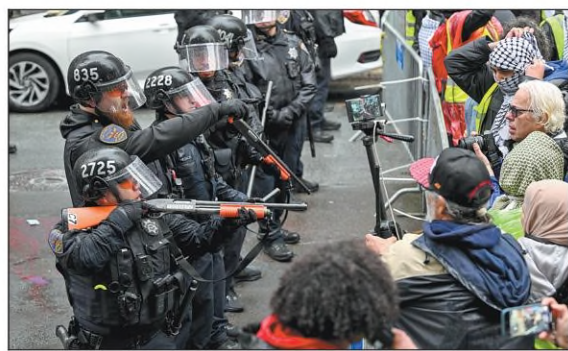
Qian emphasized that in the current context, mutual interests between China and the United States have not diminished but rather increased.

Mutual benefit and win-win cooperation are at the core of China-US economic and trade relations, he said, adding that only by jointly overcoming challenges can brighter prospects be embraced.

China and the United States — the largest developing country and the largest developed country — are each other's important trading partners. Two-way trade and investment are growing rapidly, and their industrial and supply chains are closely integrated, Qian said.

"The stabilization of China-US relations should remain unaffected by domestic politics. China expects the US to establish a fair, impartial and non-discriminatory business climate for Chinese investments," Qian said.

He urged objective assessment of Chinese companies' investment activities, avoidance of political interference and transparent security reviews to bolster confidence and create opportunities for Chinese enterprises investing in the US.



Police confront pro-Palestinian protesters outside of the Israeli consulate in San Francisco, California, on Saturday. TAYFUN COSKUN VIA GETTY IMAGES

Police in Haiti struggle against gangs in latest surge of violence

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — Police in Haiti appealed for help on Saturday night as they struggled to hold back gangs trying to storm the country's main prison in a major escalation of violence sweeping the country.

"They need help," a union representing Haitian police said in a message posted on social media bearing an SOS emoji repeated eight times. "Let's mobilize the army and the police to prevent the bandits from breaking into the prison."

A police officer told The Associated Press that the gangs had overwhelmed security forces but were not yet in control of the prison, where several gang leaders were being held. The officer spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

The armed clashes follow a string of violent protests that have been building for some time, but turned deadlier in recent days as Prime Minister Ariel Henry went to

Kenya to salvage a proposed security mission in Haiti to be led by Kenya and backed by the United Nations.

Henry took over as prime minister following the assassination of president Jovenel Moise in 2021 and has repeatedly put on hold plans to hold parliamentary and presidential elections, which have not been held for almost 10 years.

As part of coordinated attacks by gangs, four police officers were killed in the capital on Thursday

when gunmen opened fire on targets including Haiti's international airport. Gang members also seized control of two police stations, prompting civilians to flee and forcing businesses and schools to close.

The prison targeted by gangs is notorious for its extremely crowded and unhygienic conditions. Among its inmates are several gang leaders and 18 former Colombian soldiers alleged to have been involved in killing Moise.

As a result of the violence at the airport, the US embassy in Port-au-Prince said it was temporarily halting all official travel to Haiti.

Haiti's national police have about 9,000 officers to provide security for more than 11 million people, according to the UN. The officers are routinely overwhelmed and outgunned by powerful gangs, which are estimated to control up to 80 percent of Port-au-Prince.

Jimmy Cherizier, a former elite police officer known as Barbecue

who now runs a gang federation, claimed responsibility for the surge in attacks. The goal was to capture Haiti's police chief and government ministers and prevent Henry's return, he said.

Henry signed reciprocal agreements on Friday with Kenyan President William Ruto to try to salvage the plan to deploy Kenyan police to Haiti. Kenya's High Court had ruled in January that the proposed deployment was unconstitutional, in part because the original deal lacked reciprocal agreements between the two countries.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

CHINA

Warmhearted residents open doors to stranded travelers

County in Gansu offers every assistance to those trapped in snowstorm

By MA JINGNA in Jiuquan, Gansu, and ZHANG XIAOMIN

Sun Guangzheng had previously driven through Guazhou county, Gansu province, without giving it a second glance.

However, a sudden snowstorm last month changed his perception of the area.

"Being stranded there for one night, I immediately sensed the warmth of local people. Next time I pass through, I must be sure to return their kindness," Sun said.

Guazhou is situated southeast of Hami, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, with the Lianyungang-Horgos Expressway, an essential land route for entering Xinjiang, passing through the area.

During the Spring Festival peak travel period, traffic was held up on Feb 17 by strong winds and heavy snowfall.

With a permanent population of 130,000, of which 50,000 are urban residents, Guazhou found itself playing host to a large number of travelers whose vehicles were stranded on the expressway.

With visibility dropping to less than 20 meters, and 5 centimeters of snow covering the road, police implemented traffic controls from 5:30 pm. They helped drivers and passengers from stranded vehicles leave the expressway at the nearest toll station, or park at service areas to avoid potential danger.

Sun, 35, who comes from Heze, Shandong province, and was returning to work in Korla, Xinjiang, said, "Before the police advised us to leave the expressway, two fellow travelers and myself had been driving at snail's pace for 11 hours, covering only 100 kilometers."

"As the temperature had dropped to below minus 10 degrees Celsius, we were fortunate not to have to spend the night on the expressway."

The authorities in Guazhou introduced emergency response measures. They quickly organized accommodations and other services, with hotels, gyms, schools and local residents opening their doors to house the travelers.

The local government reported on WeChat that as of 1:11 pm on Feb 18, the county had housed some 25,000 travelers at 93 temporary accommodation points, including hotels, schools, gyms, community service centers, nursing homes and private homes.

Sun said: "From government officials to ordinary citizens, everyone made an effort to assist travelers who were unexpectedly stranded. Numerous



Left: Community service center staff members in Guazhou, Gansu province, organize accommodations for travelers stranded by a snowstorm on Feb 17. Right: Police officers provide free food for stranded travelers at a security checkpoint in Guazhou last month.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

volunteers braved the cold to escort them and provide support for those in need."

After leaving the expressway, Sun and his fellow travelers were taken to a stadium by staff members and volunteers.

Sun posted a message on the Douyin video-sharing platform warning netizens to avoid driving in the area. Shortly after doing so, he saw a post from a local resident offering spare rooms to accommodate the travelers.

"The rooms were offered by a couple and their son who own a restaurant. The family was incredibly kind, providing us with blankets, food and drinks. Another family of three also stayed at their place that night. The locals were really helpful," he said.

Messages spread

Many local residents posted messages on social media platforms to help the travelers.

"My family provides free accommodations suitable for a family of three," one message read, while another stated, "If you haven't found a place, we can offer one for free."

Messages and requests to help the travelers spread quickly on social media, attracting nationwide attention.

Kou Zhen, 34, and his group of four were on their way from Lanzhou, the Gansu provincial capital, to Urumqi, capital of Xinjiang. Around 11 pm, they left the expressway and stayed in Guazhou for the night.

They were assisted by Li Shengyi, a local resident.

Kou said: "Li was not in town, but after a brief conversation, he gave us the location of his newly decorated apartment. His sister gave us the key and provided us with bed linen and also with breakfast the next morning. I was deeply moved by this complete trust in strangers."

Hua Zhixiong, 29, who comes from Guizhou province, was traveling to work in Xinjiang with his wife, mother and 6-month-old baby. After conditions on the road deteriorated,



Hua decided to leave the expressway in Guazhou.

"After seeing us traveling with a baby, staff members helped accommodate us at the home of local resident Shi Fuyu. They provided us with a room and hot food," Hua said.

"The local people are incredibly kind. I felt they were willing to do everything they could to accommodate stranded travelers. Walking along the streets, you could hear residents telling travelers that if they had nowhere to stay, they could come to their homes."

To ensure those stranded were housed properly, the local government was quick to designate several middle schools and a gymnasium as temporary accommodation areas.

The authorities also mobilized personnel to form service teams to provide free fast food, hot water and other supplies, along with medical care.

The information office in Guazhou reported that as of 10 pm on Feb 17, the county had coordinated with hotels to provide 6,000 beds, with schools to offer 1,700 dormitory beds, and with hotels to provide temporary rest areas in meeting rooms and dining halls.

One of the accommodation points, Guazhou No 2 Middle School, hosted more than 780 people who were stranded.

Lu Zhifeng, a teacher at the school, said, "I remember there was a similar situation of people being stranded about four or five years ago, but it wasn't on the same scale and didn't happen as suddenly as this one."

"Some teachers brought the stranded travelers to their homes, with one teacher hosting nine individuals!"

Lu added that he brought

one young couple with a 16-month-old child to his home.

That night, as there was insufficient bedding at the school, the teachers brought their own for the travelers, with residents donating dozens of sets of bedding at the school gate.

"Some people were also offering bedding for 50 yuan (\$6.94) per set, basically with no profit," Lu said.

He added that he was deeply impressed when the travelers left on Feb 18, as they neatly folded the bedding in the dormitories. Some also stayed behind for three hours to help clear the snow, which was about 10 cm deep.

Some restaurants, training institutions and other private venues also volunteered to accommodate those who were stranded.

After learning about the situation, art school principal Liu Lin immediately returned to the school to provide shelter for more than 200 people.

Social media used

Local resident Wang Yang posted a message on WeChat Moments, stating: "Due to the blizzard, the hotels are full. My family can provide a free room suitable for a family of three. The address is..."

When Wang's post reached Xu Weiming, who comes from Shiyuan, Hubei province, and was stranded on the snowy streets of Guazhou, Xu hesitantly called Wang. To his surprise, Wang invited him and his group to his home.

Xu said: "We were provided with the master bedroom, fresh bed linen, slippers, toiletries and hot tea. Later, seven more guests arrived. Despite the lack of space, Wang managed to accommodate them as well."

Wang said: "It's not easy when you're away from home. As residents of Guazhou, we are willing to do whatever we can. It was like having 11 relatives over for the holiday."

Next morning, Wang and his wife prepared breakfast for their 11 guests, who laughed

and chatted together before leaving in the afternoon.

Wan Youhui, a Guazhou native, was preparing to drive to Xinjiang on Feb 17, but was advised to turn back at the expressway exit when he noticed many travelers were stranded.

Wan, who runs his own media account, said, "I quickly realized that they might need a place to stay overnight."

After immediately spreading this news online and calling local residents for help, Wan triggered an overwhelming response. A video produced by Wan attracted 783 comments, with many people, including hotel owners, offering help in finding free shelter and food.

Wan and his colleagues acted as intermediaries — connecting stranded travelers with locals offering shelter, and updating information on government relocation sites.

In a second video, Wan expressed his gratitude to local people and businesses. Many stranded travelers left comments, with one stating: "Guazhou is the most kind-hearted city I have experienced. Within a radius of 200 km, no hotel rooms were available, but a kind person knocked on our car window late at night and asked if our family of five needed a place to stay."

Respect gained

As the snowstorm subsided, the travelers began to leave Guazhou at noon on Feb 18.

The warmth and generosity they experienced in the small county won the respect and admiration of many, drawing attention to the area.

Numerous netizens expressed their appreciation, with some stating, "From now on, we have an extended family in Guazhou."

After bidding farewell to the travelers, the Guazhou county authorities sent a letter of apology to them on their WeChat account.

The letter stated: "Due to the unexpected wind and snow, Guazhou hosted 25,000 stranded individuals. If you encountered any inconvenience during your stay, we apologize and ask for your understanding. We invite you to return to Guazhou when spring arrives."

The letter also listed the county's attractions.

Guazhou is home to the Yulin Grottoes, a key national cultural heritage site often referred to as the "sister" of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang, Gansu.

Contact the writers at zhangxiaomin@chinadaily.com.cn



Left and right: Guazhou No 2 Middle School provides free accommodations for travelers stranded in Guazhou county, Gansu, last month. The school hosted more than 780 people who were caught in a snowstorm. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Wuhan researchers take worry out of eating fish with new 'boneless carp'

By LIU KUN in Wuhan and LIN SHUJUAN in Shanghai

A fish bone getting stuck in the throat is a common cause for emergency department referrals or visits to clinics in Asian countries including China. However, researchers at a university in Wuhan, Hubei province, have recently announced that they have cultivated a new variety of grass carp without intermuscular bones.

The grass carp is a popular freshwater fish in Asia, which is steamed or grilled for its delicious, tender meat, but its many tiny bones can easily get lodged in the upper digestive tract when the fish is eaten.

A Huazhong Agricultural University research team led by Professor Gao Xexia, who heads the molecular breeding laboratory at the university's Fisheries College, has remedied the situation by cultivating a "boneless" variety of the fish.

An adult grass carp normally has more than 100 intermuscular bones. In comparison, the new variety has no intermuscular bones, but only a vertebra and rib spines, according to a university news release put out on Saturday.

The intermuscular bones, which are actually ossified tendons in the muscle diaphragm, are usually thin and pointed, and among the main culprits of foreign body impaction in the throat. The world's major farmed fish species all have intermuscular bones, especially large freshwater fish such as the grass carp, silver crucian carp and bream, which are mainly cultivated in China.

The low cost of breeding the herbivorous grass carp, coupled with its high nutritional value, has made it the most cultivated fish in China over the years.

In 2022, the annual grass carp production in China reached an astonishing 6 million metric tons, accounting for one-fifth of the country's freshwater fish production.

However, the many tiny bones have long been a "thorny setback" for the freshwater delicacy.

Li Mingcheng, a student at the university's College of Food Science and Technology, who has tasted the



A combo photo shows cooked grass carp meat with and without intermuscular bones. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"boneless" variety said the meat is more tender. The new variety also doesn't compromise on the nutritional value of the fish, according to the research team.

Gao, the Fisheries College professor, has been dedicated to the research of cultivating fish without intermuscular bones since 2012, when she got her PhD from the university. After more than 10 years of effort, Gao and her team identified the key gene to control the growth of intermuscular bones in fish, and developed the first "boneless" bream in 2022.

According to Gao, it usually takes two to three generations to develop a 100 percent "boneless" breed. Through constant screening, only the "boneless" individuals are taken for breeding the next generation.

During the research project, the proportion of "boneless" fish in the first generation was about 17 percent, but the same in the second generation was 100 percent. Following their success, the team now plans to target the silver crucian carp.

Gao said her motivation is simple: "No tiny bones, no worries when eating fish."

Contact the writers at liukun@chinadaily.com.cn

Farewell, furry friend



Visitors take photos of giant panda Fu Bao at Everland theme park in Yongin, South Korea, on Sunday as the 3-year-old star bear made her final public appearance at the park. Fu Bao is scheduled to return to China in early April. YAO QILIN / XINHUA

Science pact seen as key to China-US ties

Agreement should be renewed to boost mutual confidence, experts say

By YIFAN XU in Washington
yifanxu@chinadailyusa.com

If the China-United States Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement is not renewed, the mutual confidence that sustains and underpins bilateral relations is bound to suffer, experts said.

