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# CHINA DAILY

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## Supreme court stresses handling of intl disputes

Plans bode well for promoting opening-up, judicial credibility, investment environment

By CAO YIN

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By offering equal protection to domestic as well as overseas litigants, Chinese courts have given full play to the role of mediation in solving commercial disputes. This has helped create a market-oriented and law-based first-class business environment, China's top court said.

In 2023, courts at all levels across China concluded 24,000 commercial cases involving foreign litigants, up 3.6 percent year-on-year, according to the annual work report of the Supreme People's Court.

The average time taken to solve such lawsuits has been reduced by nearly 10 days, said the report, which was submitted on Friday to the second session of the 14th National People's Congress, China's top legislature, for review.

"In the face of the increasing number of disputes, improving the professionalism and efficiency of case hearings is important, as it's related to promoting our high-quality opening-up, our judicial credibility and the investment environment of the market," the top court said.

Over the past few years, Chinese courts have stepped up efforts to improve their efficiency, with more international judiciary exchanges and optimized measures for foreign litigants.

In August 2018, for instance, the top court established an international commercial expert committee as a think tank for tackling foreign-related disputes.

So far, the committee has invited 61 experts from 24 countries and regions to participate, mainly to help solve international commercial cases through mediation and provide opinions in the identification and application of foreign laws, as well as in the studies of foreign-related judicial interpretations and policies.

While requiring every court to offer equal protection to all litigants, regardless of whether they are domestic or foreign, the top court has also encouraged judges to mediate between two sides, taking the mediation as a good remedy in resolving international commercial disputes.

In one case, an Indian national signed up for medical insurance with a Chinese company in 2020. He spent more than 60,000 yuan (\$8,350) on surgery and medical treatment in February 2021, but when he turned to the company for compensation, he was turned down. He then sued the insurer in Beijing Chaoyang District People's Court.

During the trial, the court found that the source of the conflict between the litigants was the language barrier. When the insurance contract was signed, the company did not clearly introduce the content to the Indian in a language he could understand, causing him to receive medial treatment beyond the coverage of the policy.

Given the flaws on both sides and to equally protect their legitimate interests, the court organized communications between them, comforting the Indian litigant while urging the company to regulate its interpretation of insurance-related information to applicants.

The communications made the two sides understand each other. Thanks to the mediation of the court, the company eventually agreed to compensate the foreigner.

Furthermore, the court contacted the Beijing Insurance Association, asking it to optimize workflows of the industry and increase explanations of insurance content to customers to prevent similar disputes.

"This successful mediation is an example of contribution of judicial efforts to enhance the international influence of Chinese justice and facilitate the healthy development of China's insurance industry," the top court said.

In addition to efficiently solving international commercial cases to help build a sound business environment, the top court provided opportunities for exchanges among judicial officials from home and abroad last year.

For instance, it held the Maritime Silk Road International Forum on Judicial Cooperation in Quanzhou, Fujian province, and a forum for judges from Shanghai Cooperation Organization countries.



Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif (second from right) greets newly elected President Asif Ali Zardari (front left) in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan, on Saturday. Zardari, the ruling coalition's candidate, won with an overwhelming lead on Saturday, the Election Commission of Pakistan announced. VIA XINHUA

## Xi congratulates Zardari on Pakistan election win

By XU WEI

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President Xi Jinping congratulated Asif Ali Zardari on his election as president of Pakistan on Sunday, highlighting his readiness to work with Zardari in carrying forward the traditional bilateral friendship and advancing pragmatic cooperation in various sectors.

Xi pointed out in his message that the two nations are good neighbors, friends and partners, saying that the ironclad friendship shared by the two countries is a choice of history and a precious

treasure of the two peoples.

Zardari, 68, was elected on Saturday by Pakistani lawmakers to a second term with an overwhelming majority. He previously held the job between 2008 and 2013 and will replace Arif Alvi, the outgoing president.

The Chinese president noted that the two sides have maintained close high-level exchanges in recent years, with both nations supporting each other on issues concerning their respective core interests and major concerns, achieving fruitful results in the construction of the China-Paki-

stan Economic Corridor, and maintaining a high level of development in bilateral relations.

With the world facing accelerated changes unseen in a century, the strategic significance of ties between Beijing and Islamabad has become even more prominent, he said.

Xi reaffirmed his strong emphasis on ties with Pakistan, saying that he is willing to work with Zardari to push for greater development of the China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership and accelerate the building of a even closer China-Pakistan com-

munity with a shared future in the new era so as to deliver greater benefits to the two peoples.

The message to Zardari comes a week after Xi extended a message to congratulate Shehbaz Sharif on his election as Pakistan's prime minister, another gesture that underscored the ironclad ties between the two neighbors.

China has remained Pakistan's largest trading partner, its largest source of imports and the second-largest export destination for eight consecutive years since fiscal year 2015, according to the Foreign Ministry.

## President vows no letup in drive to combat air pollution

By XU WEI

Ten years ago, when President Xi Jinping held a banquet for world leaders attending the 22nd APEC Informal Leaders' Meeting in Beijing, he mentioned "APEC blue", a phrase used by some internet users to describe the clear air above the Chinese capital that they feared could only be temporary.

He assured the world leaders: "We will do a better job at protecting the environment in the future. ... I hope and believe that, with persistent efforts, the 'APEC blue' will be here to stay."

On Wednesday, as the president joined national political advisers to discuss the nation's major issues, he mentioned "APEC blue" again.

Xi highlighted the remarkable changes in the capital's air quality and the monumental shift in the nation's environmental protection efforts over the past decade, after hearing insights shared by Huang Miansong, a manager from Beijing Capital Eco-Environment Protection Group.

With China's unwavering

emphasis on environmental and ecological protection, the revenue of Huang's company grew from 3.38 billion yuan (\$470 million) in 2012 to 22.16 billion yuan in 2022, with its payroll almost doubling during the period.

"This epitomizes the development of China's ecological and environmental protection sector," Huang told the president.

Led by Xi's overarching vision that lush mountains and lucid waters are invaluable assets, China became the world's first developing nation to roll out across-the-board measures to tackle air pollution caused by PM2.5 — particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 micrometers or less that is harmful to health — in 2013.

China has been the country with the fastest improvement in air quality in the world, with its average concentration of PM2.5 nationwide decreasing from 46 micrograms per cubic meter in 2015 to 30 in 2023, according to the Ministry of Ecology and Environment.

In Beijing, the concentration decreased from 89.5 micrograms per

cubic meter in 2013 to 32 in 2023, and the number of days with heavy air pollution went down from 58 to only eight during the period.

The nation's treatment of air pollution directly and indirectly stimulated investments of about 4 trillion yuan between 2013 and 2023, leading to GDP growth of 5 trillion yuan.

Xi highlighted the importance of science and technology in tackling pollution, giving the example of how the use of