"I think the scientific community in both countries want this agreement," said Denis Simon, a distinguished fellow at the Washington-based Institute for China-America Studies, during a panel discussion on the pact hosted by the institute on Feb 20.

According to Simon, the agreement gives people confidence in China-US ties.

"I think the relationship of collaboration would suffer if we don't have this (agreement), because it would be seen as an overt act of not having the endorsement of both countries. And that would not bode well for the future of collaboration," he said during the panel discussion titled "Renewing the US-China Science and Technology Agreement. Can S&T Cooperation Coexist with Technology Decoupling?"

On Jan 31, 1979, then vice-premier Deng Xiaoping and then US president Jimmy Carter co-signed the landmark agreement in Washington during Deng's historic US visit. It is a framework for collaboration between the two countries in areas such as agriculture, energy, space, health, environment, earth sciences and engineering, as well as for educational and scholarly exchanges.

The agreement has been on a five-year renewal cycle since its start and was last renewed in 2018. It was extended by six months in August as officials from both coun-

tries engaged in talks to amend and strengthen its provisions.

The agreement was required to be renewed or extended again on Feb 27, but it wasn't. The US State Department said it is negotiating to "amend, extend and strengthen protection within" the agreement, but is "not able to provide information at this time on specific US negotiating positions or on whether the agreement will be extended past its current expiration date".

Sourabh Gupta, head of the trade and technology program at the Institute for China-America Studies, told China Daily that he is not feeling pessimistic despite the lack of an official update on the status of the agreement.

"The (China-US) relationship is in a better place and, hence, there might be no pressing need to formally announce the renewal. The decision on this front has almost certainly been communicated privately to the Chinese side. Besides, if the agreement were to be canceled, that would have been publicly announced," he said.

According to Gupta, the agreement has probably been extended by another six months while negotiations between the two sides continue to amend and strengthen its provisions. "And this might not be the final six-month extension," he said.

Speaking during the panel discussion, Caroline Wagner, a professor at the John Glenn School of Public Affairs at Ohio State University, said she hopes the two countries arrive at a consensus to renew the agreement.

"I know there are different views within the United States. The Congress has spoken up actively with concerns. I think we can deal with those concerns. I do believe the

relationship is important, and is important for both countries at this time," she said. "The more we can come to an agreement that allows people to continue working together... the better."

Wagner said US-China collaboration in science and technology started because of a diplomatic agreement. "Since that agreement was signed, I think we've seen ... huge numbers of people working together."

There is a good relationship between US and Chinese scientists, she said, emphasizing that scientists are more interested in creating knowledge and advancing the frontiers of knowledge, and don't pay much attention to which way the political wind is blowing.

However, they still have to rely on government funding, and that is why the cooperation agreement is important, Wagner said, adding that she believes the relationship between US and Chinese scientists will continue despite political decisions.

Simon, from the Institute for China-America Studies, said the six-month extension in August was meant to allow both sides enough time to negotiate the terms of the agreement. "So they could incorporate a bunch of new factors that needed to be taken into account, if there was to be any meaningful future science and technology cooperation."

Following some positive moves in November 2009, there was heightened US-China science and technology cooperation. The two countries signed new pacts under the framework of the sci-tech agreement for joint projects in electric vehicles and renewable energy, and for the creation of the

US-China Clean Energy Research Center, a 10-year research effort between the US Energy Department and China's Ministry of Science and Technology.

Simon said the two sides negotiated a supplementary agreement focused on who would own intellectual property from the collaborative research, including "what was the disposition of it, and who could claim, quote, unquote ownership of it".

"By working that all out beforehand, they saved a lot of concerns and worries that somehow somebody was going to take advantage of the other side," he said.

Simon said that issues for negotiation might include personal safety and security, data, topics on reciprocity, transparency, equal access and intellectual property rights, discussions on good intentions, and dispute resolution.

The dramatic changes in Chinese sci-tech capabilities and the involvement of internal domestic consultations are the two key factors that make the negotiations complicated, he said.

Simon spoke highly of the various measures China has taken in recent years to optimize its research system and increase its research investment. He also suggested that China should overcome or move faster on "bottlenecks" such as the geographic distribution of talent, a shift away from the seniority system, and the international engagement of talent to allow the system to reach a higher level.

"There is some opposition to having a new science and technology agreement, especially from certain segments of the US Congress," he said. "But the fact remains that both countries, both governments least seemingly started the negotiations in good faith, with the hope that some kind of new arrangement could be worked out."

The absence of an agreement means that science and technology cooperation between the two countries does not have the official blessings of Beijing and Washington, he said. "I think blessings from the two governments are very important in boosting confidence," he added.

CHINA DAILY USA

NEW YORK HEADQUARTERS

1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036

Telephone: 212-537-8868

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 300

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. 1281

Transformation: Stronger links between industry, academic research urged

From page 1

"chokepoint" technologies to advance its development, China must now prioritize the incubation of homegrown "core" technologies across a range of industrial applications. To this end, it must confront and overcome, domestically, the main structural bottlenecks to domestic innovation. Foremost, is the relative lack of research and development spending by large Chinese companies; in the West, it is the large private players that pick up much of the R & D tab in-house.

Next, the linkages between Chinese industry and academic and public research must be strengthened. The commercialization of

promising academic technological breakthroughs via licensing partnerships between universities and industry must be accelerated, with the technology transfer system that links inventors, universities and enterprises playing a catalytic role. Finally, the state's weak investment in basic research must be corrected. The emphasis in this regard of the Central Science and Technology Commission, created last year, is to be welcomed.

In time, Washington's unilateral attempt to decouple and "de-Sinicize" global technology chains will come to be seen as a blessing in disguise, having done more to concentrate minds to foster domestic science and technology self-sufficiency than any "Made in China 2025" plan could have achieved.

The second major structural transformation that China must continue to prioritize is accelerating the transformation of China's growth and development model. The fixed asset-heavy overinvestment model must yield at a faster pace to a more consumption- and services-driven one that is consistent with internal economic rebalancing and aggregate demand management.

China must further liberalize the services markets, build out a unified social security net, and gradually raise the currently low retirement age. With land urbanization outstripping population urbanization due to excess supply, a structural slowdown in residential real estate construction, paired with a shift in the relative

burden of taxation from labor income to property and capital, must be realized.

The third major transformation is advancing the structural transformation of government itself — that is, of China's fiscal framework and of intergovernmental relations. The fiscal framework continues to be organized around proceeds from investment-led growth, which have begun to taper as the underlying growth model hits up against its own limits. The composition of the government's taxation as a share of gross domestic product must shift from indirect to direct taxes (as is the case in advanced economies), the tax base must expand, and the state's fiscal functions must be separated from the credit allocation system.

As for intergovernmental relations, the structural revenue deficits that have pushed local governments to utilize opaque, off-budget mechanisms to raise funding must be plugged. Local governments must enjoy predictable tax-sharing revenues and the authority to raise own-source revenues, and access to credit in order to fund expenditure responsibilities must be broadened. Land-based financing for urban development must in particular give way to municipal bond-based financing.

The structural reform of government will be the hardest of the three transformations. The upside is just as substantial, though. In China's macroeconomy, local governments play a unique role on both the production and the con-

sumption side. Fixing their structural revenue deficits will also help address the root causes of local protectionism, as well as eliminate roadblocks to updating China's bankruptcy system. Much like the 1994 tax-sharing reforms did away with the perverse incentives of the 1980s-era fiscal contracting system and ushered in three decades of robust investment-led growth, reform of the fiscal framework and intergovernmental relations today will spark a quarter century of consumption-centered growth.

China 2035 and 2049 modernization goals are well within reach. To realize them, enlightened but difficult choices must be faced head-on today.

The author is a senior fellow at the Institute for China-America Studies in Washington, DC. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

BUSINESS

JOIN THE CONVERSATION; FOLLOW US ON TWITTER · CHINA DAILY

Wanderlust boosts consumption, economy

Travel boom from Spring Festival to Lantern Festival beats tourism expectations

By ZHU WENQIAN
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

The latest consumption boom in China, which began well before this year's Spring Festival in early February, continued well after the extended holiday break into the Lantern Festival weekend, bringing glad tidings, and hopes of a rapid economic recovery to not just the local market or the provinces and regions concerned, but overseas destinations as far away as Norway, New Zealand, South Africa and Chile.

Chinese tourists made this year's Feb 10-17 Spring Festival holiday the hottest sales period on record, signifying a global travel peak in the post-pandemic period. They spent more than they did in the corresponding period of 2019 before the COVID-19 outbreak. What's more, they also traveled farther and celebrated the holiday in new scenarios, industry players said.

Chinese tourists traveled to some 125 countries and regions, including some niche destinations such as Ethiopia, Madagascar, Cuba, Uruguay, Lithuania and Malta, according to Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency.

Overseas hotel bookings jumped nearly fivefold year-on-year, and international flight ticket sales surged 14 times year-on-year, Qunar said.

"Holiday tourism has beaten expectations. Trips during the Spring Festival holiday have become a new folk custom for Chinese consumers," said Dai Bin, president of the Beijing-based China Tourism Academy.

"While boosting consumer confidence, they are expected to help significantly promote the recovery and growth of the Chinese economy, and global tourism and economic development."

Looking ahead, China's consumer market has strong resilience and abundant vitality, and its long-term fundamentals remain unchanged. With the implementation of various policies and measures to expand domestic demand and stimulate consumption, the consumption market will continue to show a trend of recovery and growth this year, said the Ministry of Commerce.

Norway's Tromsø, the world's northernmost city, welcomed a large crowd of Chinese tourists during the holiday. "When I took a cable car ride in Norway, the compartment was full of Chinese tourists. It seemed like I was in the busy Xidan neighborhood in Beijing, not in the Arctic," said Li Yuanyuan, 30, who traveled from Beijing to Tromsø for holiday fun.

Xu Yunlei, 40, a teacher from Chongqing, went on a weeklong trip to Türkiye. Like in Tromsø, about half of tourists who took a hot air balloon flight in Cappadocia were Chinese.

Several countries waived off visa requirements for Chinese tourists, which proved very effective. For instance, flight bookings from Chinese cities to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia and Bangkok in Thailand jump 29 times, 20 times and 16 times year-on-year, respectively, Qunar found.

The total number of air passengers handled in China, including via domestic and international flights, reached 17.99 million during the holiday. The daily average number



A family watch a passenger plane outside Haikou Meilan International Airport in Haikou, Hainan province, on Feb 18. YUAN JINGZHI / FOR CHINA DAILY



Tourists ride camels at the Mingsha Mountain Crescent Spring in Dunhuang, Gansu province, on Feb 19. ZHANG XIAOLIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Tourists frolic at the Shimeiwang Beach in Wanning, Hainan province, on Feb 19. CHEN YEHUA / XINHUA

Holiday tourism has beaten expectations. Trips during the Spring Festival holiday have become a new folk custom for Chinese consumers."

Dai Bin, president of the Beijing-based China Tourism Academy

of passenger trips handled reached 2.25 million, a new high, according to the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

During the period, Haikou-based conglomerate HNA Group operated some 17,500 flights for about 340,000 passenger trips daily, up 43 percent year-on-year. For domestic flights, the average passenger load

factor reached 92 percent. Flights to Bangkok and the Phuket island in Thailand and Singapore were particularly popular, and the average passenger load factor reached 90 percent, the company said.

Currently, HNA operates about 70 international and regional routes, and plans to launch new routes from Chongqing to Milan, Italy, and from Linyi in Shandong province to Seoul, South Korea, further promoting the recovery of China's outbound tourism market and enhancing the vitality of the air travel market, it said.

Owing to relatively high prices of domestic flight tickets and hotel rooms during the Spring Festival holiday period, some people chose to travel overseas during the Lantern Festival weekend, which saw a large crowd of tourists this year.

Hong Kong, Macao, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, the Maldives, Japan and Russia were some of the hottest destinations during the Lan-

tern Festival weekend, according to Tuniu Corp, a Nanjing, Jiangsu province-based online travel agency.

Besides, as the festival itself fell on a Saturday (Feb 24), taking a short-haul trip to neighboring areas became the choice of many people. Among those who traveled domestically during the Lantern Festival break, 57 percent went on short-haul tours. More people preferred tours that lasted one or two days; self-driving trips were popular, according to Tuniu.

Among the hot domestic tourist destinations are top-tier cities like Shanghai and Beijing, and tourist hot spots like Sanya in Hainan province, Nanjing in Jiangsu province and Chengdu in Sichuan province, the online travel agency said.

"Sightseeing spots across the country have launched lantern fairs and featured activities highlighting Chinese elements, such as riddle-solving and tasting of sweet dumplings made of glutinous rice flour.

And activities like experiencing dresses like *hanfu*, a traditional Chinese-style clothing, have attracted visitors," said Qi Chunguang, vice-president of Tuniu.

For long-haul tours, the number of tourists gradually returned to normal levels after the Spring Festival holiday. Tours to the tropical island of Hainan province, Kunming and Lijiang in Yunnan province, and Northeast China remained popular, Tuniu said.

During the Spring Festival holiday, 12 offshore duty-free shops in Hainan clocked total sales of 3.16 billion yuan (\$439 million), with the daily average sales hitting nearly 400 million yuan, up 7.15 percent year-on-year, according to the local government.

Meantime, thanks to the improvement of the highway network and given the popularity of passenger cars, off-road vehicles and recreational vehicles, self-driving trips have emerged as a mode of discovery for the enterprising among trav-

elers in both urban and rural areas.

During the Spring Festival holiday, car rental bookings nearly doubled year-on-year and surged more than 400 percent compared with the festival period of 2019, according to Trip.com Group, China's leading online travel agency.

Besides, the per capita car rental expenses recorded during the holiday reached 3,020 yuan, up 20 percent year-on-year. The longest rental period for self-driving in China was 39 days, with a self-driving distance of about 10,000 kilometers, Trip.com found.

Some popular domestic self-driving routes included the ring roads of Hainan, western Yunnan, western Sichuan, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and the ring road of Northwest China.

"In the future, car rental market players will focus on service quality and user experience, with each company deepening its expertise, and price wars will not be the main direction," said Song Zhen, CEO of the car rental business of Trip.com.

Overseas self-driving tours were also popular among Chinese tourists, with car rental orders increasing by more than 20 times year-on-year. The longest self-driving rental period was 49 days, according to the company.

Christchurch, Melbourne, Dubai, Kuala Lumpur, Los Angeles, Phuket, Sydney, Bangkok, Auckland and Abu Dhabi were the top 10 most popular overseas destinations for self-driving trips of Chinese consumers during the festival period.

Those born in the 1980s and 1990s remain the main consumer groups of car rentals, and consumers born after the year 2000 became the age group that has seen the fastest growth in the volume of orders, Trip.com said.

How smaller tourist destinations gained big time in February

REPORTER'S LOG

By Zhu Wenqian

That domestic tourism boomed during the eight-day Spring Festival holiday last month is well known, but what's not so well known is that this year the rush was different — even small cities and towns attracted many tourists, both Chinese and foreign. How do I know?

As is customary, I visited my hometown in Yangzhou in Jiangsu province, East China, for the holiday. Yangzhou is a third-tier city, but known for its beautiful sightseeing spots. What surprised me at the local airport was the sight of a large crowd of tourists.

More surprises lay in store for me. I spotted a number of foreigners on the streets and at hotels. This is the first time that I saw such a large number of foreign tourists in my hometown.

Local sightseeing spots were all filled with people. Data that I com-

pared later confirmed my initial deductions — the 2024 Spring Festival has proved to be a watershed in the development of domestic tourism.

China has 186 small airports in third-tier or smaller cities, excluding renowned tourist hot spots like Dali and Lijiang in Yunnan province. During the holiday, flight bookings to small airports and entry tickets at local sightseeing spots both nearly doubled year-on-year, Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency, found.

Bookings at luxury hotels in third-

tier or smaller cities more than doubled over the 2023 festival period, it said. Many people chose to stay at hotels in their own hometowns to give the tale of traveling for traditional family reunions a twist.

This year, popular small cities included Chongzuo in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, Dehong in Yunnan province and Taizhou in Zhejiang province, Qunar said.

"The longer holiday has driven people's enthusiasm for travel. The number of people who took flights on the second day of the Chinese

New Year exceeded the number of people who went back to their hometowns for reunions on Chinese New Year's Eve," said Xiao Peng, a researcher at the big data research department of Qunar.

Typically, the Spring Festival travel rush lasts 40 days in China. This year, it started on Jan 26 and will end on Tuesday. The number of inbound tourists jumped more than 100 percent compared with the figures recorded in November and December, according to data from Tianjin Airlines.

Most inbound passengers were

Chinese traveling from abroad for family reunions in China. Passenger demand for flights from Japan to China was high. During the holiday, the average passenger load factor of Tianjin Airlines' flights from Osaka, Tokyo and Nagoya to Tianjin reached 83.7 percent.

Expectedly, after the holiday, passenger flows as well as flight and hotel bookings in popular tourism cities across China gradually declined toward Lantern Festival.

For instance, the price of a Tianjin-Seoul flight ticket fell to as low as 230 yuan (\$32), excluding taxes and fees, creating one more option for passengers to travel during off-peak periods, Tianjin Airlines said.

BUSINESS



Farmers pick apples, special local products, in Yan'an, Shaanxi province, on Oct 21. SHANG HONGTAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Special product buys turn hot among young consumers

Trend of 'emotional economy' expected to provide more business opportunities

By ZHU WENQIAN
zhuwenqian@chinadaily.com.cn

The warming weather has prompted young Chinese consumers to purchase more high-quality sports equipment, as well as various kinds of auspicious items for the Chinese New Year, further driving growth in the nation's booming retail market.

Young Chinese who returned to work from their hometowns after the Spring Festival holiday break have chosen to make online purchases of special local products, such as flower cakes of Yunnan province, Shacha Noodles of Xiamen, Fujian province, and dried beef from the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region.

Sichuan province, known for its delicacies, has been ranked tops in terms of the total value of special local products that consumers have bought online.

The local cuisines of Henan, Shandong, Guangdong and Jiangsu provinces have also been popular, according to internet company Alibaba's e-commerce platform Taobao.

Meanwhile, young people have been purchasing various new

products to indicate their expectations for the new year. Some office workers have bought ornaments on the theme of the god of wealth, and auspicious money tree Lego bricks to adorn their office desks.

During the two-week period until the end of the Spring Festival break, search volumes on the theme of the god of wealth and building blocks on the theme of good luck surged tenfold online, according to Taobao.

"The emotional economy constitutes an important part of economic growth in the digital age. The concept originated from technological progress and psychological demands of people," said Hong Yong, a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation's e-commerce research institute.

"Such an emotional need has provided more business opportunities for enterprises. It is also foreseen to have a significant impact on people's everyday lives and the economy," Hong said.

In addition, young people have also bought products indicating love, expecting a potential romance to bloom.

For instance, the combination of peach blossoms and gold has been highly favored by young consumers. Some domestic jewelry retailers have launched new-style gold bracelets designed with elements of peach blossoms.

Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based jewelry retailer Chow Tai Seng said it sold more than 40,000 gold bracelets with peach blossom designs and lucky beads at the brand's Tmall online flagship store during the two-week period until the end of the Spring Festival holiday.

In addition, young people have increasingly been pursuing health-care products in the new year.

Sales of liver and eye-protection tablets and anti-aging capsules more than doubled year-on-year in the two-week period before the end of the Spring Festival holiday, said Tmall International, Alibaba's international e-commerce portal.

Sporting goods and outdoor equipment have also been sought after by consumers.

Boating, hiking and cycling are the first choices of consumers in spring and summer, and diving, river exploration, and cycling are expected to become the most popular outdoor sports in China this year, according to a new report by Tmall.

Since the beginning of this year, the online transaction value of diving equipment has increased by 120 percent year-on-year, and the number of transactions has grown by more than 200 percent on a yearly basis, Tmall found.

"Diving equipment indicates a higher consumption growth momentum. The number of consumers who purchased basic equipment such as wetsuits and goggles has been the most, while flippers and diving bags have seen increased growth in sales," said Chen Qing'e, director of the outdoor sports business at Tmall.

So far this year, some cycling equipment such as kettle racks and lights has seen their sales value jump by 70 percent year-on-year, while the total transaction amount has increased by 50 percent year-on-year.

Bicycles that have a price tag of 10,000 yuan (\$1,390) or more have seen continuous sales growth, indicating that more cycling enthusiasts have become more professional, Tmall said.

"Chinese consumers have participated in increasingly diversified outdoor activities. With the younger demographic, specialized equipment and advanced consumption are the latest trends," Chen said.

'World's supermarket' sees bright prospects in 2024

HANGZHOU — Amid the vibrant beat of drums, and dragon and lion dances, Yiwu China Commodity City, also known as the "world's supermarket" in East China's Zhejiang province, welcomed the start of a new business year on Feb 21 following the Spring Festival break.

Merchants from around the world watched the performances with great interest. Among them was Bijoy George, an Indian businessman with two decades of experience in Yiwu, who eagerly captured the lively scenes on his phone.

George, who runs a trading company in Yiwu specializing in tools and household items, expressed optimism for business prospects in the coming year. "Yiwu is full of opportunities for trade cooperation. Last year, I bought 200 containers of goods in Yiwu, and this year I plan to buy 300 containers of goods," he said.

With decades of development, Yiwu has evolved into a pivotal hub for the production and wholesale of small commodities, boasting nearly 2.1 million product varieties. The city hosts over 15,000 merchants hailing from more than 100 countries and regions.

According to statistics from Yiwu Customs, the total import and export value of the city reached 566.05 billion yuan (\$78.63 billion) in 2023, marking an 18.2 percent year-on-year increase. Notably, exports exceeded the 500-billion-yuan mark for the first time.

During this year's Spring Festival holiday, China-Europe freight trains departing from Yiwu were operational. From Feb 10 to 17, a total of 68 trains were dispatched, carrying 5,504 standard containers of goods.

Facing evolving customer preferences and shifting business models, merchants in Yiwu are striving to adapt to new commercial trends, actively seeking out new sales channels and creating fresh points of growth for their businesses.

One such entrepreneur is Zou Ying, who owns a packaging business within Yiwu China Commodity City. "We incentivized customers with special discounts today and witnessed tremendous enthusiasm from buyers," Zou said, noting that

she received over a dozen wholesale orders in the morning alone.

With 21 years of foreign trade experience in Yiwu and a burgeoning portfolio of eight stores, Zou believes that while the market may change, the demand for high-quality goods will remain steadfast.

Zou plans to expand her factory from 10,000 square meters to over 30,000 square meters this year. "We anticipate a revenue surge of over 60 percent in 2024," she said confidently.

At an umbrella shop, proprietor Zhang Jiyong proudly presented a palm-sized umbrella weighing just over 100 grams, designed for effortless storage in a handbag or coat pocket.

"This umbrella comes packaged in a drawer-style paper box, eliminating the need for additional cartons for e-commerce sellers during shipping, thereby reducing their costs," Zhang said. With the rapid growth of cross-border e-commerce in recent years, her company has paid more attention to enhancing convenience for online sellers.

Meanwhile, technological advancements are being leveraged to facilitate trade development. Last year, Zhang started using an app after her curiosity was sparked by its AI capabilities.

Upon recording and uploading a video of herself introducing the company's products in Chinese, the app generated a new version featuring her speaking in various languages, including English, French, Spanish and Arabic.

The video garnered over 2 million views online and boosted Zhang's customer base, she said.

Data showed that in Yiwu, over 10,000 vendors currently use AI tools to alleviate language barriers and platform restrictions in foreign trade scenarios, which not only reduces costs, but also enhances operational efficiency for merchants.

"Technology has become integral to our daily lives and has profoundly impacted our business operations. I am hopeful that the implementation of new technologies can generate fresh avenues of growth for my business," she added.

XINHUA



Merchants from India shop for small commodities at Yiwu China Commodity City in Yiwu, Zhejiang province, on Feb 21.

SHI BUFA / FOR CHINA DAILY



PUBLIC INTEREST AD-0201

CHINADAILY 中国日报

BUSINESSINSIGHT

US debt, FDI in China tell a curious tale

EAGLE EYE

By Guan Tao

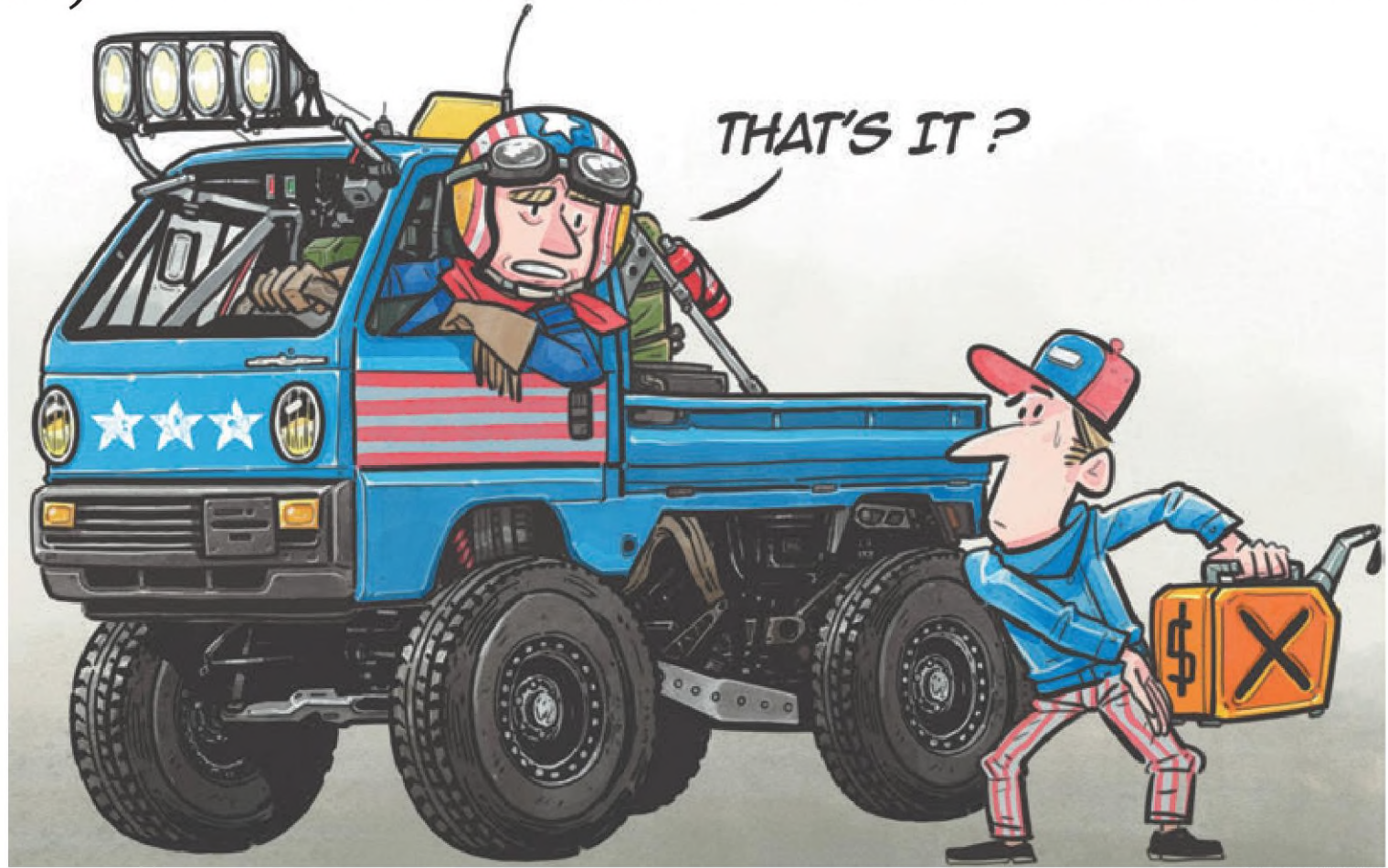
The US Federal Reserve has slowed its interest rate hike tempo over the past two years and even indicated that it may cut rates this year.

The downtrend of US interest rate movement has eased global capital shortages to a certain extent, although it remains a serious problem for economies, including China.

In 2022, faced with resurgent inflation, the Fed embarked on an aggressive path of interest rate increases, raising it seven times by a total of 425 basis points through the year. The move, coupled with tightening expectations, saw US Treasury yields soar, leading to a dollar shortage in other countries and a "double whammy" for the global markets — both stocks and bonds tumbled as international capital rushed back into the United States.

The scenario changed in 2023. With inflation showing signs of easing, the Fed slowed its pace of tightening, raising rates only four times by a total of 100 basis points. In December, it hinted at a potential end to rate hikes and even possible rate cuts. The changing stance has seen Treasury yields retreat from their highs.

As a result, global stocks and bonds rallied as the scale of international capital flowing back into the US decreased, indicating at least a partial easing of the global dollar shortage.



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

Shortage persists

Foreign investor holdings of US Treasury increased significantly in 2023, reaching a record high of more than \$8 trillion by the year-end. In November and December each, foreign investor holdings of US Treasury increased by \$240 billion month-on-month, although the sharp increases were primarily due to falling Treasury rates, not a real surge in foreign purchases.

In terms of broad international capital inflows into the US (excluding direct investment), the net inflows of international capital into the country totaled \$864.5 billion in 2023, down 46.6 percent year-on-year, but was still the fifth-highest level in history.

In the fourth quarter of 2023, net foreign purchases of US debt stood at \$76.7 billion, down 17.6 percent quarter-on-quarter. However, in the same period, the net international capital inflows into the US were \$277.6 billion, an increase of 11.4

percent quarter-on-quarter.

Therefore, while there are signs of shifting sentiment among global investors, it is immature to claim that the global dollar shortage has substantially eased.

China cuts holdings

According to data from the US Department of the Treasury, as of end-2023, Chinese investors held \$816.3 billion in US debt, a decrease of \$50.8 billion year-on-year. It marks the third consecutive year of decline, with a decrease speed of 70.7 percent compared to a year ago.

In the last two months of 2023, Chinese holdings of US debt saw consecutive increases, but it was not the result of increased investment but a substantial decline in Treasury rates and the resulting valuation effect.

As of end-June 2023, China's net nongovernment equity investment in the US was \$237.9 billion, up 63.8 percent compared with the end of 2017, according to statistics of the

State Administration of Foreign Exchange. Despite the increases, however, the US only accounted for 22 percent of China's holding of outbound securities investment at the end of June, down by 7.2 percentage points from the end of 2017.

The latest statistics on the asset structure of China's banking sector also point to a similar trajectory. As of the end of September, US dollar assets accounted for 58 percent and 74.2 percent of China's overall external financial assets and foreign currency assets, respectively, down 10 and 2.5 percentage points from the end of 2017.

FDI rebounds in Q4

Data from SAFE show that in the fourth quarter of 2023, foreign direct investment in China surged back into surplus territory, registering a notable \$17.5 billion surplus, compared with a deficit of \$11.8 billion in the previous quarter.

The deficit, which was the first

since 1998 when SAFE started to publish the data, had aroused concerns about foreign investors pulling capital out of China. But, as I have argued many times earlier, it is essential to delve deeper into the numbers to see what really happened.

China employs two distinct sets of statistical methods to track foreign direct investment: one within the balance of payments framework by SAFE and the other by the Ministry of Commerce. The former encompasses both equity investments and intercompany debts, offering a more comprehensive perspective, whereas the latter excludes intercompany debts.

As a result, the BOP-based FDI data set has a broader scope and tends to exhibit greater volatility. It is not advisable to extrapolate FDI trends solely from individual quarterly data, nor is it appropriate to equate negative net FDI figures with foreign capital withdrawal.

China's BOP-based FDI surplus

stood at \$33 billion in 2023, down 81.7 percent year-on-year. The surplus in equity investments decreased by \$97.5 billion, contributing to 66.3 percent of the total decrease in FDI surplus, while the deficit in intercompany debt transactions increased by \$49.6 billion from the previous year, accounting for the remaining 33.7 percent of the overall decrease in FDI surplus.

It is obvious that the significant volatility in intercompany debt should not be equated with foreign capital withdrawal.

As for the decline in equity investment, it still merits further discussion — whether it is the result of a decrease in new foreign equity investments, capital withdrawal by existing foreign investors, or a reduction in reinvestment of undistributed profits due to declining profits of foreign enterprises.

In terms of China's FDI stock, as of the end of the third quarter of 2023, the figure stood at \$3.345 tril-

lion, with foreign equity investments accounting for \$3.0397 trillion, down by \$353.4 billion and \$334.8 billion, respectively, from the peaks recorded at the end of the first quarter of 2022.

However, non-transaction factors, including exchange rate fluctuations and asset price revaluations, had led to cumulative write-downs of \$447.8 billion for total FDI stock and \$449.4 billion for foreign equity investments, respectively, from the second quarter of 2022 to the third quarter of 2023.

The write-downs had exceeded the total decreases in total FDI stock and foreign equity investments, indicating that the FDI stock decreases are attributable to the negative valuation effect, not real capital outflow.

The writer is global chief economist at BOC International. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

BRI needs results-based project management, consulting

MAIN STREET

By Justin Yifu Lin, Wang Yan and Xu Yinyin

As of October 2023, China had signed more than 230 cooperation documents with more than 150 countries and 30 international organizations under the Belt and Road Initiative, since its inception in 2013.

In the past decade, more than 3,000 projects have been initiated and implemented, and 420,000 jobs have been created under the auspices of the BRI, according to media reports.

These projects have, on average, been completed within three years of the dates of commitment. However, whether these projects have squared the high-quality efficiency circle has not been sufficiently investigated.

A few Western scholars have found *de jure* environmental, social, and governance safeguards in place for Chinese infrastructure projects. Whether these safeguards have been implemented, *de facto*, remains a question mark.

Admittedly, China is still on an upward learning curve in delivering sustainable development projects, and there is a need to establish institutions and strengthen capacity.

The newly established China International Development Cooperation Agency has been formalizing and systematizing foreign aid project management standards. Such *de jure* improvements include

passing a series of regulations regarding the consulting services for foreign aid projects.

More experimental evaluations have been carried out in recent years, but they lack systemic or mandatory requirements.

Quality control is key

As a responsible development partner and financier, China should fully utilize its resources and build capacity in high-quality foreign aid project management rather than leaving this space to the Western media and scholars.

This is urgent since, while making the "high-quality BRI", quality control should not be the missing link in the entire framework of international development and finance.

In the next stage, more projects will need to march toward "going green, going smart, and going digital" to empower the high-quality development of the BRI.

There will also likely be more Build-Operate-Transfer projects in the coming years as the Chinese partners are transforming their roles from contractors to investors. Multiple stakeholders, both at home and abroad, will demand result-based project management for better governance, greater transparency, effectiveness and accountability.

However, China has a long way to go before it implements results-based project management covering the entire supply chain, in accordance with the standards set by international development agencies. More systemic and institutional efforts from the Chinese development cooperation agencies and development finance institutions are needed.

In the first place, project monitoring and evaluation must be undertaken by third-party and independent entities. Otherwise, objectivity and credibility could be affected. This is paramount, especially for project and impact evaluation, which should be done five years after project completion.

The process of feasibility study, project planning, evaluation and economic consultation should be interconnected and technology-intensive.

In other words, early findings from feasibility studies and environmental assessments must be linked to project formulation, planning, budgeting, result framework setting, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. They also require sectoral and technical expertise.

Moreover, ex-post, mid-term and impact evaluations need to be made mandatory under certain circumstances, such as for mega projects in infrastructure. New methodologies like big data, remote sensing and geo-econometrics can be applied in impact evaluation.

The private sector, nongovernmental organizations and academics should be encouraged to undertake tech-intensive evaluation service tasks compared to the current practice of favoring affiliated agencies or subsidiaries.

In addition, these technical assistance or consulting services aimed at evaluating overseas projects could be organized as joint ventures, and they could serve as an instrument for accountability and an opportunity for two-way learning and knowledge-sharing between development partners (that is, China and the host countries).

Such technical assistance service providers shall actively engage and work with local stakeholders and relevant institutions in the host countries.

Chinese public sector consulting agencies must meet international standards in development cooperation project management through learning by doing. Project evaluation is barely new in the Chinese development context. However, the capacity has not been well utilized in China's overseas investment and financing efforts due partly to inadequate accountability, regulatory enforcement and institutional restrictions.

A culture of project monitoring, evaluation and impact evaluation had not been established among banks and construction companies engaged in overseas investment until recently. The fundamental reason is that there is no foreign aid and cooperation law in China. The definitions, size, criteria, regulations, transparency, safeguards, accountability, and governance of China's foreign aid and cooperation have not been established under the jurisdiction of the National People's Congress (the top legislature), and the decision-making has been done in an ad hoc manner.

CIDCA, for example, is not yet equipped with sufficient authority, budget and human capacity to regulate all actors of overseas lending, investment, contractors and their behaviors.

Build capacity in consulting

Though China's domestic consulting services sector has grown since the start of economic reform more than 40 years ago, it lacks

international vision.

Domestic public consulting agencies, private firms and academic institutions have accumulated hands-on experience in regional planning and project management. Many local firms have managed to cultivate, attract and retain young talent graduating from well-known academic institutions worldwide. These young consultants have a good command of essential analytical tools and organizational skills to provide constructive policy recommendations. However, only a few such firms have a vision for international competition.

Overall, China's technical assistance or the consulting sector, remains underdeveloped compared to global consulting sectors due to a lack of vision, lack of transparency and limited access to the international market. Very few entities have conducted overseas project evaluations. Only a handful of Chinese consulting firms are on CIDCA's "vendor" list to provide such services for foreign aid projects, whereas the World Bank has hundreds, if not thousands, of qualified vendors in its vendor list.

Therefore, more diversified entities and experts from the private sector, academia and NGOs should be encouraged to provide tech-intensive consulting services to BRI projects at different stages.

CIDCA should actively work with specialized agencies in international organizations, such as the World Bank, the United Nations, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, to organize essential technical training and eligibility evaluation of "vendors" based on performance. Climate crises, new technology

development and the "reconfiguration" of global supply chains have put developing countries at a disadvantage. Economists have, therefore, called for new strategies for opening-up and cross-border learning.

Building a tech-intensive consulting services sector can play a critical role in the "dual circulation" of domestic and international cycles by breaking information cocoons and building a bridge for knowledge spillovers. This is also consistent with the need for the services sector's exports as an engine of growth.

Considering the two sessions — the annual meetings of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference — to be held this month and the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation summit later this year, it is high time that the issue of promoting results-based BRI project management is brought to the agenda.

This will help in completing project supply chains with quality control, with the recommendation that these international or joint venture consultancies be established as a measure of creating a new engine of high-quality growth for BRI that will generate jobs for educated youth in both China and Africa, and serve the global development agenda for a green and sustainable future.

Justin Yifu Lin is dean of the Institute of New Structural Economics and honorary dean of the School of National Development, Peking University; Wang Yan is senior academic researcher at the Boston University Global Development Policy Center; and Xu Yinyin is a graduate student at Graduate Program in Regional Science, Cornell University. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

COMMENT

Editorials

Fears of lack of competitiveness drive EV scare story, not national security

The United States has expanded its so-called technology de-risking to Chinese electric vehicles, with the Joe Biden administration ordering an investigation into the potential "national security" risks of Chinese EVs.

Following a Feb 28 presidential executive order to deny "countries of concern" access to bulk sensitive personal data, the US Commerce Department now has its sights set on electric vehicles with Chinese technologies. The Biden administration wants to develop regulations, or restrictions, to address what it alleges are the security risks posed by Chinese EVs.

"It doesn't take a lot of imagination to think of how a foreign government with access to connected vehicles could pose a serious risk to both the country's national security and the personal privacy of US citizens," said Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo. In a Friday news release, her department identified China as presenting "a particularly acute and persistent threat."

To back up her scaremongering, she presented the imagining of a future in which there are millions of Chinese connected cars on US roads collecting the data on millions of Americans "every minute of every day" and sending that data back to Beijing. It is "scary to contemplate the cyber risks, espionage risks, that these pose," Raimondo said. She, like so many in Washington, sees Beijing as a foreign adversary capable of and with the intent to inflict harm on the US so it can take its place as world leader.

But there is another dimension to the "national

security" threat narrative that paints a truer picture of US fears. Namely the economic competition between the two countries. As multiple Biden administration officials have acknowledged, this is only a first step in the administration's bid to keep consumer-friendly Chinese EVs from "flooding" the US market, potentially driving US automakers out of business. "I'm not going to let that happen on my watch," Biden said.

Chinese EVs are no doubt a challenge for the Biden administration's attempt to help struggling US automakers. The US president has felt the pressure from Donald Trump, his immediate predecessor and possible rival in the November presidential election. Biden needs to appear tougher.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning accused the US of "trade protectionism". But this is not the protectionism of the past, which was less damaging without today's "national security" fearmongering, which is enabling the Biden administration to tighten the screws to such a marked degree.

Those spreading fears of China launching cyberattacks on US infrastructure via smart devices may want to count how many Teslas are running on Chinese roads and how many iPhones are being used by Chinese consumers.

Following their logic to its natural conclusion, the only way to address "security" concerns is to shut the doors of trade against each other completely. That will not serve the US' interests and those crying wolf about Chinese threats know it.

Report both irresponsible and ridiculous

The European Parliament is flouting the international consensus on the Taiwan question. In its foreign and security policy report it says that, "Neither Taiwan nor China is subordinate to the other" and "only Taiwan's democratically elected government can represent the Taiwanese people on the international stage".

Its wording is problematic in the first place. It is an international consensus that there is only one China and Taiwan is an inalienable part of China of which the government in Beijing is the sole legal representative. The wording of the report constitutes an infringement on China's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The report has seriously interfered with the internal affairs of China by calling on the European Commission and member states of the European Union to support Taiwan's "meaningful participation" in international organizations, despite it being recognized in international law the island has no ground, reason or right to do so.

When establishing diplomatic relations with China in 1975, the forerunner of the European Union explicitly committed to adopting the position on the Taiwan question that there is only one China, with Taiwan being an inalienable part of China. The EU also committed to refraining from maintaining any official relations or entering into

any official agreements with Taiwan.

What the European Parliament has done by including such irresponsible statements in its report about Taiwan is a walking back on the commitment the EU has made. It is also a slap in the face of the reality that all EU countries have diplomatic relations with Beijing that are based on the one-China principle.

China-EU relations have developed well in the past two decades since they established their comprehensive strategic partnership. Whatever reason there is behind its audacious and provocative statements, the report will have a negative impact on the relations between the EU and China.

There is enough reason for those in China and Europe who cherish EU-China relations and hope for better bilateral ties to worry that some politicians in the European Parliament may get carried away by their deeply entrenched Cold War mentality and do things that may erode the foundation of EU-China relations. Some of them may be instigated by Washington to challenge China on the question of Taiwan.

But what they should never forget is that it is EU countries that will suffer if relations with China are made to decline. The Chinese mainland has the strength and resolve to deal with any challenge to the island's reunification with its motherland, and it will not change its commitment to that cause.

Ugly role of US thrown into stark relief

With the majority of the world pinning high hopes on Special Representative of the Chinese Government on Eurasian Affairs Li Hui taking advantage of his visit to Moscow to effectively de-escalate the tensions in the Ukraine crisis, as he did last time, it should not be forgotten that this represents the second time China has sought to help clear up the mess of the West's making.

That Li wrapped up his two-day visit to Kyiv on Wednesday, before arriving in Moscow on Sunday, hopefully means that he can help the two conflicting sides compare notes on their respective concerns and find some common ground on which a footing can be found for talks exploring ways to end the fighting.

As China maintains constructive relations with both Ukraine and Russia and has remained neutral throughout the crisis, Li's shuttle diplomacy bears the hopes of many in the international community that his efforts can help promote a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

The fact that the conflict has evolved into a protracted war of attrition, inflicting a heavy loss of life on both sides, and that there has again been talk of nuclear weapons being used, raise the practical value of Li's pro-peace efforts this time.

Both Moscow and Kyiv are well aware that bringing an end to the conflict as soon as possible is not only what Beijing wants but is also in line with both their interests and accords with the

common expectations of the international community in general. The exceptions being those Western countries who are seeking to prolong the conflict to further their own agenda.

That the insistence of these United States-led countries that there can be no talks until Russia is defeated is tantamount to ordering the Ukrainians to fight to the last man in pursuit of that objective. Their crocodile tears for the loss of Ukrainian lives cannot disguise the fact that they see it as just the necessary price that needs to be paid to achieve that end. In their eyes better Ukraine pay the price than them.

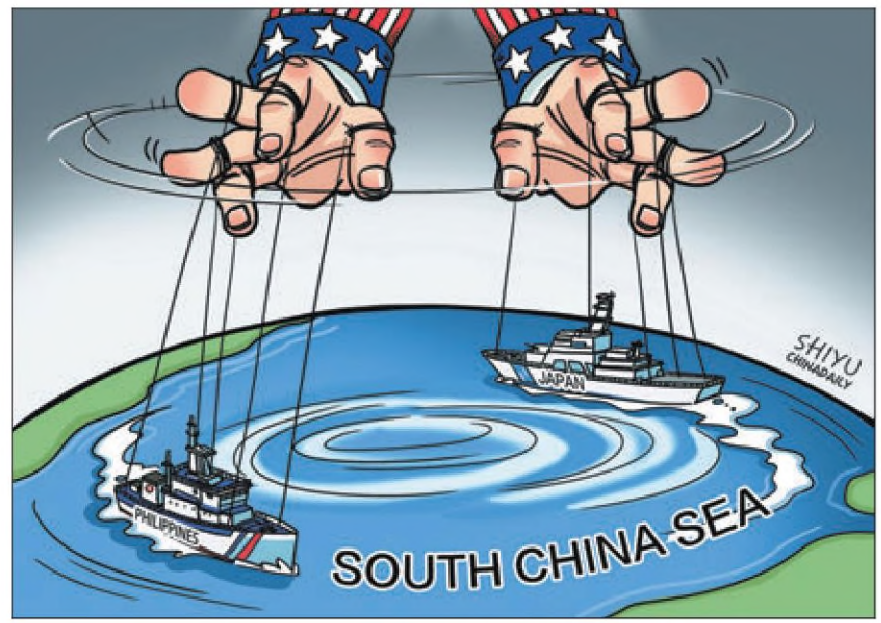
Nor should it be forgotten that Moscow raising the prospect of a nuclear war has been in the context of suggestions that NATO may join the fray by putting troops on the ground.

As was the case in May, except for pointing a blaming finger at Moscow for "taking the initiative to escalate the situation" — as if they were innocent — and vowing a tit-for-tat nuclear attack retaliation, these Western countries are making no effort to de-escalate the situation.

The US has never stopped attributing the crisis to what it alleges is China's support of Russia's "war effort". It should now be clear to all that it is simply an attempt to divert people's attention from the US being the main beneficiary of the crisis — perhaps the only one — and thus the main hand behind the conflict's escalation and prolonging.

The nastier the conflict becomes, the more evident the ugly role the US is playing in it is.

Shi Yu



Opinion Line

Facilitation of out and in travel can help expand opening-up on a wider scope

On March 1, the visa exemption agreement between China and Thailand officially came into effect. Prior to this, Malaysia implemented a 30-day visa-free policy for Chinese tourists starting on Dec 1, while beginning Feb 9 ordinary passport holders from China and Singapore can enter each other's country without a visa for a stay of up to 30 days.

The classic outbound travel route of Singapore-Malaysia-Thailand is thus visa-free for Chinese tourists.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, China was Thailand's largest source of tourists, with more than 10 million Chinese tourists visiting the Southeast Asian nation in 2018, accounting for one-fourth of the total travelers it received that year. Last year, there were only 3.51 million Chinese tourists among the 28 million foreign tourists visiting Thailand. The country anticipates that the number of Chinese tourists will rise to about 8 million this year, generating about 320 billion Thai baht (\$8.92 billion) in revenue.

The decision to implement visa-

free entry for Singapore just before the Chinese Lunar New Year, a traditional festival holiday, likely had economic factors as a significant consideration because holiday tourism is one of the key drivers of consumer spending and an important lever for economic growth. Singaporean policymakers' intention to attract Chinese tourists to Singapore during the Spring Festival holiday is evident.

Besides the three countries, Chinese tourists have always been an important source of revenue in the global tourism market. According to official data, during the 2024 Chinese Lunar New Year period alone, the number of outbound Chinese tourists reached 3.6 million, indicating significant consumption potential.

However, to gain the favor of Chinese tourists, it is necessary for other countries to strengthen research on the characteristics of Chinese tourist groups. For example, the traditional model of tourists shuttling between tourist attractions and shopping malls is

being replaced by a slower, more relaxed model that focuses on personal travel experiences. Longer dining times, leisurely touring schedules, and comfortable service guarantees are now the preference of Chinese tourists.

It is worth emphasizing that while outbound tourism from China is recovering rapidly, the recently implemented inbound facilitation measures have also attracted foreign tourists to China. According to data from tourism platform Ctrip, the number of inbound tourists during the Chinese Lunar New Year period increased by more than 10 times year-on-year, with the main source countries being Japan, the United States, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Vietnam, Germany and Thailand.

The enabling of Chinese tourists to "go whenever they want to" and for foreign tourists to "come whenever they want to" demonstrates that China is opening up on a wider scope and at a deeper level.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

Rural vitalization key to reversing no-marriage trend

The trend of not getting married is spreading in some rural areas. While changes in the attitude of young people toward marriage is a factor to some extent, the main reason is that the financial pressure after marriage is too great, as the overall economic income level in rural areas is significantly lower than in cities.

With the continuous acceleration of urbanization and the rapid outflow of the population, most rural areas are experiencing continuous population loss. Since it is easier for rural women to marry in cities than rural men, the gender ratio in countryside tilts further to the male, resulting in an obvious gender imbalance there.

After working and living in cities for a long time, the farmers-turned migrant workers' requirements for a better material life are markedly higher than those of their predecessors

who had few opportunities to work and live in cities.

Before the underlying economic causes are addressed, and the rural-urban gap is filled, the no-marriage trend in the countryside is hard to reverse.

To effectively curb the spread of the no-marriage trend in rural areas, the government is required to further improve various marriage and child-bearing welfare mechanisms and public services, and further narrow the gap between urban and rural areas.

Some suggest that governments at various levels introduce special fertility policies for rural areas, and formulate reasonable policies for those having a second child without fixed jobs and fixed incomes, such as financial incentives, purchase of insurance for retirement, house purchase subsidies and assistance.

Also, the government needs to take

more concrete actions to create more jobs in the countryside to attract young people back. In particular, it should be noted that the imbalance in the gender ratio of the rural population is also directly related to the fact that most rural areas provide fewer employment opportunities and space for women, leading to a severe loss of the female population.

Since men have a higher tolerance for manual work, they are more likely to stay in the countryside. Accordingly, in order to make the rural population structure healthier, the cultivation of related industries and the arrangement of vocational training services must take more into account the needs of the female population.

Therefore, it is worth promoting some industries that meet women's employment needs in rural areas and small towns.

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

Airdrops of food in Gaza a display of hypocrisy

On Saturday, the US military began dropping food over the war-torn Gaza Strip where 2 million people have been in desperate need of humanitarian aid.

According to the US Central Command in a statement, planes of the US and Jordanian air forces dropped over 38,000 pallets of food aid along the coastline. The two countries are also "conducting planning for potential follow-on airborne aid delivery missions". That's a rare demonstration of humanity from the US over the Gaza crisis.

The entire population of Gaza is suffering from food shortage, of which 478,000 people are at "crisis" levels while 576,600 are at the

"catastrophic" level.

That's why people rushed to the food trucks that arrived on Thursday. But Israeli forces opened fire on them, killing at least 112 people. It's Israel's blockade of Gaza that has turned the Palestinian enclave of 365 square kilometers into the biggest outdoor prison for the 2.2 million people living there. While Israeli attacks have killed over 30,000 people in the latest round of bloodshed since Oct 7 last year.

However, the US, as the largest and staunchest supporter of Israel, has kept its unconditional bias toward Israel regardless of Israel's ruthless assault on the Palestinians in Gaza.

In this round of conflict alone, Washington has four times vetoed United Nations Security Council's resolutions on Gaza aimed at securing at least a pause in the fighting to allow humanitarian aid to enter the zone. The prolonging of the Palestine question for decades has much to do with the US standing firmly behind Israel, no matter what Tel Aviv does.

The US sabotages joint pro-peace efforts of the international community to serve its own interests. The US has never truly cared about the Palestinians and the Israeli hostages. Its airdrops of food in Gaza is nothing but an ugly show of its hypocrisy.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at

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

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

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

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

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

COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | New Productive Forces

Editor's note: New productive forces have emerged due to continuous breakthroughs achieved in science and technology, which help emerging industries to apply disruptive advanced technologies in pursuit of high-quality development. Four experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Amitendu Palit

Innovative economy also a trade opportunity

The role of innovation has become exceptionally critical in increasing comparative advantages of a country in global production. This is particularly true for China, which is undergoing an economic transformation. This transformation, and the vitality of innovation in determining comparative advantages, will determine the future nature of China's trade with many of its trade partners.

For China, the emphasis on new productive forces is partly being driven by the remarkable speed of the country's demographic transformation. This can be understood by taking a close look at China's population growth and its demographic changes.

China will no longer be the most populous country in the world. As birth rates drop well below death rates, China has negative population growth this year and the trend may continue in the years to come. As a result, the overall population of China will steadily decline during the following decades.

This demographic transformation will have a significant impact on China's industrial strategy. Since the launch of reform and opening-up in 1978, China had been using its large population to develop strong comparative advantages in industrial production that required extensive use of low and semi-skilled workers.

The comparative advantages China enjoyed in industrial production made the country a global manufacturing hub. Investors from developed economies, notably the United States and Euro-

pean countries, shifted their labor-intensive production units of their supply chains to China to take advantage of its cheap labor. This resulted in China becoming a global manufacturing powerhouse in production of chemicals, electronics, garments, machinery, fertilizers, drugs, cars and several other products.

This strategy is not useful for China anymore. One of the implications of China's demographic transformation is the decline in supply of cheap low-skilled labor. Indeed, over the past decade, there has been a steady decline in the number of working-age people in China. In fact China has been slowly adjusting its earlier strategy of specializing in labor-intensive industrial products and moving up in the global value chains.

Instead of cheap labor, it now needs to use technological innovation for maintaining its position as a global industrial power. This makes it imperative for China to focus on innovation in all aspects of its industrial production, beginning



The author is a senior research fellow and research lead (trade and economics) at the Institute of South Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore.

from design and conceptualization to making of the products and their marketing. This strategy will become an important factor in China's economic relationships, including those with trade partners.

The Chinese economy has not only undergone a demographic transformation in terms of an absolute reduction in population and declining working-age population. It has also transformed remarkably in terms of consumer behavior. An important point to note in this regard is the very large number of smart-

phone users that China now has.

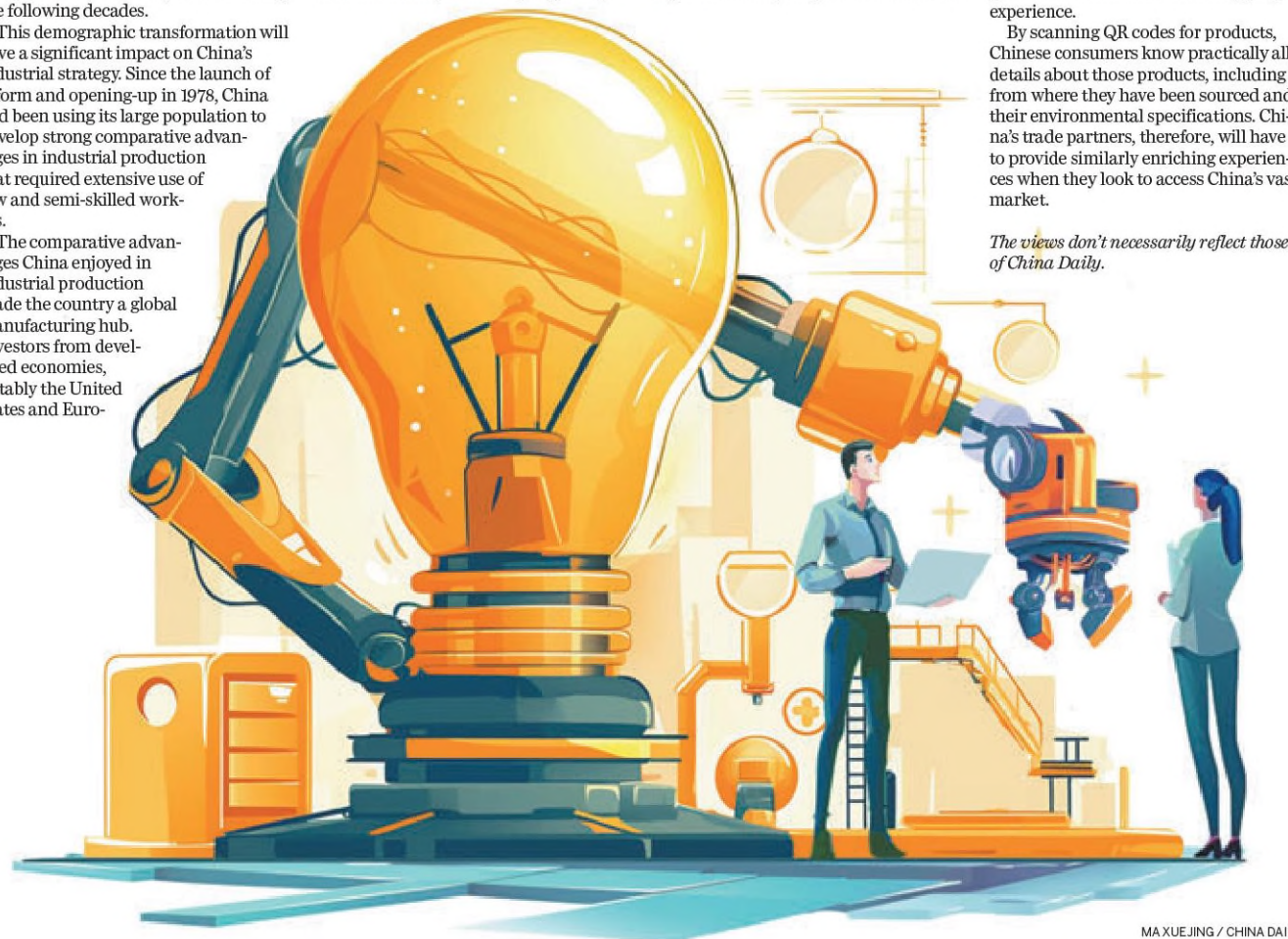
Chinese consumers have been fast in adopting digital practices and online shopping habits. With over 122 phones for every 100 Chinese by the end of 2023, China has become a leading e-commerce and online retail business power. As a result of such growth, digital trade, that is, online purchase of goods and services by households and businesses has become an extremely important part of overall trade. In fact, ordering goods and services through mobile payment platforms will only further increase, leading to similar increase in digital trade. This is a factor that will impact China's trade with its trade partners.

China's trade is expected to increase more with trade partners with whom it can engage relatively easily in digital trade. This means foreign businesses can integrate more easily with China's online retail platforms.

Also, China's online consumers have got used to a rich and varied shopping experience.

By scanning QR codes for products, Chinese consumers know practically all details about those products, including from where they have been sourced and their environmental specifications. China's trade partners, therefore, will have to provide similarly enriching experiences when they look to access China's vast market.

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



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Ni Yueju

New productive forces driving transformation

The top Chinese leader's call to harness new productive forces to promote technological advancement has emerged as a pivotal strategy in China's journey toward realizing comprehensive modernization. The emphasis is on using innovation to achieve high-quality development.

Unlike the traditional approach to development and modernization which focuses on incremental improvements, the new productive forces signify a quantum leap facilitated by emerging technologies, novel formats and transformative models amid the ongoing technological revolution and industrial transformation. The new productive forces' salient features include integration, leadership and breakthrough innovation.

Central to the new productive forces' efficacy is the seamless integration of innovation elements. Deeply rooted in advanced technologies, the productive forces spawn fresh formats, models and driving forces, spearheading innovation-driven socioeconomic development. Examples abound, from the convergence of information technology and manufacturing to realize smart manufacturing, to the ubiquitous application of groundbreaking technologies such as big data, cloud computing, and the internet of things across different industries, fostering cross-industry integration and catalyzing technological innovation.

Moreover, the new productive forces underscore the paramount role of innovation. They symbolize a paradigm shift in productivity driven primarily by technological innovation, and characterized by efficiency and high quality. By charting the trajectory of industrial development, they radiate to interconnected sectors, giving rise to strategic emerging industries and future industrial clusters with profound leadership impacts.

They also accentuate breakthrough innovation. Being focused on substantially enhancing total factor productivity, they prioritize original, revolutionary and breakthrough technological innovations, leading to fundamental shifts in the industrial structure and even the broader socioeconomic paradigm. This is in stark contrast to the traditional innovation paradigm, which primarily focuses on improving the existing systems.

Advancing the new productive forces is necessary for driving high-quality development. Yet high-quality development depends on not only attaining the commanding heights in the global technological revolution and industrial transformation but also charting new frontiers of development and fortifying new competitive advantages.

At the heart of this evolution lie technological innovation, industrial transformation and transitioning economic development from being factor-driven to innovation-driven. This calls for a pivot



The author is a research fellow at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of World Economics and Politics.

toward emerging technologies, novel formats, models and data, and making marginal output more efficient and innovation capability long lasting, in contrast to the traditional reliance on factors such as land, labor and capital.

The new productive forces' development will help fuel the optimization and upgrading of the industrial structure, catalyze the emergence of new economic growth drivers such as the digital economy, intelligent manufacturing, new energy and advanced materials. These breakthroughs will help clear the growth bottlenecks that have long hindered traditional industries, while laying the foundation for a modern industrial system.

Additionally, by leveraging information technology to digitalize the production process as well as to build a smart production process, the authorities can strengthen resource allocation efficiency, minimize waste and foster greener, more sustainable socioeconomic development.

Importantly, this pursuit transcends quantitative growth to realize qualitative development. Aligned with the other ele-

ments propelling high-quality development, the pursuit prioritizes the quality of products and services, bolstering core competitiveness, and fulfilling the escalating aspirations of the people for a better quality of life.

The new productive forces' development catalyzes the shift in production relations, necessitating corresponding institutional reforms, including measures to better protect intellectual property rights, improving technology innovation policies and streamlining market access mechanisms, thereby fostering a favorable institutional environment for high-quality development.

Narrowing regional development gaps, these new productive forces will facilitate technological innovation and the restructuring of industry chains, enabling relatively less-developed regions to find new growth drivers, thereby promoting coordinated regional development and overarching social progress.

In summary, the ascendance of new productive forces has been playing a key role in China's economic modernization, and serving as a pivotal lever for modernizing the national governance system and governance capacity, and supporting the country's transition from high-speed economic growth to high-quality development.

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

Huang Weiping and Huang Jian

Nation charts course toward modernization

The modernization agenda, centered on high-quality economic development, seeks to translate China's blueprint for modernization into tangible reality to improve people's lives.

At its core, Chinese path to modernization embodies distinctive Chinese characteristics, and aims to achieve common prosperity through the path of peaceful development, harmony between humanity and nature, and the balanced development of material and cultural-ethical advancement. This, incidentally, is also the founding mission of the Communist Party of China and the fundamental purpose of socialist revolution and construction.

As China develops beyond a moderately prosperous society in all respects, it faces a myriad of challenges on the path to socialist modernization. These challenges range from sustaining economic growth and ensuring the sustainable allocation of resources to meeting the evolving needs of 1.4 billion Chinese people and navigating the complex shifts in the global landscape. Addressing these challenges necessitates unlocking the transformative power of innovation and propelling the development of new productive forces.

At the forefront of this endeavor is the primacy of technological innovation. By achieving breakthroughs in technological innovation, China seeks to enhance its manufacturing capability, clear technological bottlenecks, and maximize resource efficiency. Through the integration of cutting-edge technologies and revolutionary production processes, China has been trying to overcome the problems created



Huang Weiping is a Jean Monnet chair professor at the School of Economics, Renmin University of China.



Huang Jian is a professor at the Business School of Wenzhou University.

by resource scarcity, and to elevate productivity and increase economic output. The strategic emphasis on technological innovation serves as the linchpin for achieving high-quality development and transforming China into a leading innovation powerhouse.

Besides, the application of new productive forces mainly lies in strategic emerging industries and future-oriented sectors. By nurturing innovation ecosystems and fostering an environment conducive to promoting entrepreneurship and creativity, the country is also endeavoring to create new products and business models so as to better cater to the evolving needs of the Chinese people.

From the burgeoning digital economy to the transformative potential of e-commerce platforms and the internet of things, China is at the forefront of harnessing new productive forces to boost consumption and drive sustainable growth.

Furthermore, cultivation of talents emerged as a facilitator of new productive forces. Recognizing the pivotal role of human capital in driving innovation and sustaining growth, China has made significant investments in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education. It should prioritize STEM education from the grassroots level to cultivate a skilled workforce equipped with the knowledge and competency needed to promote technological innovation. This strategic focus on talent cultivation will not only strengthen the innovation ecosystem but also turn China into a global leader in science and technology.

In tandem with fostering innovation and cultivating talents, China should implement institutional and governance reforms to promote the development and use of new productive forces. Through targeted reforms, aimed at streamlining the bureaucratic process, enhancing regulatory efficiency and fostering a free and fair conducive business environment, China aims to catalyze innovation-led growth and unleash the full potential of its economy. And by ensuring transparency and accountability, and strengthening the rule of law, China seeks to create a level playing field that will promote innovation, entrepreneurship and sustainable development.

In conclusion, the pursuit of Chinese path to modernization is a multifaceted approach centered on innovation, talent cultivation and institutional reform. By harnessing the transformative power of innovation, nurturing a skilled workforce, and building an enabling regulatory environment, China hopes to promote socialist modernization.

As China charts its course toward a brighter future, the development of new productive forces will help it promote prosperity and progress, and achieve national rejuvenation.

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

GLOBAL VIEWS

JOHN E. SCANLON

Much more to be done

Global environmental strategies are falling short, but there are solutions that offer hope

More than 1,400 multilateral environmental agreements have been adopted over the past 50 years, with more in the pipeline. Over this period of time, we have also seen multiple global conferences, meetings and summits.

Given this flurry of international activity, our environment ought to be in good shape. But it's not; it's quite the opposite.

In recent years, the world's best scientists have painted a grim picture of a degrading environment. Reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and many others reveal multiple crises, including biodiversity loss, climate change, land degradation, plastic pollution and declining air and water quality, all of which are making our planet an increasingly unhealthy place for people and wildlife.

Have all these meetings and the hundreds of multilateral environmental agreements made a significant difference to the state of our planet? Have they served to advance the cause of the environment or sustainable development?

We've had a convention on international wetlands since 1972, yet approximately 35 percent of the world's wetlands were lost between 1970 and 2015. We've had a convention on migratory species since 1979, yet 44 percent of the listed species are undergoing population declines. We failed to meet our globally agreed 2010 and 2020 biodiversity targets, with over 1 million species now at risk of extinction, and we are not on track to meet our globally agreed climate targets.

Don't get me wrong, we need international conventions, global summits, strategies and targets, but they have their limits. Their success cannot be measured by how many we have, but how they impact what is happening on the ground. International agreements can act as a catalyst for national plans, legislation and action. They can create a positive cascade effect at the national level and enhance cross-border cooperation, as we have seen to varying degrees with conventions addressing biodiversity, climate change, marine pollution, ozone depletion, the transboundary movement of waste and the wildlife trade.

But more is still needed. For example, last year, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the World Health Assembly agreed to create a treaty or instrument focused on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response. The issue of pandemics is closely tied to how we treat nature,

animal health and welfare, and is a perfect candidate for a coordinated global response.

But we are clearly falling short with the implementation of international laws and global strategies, and their financing, which are inextricably linked, and in finding creative ways to better encourage compliance with international obligations.

It's challenging to reconcile international obligations, and emerging science, together with changing community expectations across the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic, environmental and social. China has embedded the ecological civilization into its current five-year plan (2021-25), reconciling international obligations and national expectations, in the pursuit of harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature, as was evident from the actions taken in China to close its domestic ivory markets.

Now, more than ever, we need a strong global anchor institution for the environment, one that can measure how we are lessening or exacerbating our impact on the global environment; to paint the whole picture to help guide our collective response.

Recognizing that tackling global environmental challenges requires a multilateral effort, the United Nations Environment Programme was created in 1972 with an ambitious mandate. While progress was made, by the turn of the century, there was general agreement that the international environmental governance system was failing to deliver on expectations, and following an inclusive process, in 2013 the UN Environmental Assembly was established by the UN General Assembly, as the world's first subsidiary body of the UN with universal membership (namely of all 193 member states of the UN). China was actively engaged in this inclusive process to strengthen global environmental governance.

International law is not static — it is continuing to evolve. Today, we see important new international laws being created, or discussed, in multiple international fora where China is engaging, on the high seas, pandemics, plastic pollution and wildlife trafficking. This is part of an ongoing and evolving approach to tackling global environmental challenges through the multilateral system.

While we have multiple well-crafted international agreements in place, or in progress, to address our most pressing environmental and sustainability challenges, we are in need of a revitalized commitment to implementation, the necessary international and national financing to enable it, and an authoritative global center of

gravity for monitoring progress and enhancing compliance.

Today, science is unequivocally presenting us with the reality of the environmental harm we are inflicting on our planet, and in real time. If we stay on the same trajectory for the next 50 years, the prognosis looks grim to say the least.

This is a crucial time for the environment and our planet's health. The time is ripe for UNEP and UNEA to step up and be more ambitious and impactful, to become the global environmental authorities they were designed to be.

It's not all bad news. Over the past 50 years we have collectively developed a comprehensive body of international and national policies and laws. China is a party to all of the major multilateral environmental agreements. This body of laws continues to evolve, backed by a strong and improving science base. It has not been fast enough, effective enough, or adequately financed, but despite all of these shortcomings, we are better off today because of them. It also reflects how humanity has been continually striving to find the ways and means of better responding to environmental threats to our planet's health, to achieve harmonious coexistence.

There are glimmers of hope. There are solutions. The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework adopted a bold set of biodiversity targets to 2030, creative natural and technological solutions are increasingly being deployed to meet agreed targets, and new funds and innovative sources of finance are emerging.

For example, in 2021, China pledged 1.5 billion yuan (\$206 million) to the Kunming Biodiversity Fund to support biodiversity in developing countries, and the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation donated 1 million yuan to support the fund and established a public fundraising platform.

The science tells us it's still not too late — provided we change course. It will not be easy but there really is no other option. And, if we try hard enough and work together in common cause, we may just succeed.

The author is chair of the Global Initiative to End Wildlife Crime, former secretary general of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and a recipient of the Friendship Award of the Chinese Government. 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.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

ERIK SOLHEIM

Exemplary greening

What started as the war on pollution became a movement for an ecological civilization and a Beautiful China

I went on a wonderful jogging tour in Beijing in February. It was freezing cold, but the sky was blue, the sun was bright and the air was fresh. I visited Beijing to receive the 2023 Chinese Government Friendship Award. To better kick-start my day, I went outside and took a morning run. Under the blue skies and bright sunny light, I happily breathed the fresh air and enjoyed the beautiful winter morning.

Looking back many years ago, I would never go jogging in Beijing. The faint smell of coal burning at the time hung in the air and the color of the sky was gray from smoke. At the time when I spoke to Chinese friends about the economic miracle bringing 1.4 billion Chinese out of poverty, they would always reply: "Yes, but I want to see the sun." Now the sun is back.

China has made huge progress in the war on pollution and has become the country with the fastest improvement of atmospheric environment quality in the world. More than 10 years ago, China took the lead in fighting air pollution. Now China leads the world not only in better air quality, but in environmental progress more widely and in green technology.

China believes that lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets, as President Xi Jinping said in his famous speech in Anji, Zhejiang province, back in 2005. It has included the concept of harmony between man and nature in its path of modernization.

In 2012, the Chinese government first introduced the concept of building a Beautiful China. In January, China issued guidelines to comprehensively promote the development of a Beautiful China. The guidelines put this initiative in a prominent position in the construction of a strong country and in the process of achieving national rejuvenation. With the guidance providing a clear blueprint and a set of concrete plans, the realization of a Beautiful China is within reach.

I love the concept "Beautiful China". It's simple. It's people-centered. It's close to the heart. It mobilizes the emotions of all people — farmers and industrial workers, students and IT professionals, rural and urban residents, the old and young. We need such slogans to create the mass movement necessary for better care of Mother Earth. And of course, Beautiful China can

easily be translated to Beautiful India, Beautiful America, or Beautiful Norway, to mention my home country.

It's inspiring to see how millions of people across this vast land are creating a Beautiful China.

China is in a league by itself as the world's biggest tree planter. In Saihanba in Hebei province or in the Kubuqi desert in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, I have been a witness to how tens of thousands of people have planted trees and greened the land.

Ecological restoration programs bring land and waterways to their old beauty — from the fishing ban in the Yangtze River to the green rural vitalization of Zhejiang province. Last year, President Xi visited a mangrove forest in Guangdong province, highlighting the role of mangroves as coastline protection and as species-rich habitats of huge importance. China's innovative redline system provides a scientific way of establishing priorities for conservation efforts.

While the idea of national parks may have been American, China is now establishing what will be the most comprehensive national park system in the world, with big parks in the Xizang autonomous region and Qinghai province and new conservation areas all over China. It will give better protection to China's wonderful nature as well as to iconic species such as snow leopards and Tibetan antelopes.

The cities of China are also rapidly becoming greener and more beautiful. Shenzhen in Guangdong province hosts a big wetland, rich in birds, right in the center of town. Great green corridors pass through that city. In Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, the West Lake has been restored to its historical glory creating one of the world's most beautiful cities. The canals of Suzhou in Jiangsu province and the Dianchi Lake in Kunming, Yunnan province, have been cleaned up and they provide beautiful urban areas for residents and visitors to walk or cycle. Xiamen, Fujian province, proudly wishes to be the "garden by the sea". When I recently visited Datong, a coal mining hub in Shanxi province, I was struck with how clean and green this industrial city has become.

China's green development can inspire the world. Backed by domestic success, China confidently co-chaired with Canada the United Nations Biodiversity

Conference (COP15) that produced the historic Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. To facilitate the implementation of this new global agenda, the Ministry of Ecology and Environment has recently issued the China National Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan (2023-30), anchoring the management of nature in top notch science and moving fast forward on conservation.

Through the Belt and Road Initiative and across the Global South, China has been increasing green investment, accelerating technology and knowledge transfer as well as sharing valuable experience and expertise on nature protection and green development.

It is also important that China is willing to open the door to international experience and welcome world experts and talents to engage in and support China's reform and development. When I attended the award ceremony of the 2023 Chinese Government Friendship Award, Premier Li Qiang said China's development is open, and the country welcomes talents from all over the world. The Chinese government will create a better environment for foreign talents to work and live in China.

Let's evolve the concept of building a Beautiful China into an idea of a Beautiful World. Let's expect the beautiful vision of all countries jointly pursuing win-win cooperation and heading toward a clean, healthy and prosperous future.

A few years ago I had the pleasure to visit the Giant Panda National Park in Sichuan province and observe the extraordinary efforts to increase the number of this wonderful iconic species. It's at the same time a high tech operation deploying the best in modern technology and science and a heartwarming protection of amazing animals by dedicated local people. There are few symbols of China as strong as the giant panda. This wonderful animal embodies the idea of a Beautiful China in a beautiful world.

The author is vice-president of the Green Belt and Road Coalition and former executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme. 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.



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

CULTURAL HERITAGE



Far left: A painted bronze lamp in the shape of a wild goose chewing fish is on display. **Above:** A gold decoration in the shape of a mythical beast at the exhibition.



A bird's-eye view of the newly opened Shaanxi History Museum's Qin-Han Civilization Museum in Xixian New Area, Shaanxi province.

PHOTOS BY ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

As they pass through the doorway between two towering *quelou* — traditional ceremonial gate towers — and walk up the 90 steps to the main building of the Shaanxi History Museum's new Qin-Han Civilization Museum, visitors may experience a sense of solemnity as they arrive at the complex, which is based on Qin (221-206 BC) and Han (206 BC-AD 220) dynasty palaces.

Designed by architect Zhang Jin-qiu, who is also an academicien of the Chinese Academy of Engineering, the buildings resemble traditional Qin and Han dynasty palaces, which were often built on high, rammed earth platforms.

As the first museum in the country specially dedicated to the Qin and Han dynasty civilizations, this branch of the Shaanxi History Museum is currently in a soft opening and will officially welcome visitors in May.

"If the Shaanxi History Museum is seen as a great overview of Chinese history, then its Qin-Han Civilization Museum is the volume dedicated to the Qin and Han," says Ren Xueli, director of the Shaanxi History Museum's exhibition department.

The new museum is located in Xixian New Area neighboring the ruins of the central palace area of ancient Xianyang, the capital of the Qin Dynasty, and the location of the mausoleums of Western Han (206 BC-AD 24) emperors.

"In some way, the buildings are the biggest exhibits," Ren says.

There are seven buildings in all, laid out in the shape of the Big Dipper. This is a representation of *xiangtian fadi*, the traditional practice of making a city layout, according to celestial positions, Ren says.

"During the time of Qinshihuang (China's first emperor), Xianyang was laid out according to the positions of the stars. By the time it was completed, the city extended along both the north and south sides of the Weihe River, and the river was seen as a representation of the Milky Way. Zhang Jinqiu designed the museum based on the same idea," Ren continues.

The buildings are connected by overhead corridors, much as they would have been in ancient times, but these corridors are made of glass curtain walls and provide good views of the outside. This, Ren says, is a combination of the old and new.

During the Qin and Han eras, the imperial family had royal gardens where they could hunt and appreciate landscapes. For example, Western Han poet and musician Sima Xiangru described the views and animals in one large royal garden, the Shanglin Garden. The museum has re-created some of those views.

"The overall design is imbued with deep meaning and a sense of romance. The beautiful architecture faithfully reproduces ancient literary depictions, and allows people to experience the beauty described in literary works for themselves," Ren says.

A focus on the formative

New branch of the Shaanxi History Museum places achievements of Qin and Han dynasties in wider context, **Wang Ru** and **Qin Feng** in Xi'an report.



Left: Two pottery figurines against the backdrop of a multimedia device, which illustrates the transformation of Chinese characters. **Right:** A Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220) wooden vessel on display undergoes repairs in January.



The buildings will be used as exhibition halls, a library, a cultural relic protection center, a restaurant and an activity center, and will become a cultural and tourist complex, she adds.

Many ancient dynasties had their capitals in Shaanxi, in particular the Western Zhou (c. 11th century-771 BC), the Qin, the Han, the Sui (581-618) and the Tang (618-907) dynasties.

"These dynasties exert a very important influence on modern China. The rituals and music system of the Western Zhou Dynasty, the political systems of the Qin and Han dynasties, and Sui and Tang's governing policies with their spirit of openness, inclusiveness and peaceful communication with foreign countries, have all been important influences on Chinese civilization," Ren says.

The ongoing exhibition *Great Unity Under Heaven: Civilization of Qin and Han Dynasties* displays 732 artifacts that illustrate the contributions of both dynasties to China.

According to Peng Wen, exhibition curator, the show focuses on pioneering systems established

during the dynasties, and explores their contributions to China from political, economic, ideological, cultural, technological and communication perspectives through artifacts and multimedia.

"If we say the Greek and Roman civilizations represent Western civilization, then the Qin and Han civilizations are viewed as a representative of Chinese civilization," says Liu Qingzhu, a researcher at the Institute of Archaeology at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, who is an

expert on Qin and Han archaeology.

"The Qin and Han era was a period of great transformation and development in Chinese society. It was a time when many ancient political systems were devised, and the foundations of Chinese academic and intellectual thought were laid. It was also a time when China began to come together as a unified country of multiple ethnic groups," he adds.

For example, both dynasties standardized written characters, promoted *xiaozhuan* (small seal script)

and then *lishu* (clerical script), and broke the barriers of communication between different groups of people, thus helping to give rise to civil politics in China, which means scholar officials played a more important role in imperial courts, and often had more power than military officials. This, Liu says, is different from Roman stratocracy, or government by military forces.

"In addition, China has been ruled with the help of written characters since policies and rules were disseminated in written documents, a tradition that continues today. And this custom originated in China under the Qin and Han when words were standardized. This shows consistency and uniformity in Chinese civilization," Liu says.

One multimedia exhibit illustrates the transformation of characters. Words stream toward a device in the center of the space, and then rise to the ceiling where they hang like stars in the sky. It follows changes all the way from the *jia-guwen*, or oracle bone inscriptions, the earliest known form of Chinese writing, to modern Chinese characters, and even to words in Japanese

A bronze tiger that was presented to summon soldiers in the Warring States Period (475-221 BC) is on exhibition.



Ancient tomb delivers secrets from the past

By **WANG RU** in Beijing and **QIN FENG** in Xi'an

A precious four-wheeled carriage, the first of its kind found in China, has been discovered at a tomb that is part of the mausoleum complex of Qinshihuang, China's first emperor, Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, announced recently.

It is one of nine large-scale tombs located to the west of the emperor's mausoleum. Excavations started in 2013. To date, archaeologists have excavated two passages, a burial room and three chariot burial pits.

According to Jiang Wenxiao, a researcher at the museum and also leader of the project, the tomb dates to the time between the late Warring States Period (475-221 BC) and the establishment of the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BC). It is set somewhat apart from the rest of the site and was surrounded by a ditch to its

west and south. To the north was a precipice, and to the east there was a river.

The tomb is 100 meters long, and covers an area of 1,900 square meters. The central coffin has collapsed and is severely deteriorated, with only a few human bones remaining. It was taken to the laboratory for care, Jiang says.

A large amount of pottery, bronze vessels, jade, iron, gold and silver artifacts have also been unearthed in the tomb, some of which are very precious. For example, gold and silver camels found in the burial room are the earliest of their kind found in China.

According to Jiang, the two-humped camel was a rare sight in the Central Plains at that time. As a result, the artifacts may reflect communication between the Qin Dynasty and Xiyu (the western regions, a term to describe today's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region and Cen-

tral Asia in the past), and provide a reference for understanding cultural exchange before the Silk Road began operations during the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220).

One of the highlights has been the discovery of the four-wheeled wooden carriage found in the tomb passage, which was well-preserved.

The carriage is 72 meters long, and still had an intact painted hood. After more than 2,000 years, its red color is still vibrant, Jiang says.

He says their preliminary judgment is that it was closely linked to the funeral process, and was possibly used to transport the coffin.

Carriages of other types and functions have also been unearthed at the tomb, including a wooden carriage found in a burial pit, which was driven by four horses. The horses' bones are intact and were found complete with their tack, showing a scene of the four horses pulling the carriage when the tomb

owner was alive, says Jiang.

Another carriage probably pulled by sheep was also discovered. Although it was damaged, the bones of the accompanying sheep are well-preserved. This is also a rare discovery in China, Jiang says.

Although the occupant hasn't been identified, he must have been of high social status since his tomb can be regarded as the primary tomb that accompanies the resting place of the emperor, Jiang adds.

"This is currently one of the largest and highest-ranking Qin noble tombs to be discovered and excavated, and one of the best preserved," says Jiao Nanfeng, a researcher at the Shaanxi Academy of Archaeology, adding that it may provide valuable information about the burial practices of Qin aristocracy, and even of ancient China's emperors.

Earlier excavations of high-level Qin tombs include some to the east



A four-wheeled wooden carriage, the first of its kind found in China, discovered in a passage of a tomb that is part of the Qinshihuang Mausoleum complex in Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

of the emperor's mausoleum in Shangjiao village, where 17 tombs were found in the 1970s, eight of which were excavated.

The occupants of the tombs are believed to be the emperor's sons and daughters. They have been killed during political struggles

and Korean influenced by Chinese. "This shows that the standardization of characters prompted the spread of Chinese civilization," Ren says.

One of the exhibits' highlights is a wooden Han boat unearthed at Weiqiao Site in Xi'an. It is on display for the first time.

"The boat is made of 16 planks, joined together by *summao* (mortise-and-tenon) joints. This method of building was found common in the Mediterranean area during Ancient Rome, but it is the first time it's been found in China," Peng says.

She adds that the usual way to build boats in ancient China was by carving one out of a single trunk, rather than by jointing planks. The adoption of this way of building boats shows that China's communication with the rest of the world was ongoing during the Qin and Han era, when the embryonic form of the ancient Maritime Silk Road began.

"The prosperous Qin and Han periods saw exchange with the rest of the world. ... Since then, China has sustained the vitality of learning and communication with other civilizations with its open-minded and inclusive attitude," Peng says.

The Shaanxi History Museum has a collection of more than 1.7 million artifacts, only several thousand of which have been exhibited before. With the opening of the new branch, visitors will have the chance to see more of them, Ren says.

For example, some small ceramic animal figurines of monkeys, camels and pigs, which are believed to have been Han era toys, were previously lost among the many exquisite artifacts in the Shaanxi History Museum's collection, but they finally have their chance to shine at the new museum.

The exhibition also makes a lot of comparisons between the Qin and Han civilizations and their foreign contemporaries. For example, when introducing the standardization of words, Persia's trilingual policy, its simultaneous use of Old Persian, Elamite, and Akkadian during the Achaemenid Empire (550-330 BC), is introduced by way of comparison.

According to Ren, since its soft opening at the end of last year, the museum has welcomed an average of about 10,000 visitors a day.

Two other exhibitions on the art of Qin and Han dynasties, and Qin and Han cities and tombs, will open in May.

"I believe the museum is very important as it explains important characteristics of Chinese civilization using archaeological evidence from the Qin and Han dynasties. Visitors will get the opportunity to understand how Chinese civilization has lasted for such a long time without interruption," Liu says.

Contact the writers at wangru1@chinadaily.com.cn

Zou Hong contributed to this story.

LIFE

Universal appeal

Reality TV comedy duo continue their mirthful and meteoric rise in acclaimed new series, **Li Yingxue** reports.

It TV shows sometimes spark spin-off reality programs, fueled by the fans' love for the actors. Stand-up comedian Zhan Xin and actor Zhang Zhehua are a special case — their popular appearance on a variety show earned them a devoted following, paving the way for the success of their future projects.

In 2022, their respective roles as young master Liu Bo and butler Long Aotian in the comedy reality show *Super Sketch Show* won the hearts of viewers, later leading them to clinch the title of Audience Favorite for their series *Master and I*. Their on-screen chemistry and comedic timing generates plenty of buzz.

Just last month, their latest venture, the 12-episode drama, *Our Parallel Universes*, aired on streaming platform iQiyi. Zhan and Zhang took on multiple roles, as each episode told a different story of chance encounters.

Reminiscent of the animated short *Yao-Chinese Folktales*, the series packs a punch with its succinct, quirky narratives, and has earned a solid rating of 7.3 points out of 10 on Douban.

During the recent Spring Festival, *Our Parallel Universes* became a binge-worthy treat for many, attracting a fresh wave of viewers. The hashtag "short show *Our Parallel Universes*" racked up a staggering 160 million views on Chinese social media platform Sina Weibo, while the show's debut on Douyin earned it a spot at the top of the trending charts.

Director Wang Li says that when they began planning this series, they thought about continuing the story from the duo's performances on previous reality shows. However, they decided to create 12 entirely separate stories for them instead.

"There was always a warm feeling to their reality show appearances, so we wanted to keep that," explains Wang. "Our main goal was to tell 12 good stories with a comedic touch."

Filming 12 different stories was a big challenge for the team. "Each episode had its own unique setting, costumes, props and filming style. It was like making 12 small movies," Wang says.

"This is my second time working with Zhang and my first with Zhan. After getting used to the filming environment, Zhan became really relaxed and was a lot of fun on the set. His spontaneous jokes during breaks kept everyone laughing," Wang says.

"Zhang and Zhan are very talented, and both are quick learners," she adds.

Wang also says that the chemistry



Clockwise from top: Stand-up comedian Zhan Xin (left) and actor Zhang Zhehua co-host the 12-episode TV series *Our Parallel Universes*; Zhang acts in an episode telling a story about schoolmates; Zhan (left) and Zhang discuss the script; Zhan plays a swordsman in one episode. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

between the two actors often led to unexpected surprises during filming. "Sometimes, I let them keep going with their improvisation, which often sparked new ideas," she says.

For actors, tackling 12 different roles is much tougher than playing one character in a regular TV series. Zhan, 36, who isn't from an acting background, it was an even bigger challenge.

"Stand-up comedy is about direct audience interaction, where you get instant feedback. Filming movies



"This is my second time working with Zhang and my first with Zhan. After getting used to the filming environment, Zhan became really relaxed and was a lot of fun on the set."

Wang Li, director

and TV shows, however, is quite different," Zhan explains.

"After playing one character, I had to completely switch to the next," he says. Initially nervous, he gradually relaxed as filming progressed.

Zhan also wrote an episode. It was inspired by a moment during his stand-up tour when he couldn't stop laughing on stage. "I created two silly characters without specific roles for myself and Zhang," he says.

Zhan feels that the routines he and Zhang performed on *Super Sketch Show* were well-received

because both characters shared a certain silliness.

"On stage, we always portrayed ourselves as earnestly asking about something absurd," he adds.

Switching between characters presented its challenges, but the film set was filled with joy. The chemistry between Zhang and Zhan, honed during their reality show experiences, shone brightly on set. The actors, who both come from Anshan, Liaoning province, consistently sparked fresh dialogue and interaction.

Zhang says the atmosphere on the production team was different compared to his previous experiences.

"Everyone, from cinematography to art direction and lighting, was deeply devoted to enhancing the story," the 30-year-old says. "The realistic set helped us, as actors, to dive deeper into our roles and performances."

Many other actors from *Super Sketch Show* also make guest appearances in the series, injecting more creativity into the script. "Their involvement enriched our stories," Zhang says.

Lately, familiar faces from both seasons of *Super Sketch Show* have been popping up frequently, entertaining audiences not only on China Central Television and local channels during the Spring Festival and Lantern Festival galas, but also in film and TV projects.

These most notably include the comedy film *Johnny Keep Walking!*, which has already raked in nearly 1.3 billion yuan (\$180.6 million) at the box office, and the TV series *Run, Gousheng*, which has been well-received by viewers.

With years of comedy experience, Wang is thrilled to see fresh comedic talent emerging. She believes that making people laugh is no easy feat, and that exceptional comic actors are hard to come by. She says that the good ones can shine in any genre of film or television.

"Comic actors naturally exude charm and humor," Wang says.

Facing a packed schedule due to the show's popularity, Zhan plans to continue his stand-up comedy career in the long term, and he hopes to find time to develop his stand-up routine, which is drawn from a wealth of stored materials and ideas on his phone.

"I've got plenty of material waiting to be turned into full-fledged routines," Zhan says, with a grin. "But when I do have downtime, you might just catch me playing video games."

Contact the writer at liyixue@chinadaily.com.cn

Tibetan opera takes center stage in Gansu village's New Year festivities

In a medium-sized courtyard in Wem village in the Gannan Tibetan autonomous prefecture in Northwest China's Gansu province, residents are busy putting up colorful bunting and cleaning a stage. The stage, which stands about a meter high, is enclosed on three sides by walls adorned with paintings of various characters, and will serve as a matching backdrop for the upcoming performances of Namtar Tibetan opera.

Namtar, or *nam thar*, is like a form of religious biography in Tibetan Buddhism.

It is fair to say that the new year celebrations in Wem village wouldn't be complete without these performances, since watching them on the 12th and 13th days of the first lunar month has been a cherished tradition for decades.

"I recall watching Namtar opera on these two days since I was 11. Back then, people from neighboring regions would travel to our village on horseback or by motorcycle for the show," says Drugyal, a 57-year-old audience member.

Geographical factors may explain the origin of this tradition. Wem is only about half an hour's drive from the Sangchu county's Labrang Monastery, the birthplace of Namtar opera.

Inspired by Tibetan opera, in the



Left: The Wem village Namtar opera troupe rehearses for upcoming performances. **Right:** The Namtar opera troupe from the Nyingma-school Temple at the Labrang Monastery performs for free during Lunar New Year celebrations. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

1940s, the Sixth Jamyang Living Buddha of the Labrang Monastery asked Living Buddha Lang Tsang and other esteemed monks at the monastery to come up with scripts based on history and Buddhist stories. Thus, a unique type of Tibetan opera, Namtar opera, gradually evolved, according to Tsegon Kyab, director of the Sangchu Cultural Center.

"Unlike Tibetan opera, Namtar opera shares some similarities with Peking Opera in terms of the stage, costumes, and accompanying instruments. This is because Living Buddha Lang Tsang maintained communication with the renowned

Peking Opera artist Mei Lanfang," says Tsegon Kyab.

Apart from the orthodox Namtar opera troupe from the Nyingma-school Temple at the Labrang Monastery, there are 30 local troupes in Gannan, with almost half of them in Sangchu county, including the Wem village Namtar opera troupe.

Bande Tsering, leader of the village's troupe, started to learn Namtar opera in his teens. He began by playing minor roles and eventually progressed to playing leading roles in his 20s.

"The characters that have left a lasting impression on me are the

butler, the minister in *Atag Lhamo* and the prince in *Drime Kunden*. While the first is a minor role, the last two are lead roles. Playing lead roles signifies that one has completed the learning process," he says.

Around the same time that he started playing lead roles, Bande Tsering was appointed head of the troupe by his teacher. Since then, he has been responsible for organizing rehearsals and performances, selecting and training troupe members.

The troupe now has about 40 members, ranging from children to the elderly. Experienced teachers select members based on role requirements

and train the new recruits.

"The local residents have all grown up watching Namtar opera performed by our troupe in our village, so they basically know the lines and moves of each character by heart, and there is no need to start training from scratch," says Bande Tsering.

Among the many Namtar performances across Gannan during the Lunar New Year celebrations, the annual two performances presented by the Wem village troupe are a big event for villagers and residents from neighboring regions. Despite being a village of about just 120 peo-

ple, the shows can draw an audience of up to 1,000 people, comprising not only Tibetan viewers but also people of other ethnic groups.

In addition to the New Year performances, the troupe has been invited to perform for audiences both within Gansu province and further afield. Bande Tsering also travels with troupe members to learn from, and communicate with, troupes from the Nyingma-school Temple, Qinghai province, and the Xizang autonomous region.

Local authorities and Namtar enthusiasts have been working hard to preserve, promote and develop this art. In 2011, Namtar Tibetan opera was inscribed on the national intangible cultural heritage list. Just two years ago, Bande Tsering was recognized as a county-level inheritor.

"We will continue our efforts to support the development of Namtar opera and step up funding. We also plan to compile a complete collection of Namtar opera scripts and provide training to local troupes, as most of the scripts are passed down orally, which results in errors and missing lines," says Tsegon Kyab.

Li Hezi contributed to this story.

CHINA DAILY

CULTURE

Clockwork wonders tell tale of cultural exchange

China's love of British craftsmanship highlighted in exhibition, **Julian Shea** reports in London.



“The ability to use clocks and mathematical instruments ... meant the emperor was seen as someone who unified heaven and Earth.”
Jane Desborough,
 Keeper of Science Collections at the Science Museum in London

Above: An exhibition, entitled *Zimingzhong: Clockwork Treasures from China's Forbidden City*, demonstrates how modern timepieces, something that first emerged in 11th century China, were exported back to the country through elaborate Western craftsmanship. The exhibition ends in June at London's Science Museum. PHOTOS FROM XINHUA

Some of the most elaborate and culturally important artifacts from Beijing's Palace Museum have gone on display at London's Science Museum for the first time, as part of an exhibition looking at the art of clockmaking, and the way it brought two distant cultures together.

The exhibition, entitled *Zimingzhong: Clockwork Treasures from China's Forbidden City*, contains 23 examples of how 18th century technology from the United Kingdom found an enthusiastic home in China, and how the meeting of cultures produced some spectacularly complex and decorative pieces of what was then cutting-edge technology.

The media release for the exhibition says how these “opulent constructions ... combined timekeeping, music, and movement in a triumph of artistry and spectacle”, and offer an insight into the two cultures' early perceptions of one another.

Translated as “bells that ring themselves”, *zimingzhong* pieces are a fusion of Britain's world-leading clockmaking technology and the artistic tastes of imperial China, with many pieces incorporating elements of Japan and India in a hybrid estimation of the tastes of a distant continent that the craftsmen responsible had never visited.

Some of the first *zimingzhong* to find their way to China were taken by Matteo Ricci, an Italian missionary in the early 1600s. His 1616 publication *On the Christian Expedition among the Chinese* was a hugely popular

success, translated into numerous languages for a European audience keen to learn about China, and mention of the popularity of what the locals referred to as “foreign curiosities” encouraged the taking of such pieces to win favor in China in the years that followed.

Jane Desborough, keeper of Science Collections at the Science Museum, said it was a thrill to have such culturally and technologically significant pieces on display.

“The exhibition is part of our global work,” she explained. “We recently had another of our exhibitions, about COVID, *Injecting Hope*, on at the Guangdong Science Center, which is the world's biggest science museum, so we are very keen to collaborate with China in particular.”

Start of the story

Although it was Ricci who introduced modern clock technology to China, it is in fact China itself where the roots of mechanized timekeeping can be found.

“Clocks were invented in China in 1088 by Su Song with his waterwheel, but that technology and knowledge seems to have been lost over time, so when clocks arrived with Ricci, and in subsequent years, they appeared new and novel, and the Qing Dynasty emperors became really interested in clockwork objects and *zimingzhong*,” said Desborough.

Britain became a world leader in clock technology in the 1600s, most famously through the work of Thomas Tompion, one of whose clocks

sold at auction in 2015 for 4.5 million pounds (\$5.7 million), and later Robert Harrison, whose ultra-precise marine chronometer transformed the accuracy of navigation.

“In the 18th century, the British realized the emperors had a real interest in and taste for *zimingzhong*, so they started to design pieces in a way that they hoped would appeal to them,” Desborough explained.

But artisans making pieces they hoped would match the tastes of people they had never met, in countries they had never seen, made for some imaginative, if not entirely accurate designs, which only serve to add to the elaborate nature of the *zimingzhong* in the exhibition.

“They had an imagined view of the East, what they were creating was what they thought would appeal, and that was very different from reality,” Desborough said.

The exhibition quotes a poem by Emperor Qianlong in 1784 about his admiration for the new technology: “Precious and unique treasures come from foreign boats. More delicately made than the Palace Lotus time-piece. It does not rely on water or fire. Seconds and minutes tick by automatically. It is truly heavenly made. And reports the time by the sound.”

Snapshot in time

In addition to their aesthetic values, and mirroring their makers' somewhat imprecise impressions of Asia, the exhibition explains the symbolic importance of owning such treasures, as, in the words of the exhibi-

tion notes, “displaying ‘exotic’ items from a generalized ‘West’ showed that (the emperors) had power and influence around the world”.

But they were not only ornaments to demonstrate social status. Historically, astronomers were vital members of the imperial court because of their ability to interpret the stars, providing the emperor with knowledge that reinforced his status as someone connected to the heavens.

“The ability to use clocks and mathematical instruments was very important,” said Desborough. “To predict things like eclipses meant the emperor was seen as someone who unified heaven and Earth. They also seemed to find their moving parts very entertaining, and used the clocks as timepieces to organize their days. They were really interested in them.”

Notebooks and documents from the craftsmen involved in making the clocks are also a revealing snapshot in time.

“We're very lucky to have these surviving records, as they give us a real insight into how people thought at the time,” Desborough added.

Ian Blatchford, director of the Science Museum Group, said it had been “a dream ... for many years” to host the exhibition, since he had first seen the *zimingzhong* at the Hong Kong Science Museum, and in Beijing.

“The fusion of art and science, technology and design was utterly enchanting, and that first meeting provided the inspiration to have our

own exhibition,” he added.

Splendid history

Another sign of close ties with China is that the Science Museum recently signed a memorandum of understanding with the China National Space Administration, which it hopes will result in some Chinese space program artifacts being added to its already extensive space collection.

Speaking at the exhibition's opening ceremony, Chinese Ambassador to the UK Zheng Zeguang said the pieces were a demonstration of the “splendid history of science and culture” of both countries, which had made important contributions to the progress of human civilization.

“Both sides have benefited tremendously from such exchanges in terms of enhancing mutual understanding and boosting their respective scientific and cultural development,” he continued.

The exhibition pieces, he said, are “the crystallization of scientific and artistic exchanges between the East and the West”, and their styles “borrowed from, blended with, and complemented each other”.

They would continue to inspire contemporary scientists and artisans, he added, and “they will also spur more institutions of the two countries to engage in exchanges and cooperation”.

There is no set ticket price to enter the exhibition, but people are asked to pay what they can afford, and Desborough said she hoped visitors will

take away not only an appreciation of the artistry and effort involved in making such fine pieces, but also an increased awareness of the times in which they were made, and the relationship between their countries of origin and destination.

“The exhibition covers three centuries of meetings between China and Britain, which was a very special time in the history of both countries,” she said. “There was a real exchange of goods, technology and culture going on in that time, so I hope people will take that knowledge away with them.”

Contact the writer at julian@mail.chinadailyuk.com

奇珍来海舶，
精制胜宫莲。
水火明非藉，
秒分响自迁。
天工诚巧夺，
时次以音传。

Precious and unique treasures come from foreign boats. More delicately made than the 'Palace Lotus' time-piece. It does not rely on water or fire. Seconds and minutes tick by automatically. It is truly heavenly made. And reports the time by the sound.

An excerpt from a poem by Emperor Qianlong, composed in 1784, is displayed at the exhibition. YANG CHUNYI / CHINA DAILY

Bottom: In their time, the 23 priceless pieces on display in the exhibition were technical marvels, works of art and important symbols of social status. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE PALACE MUSEUM

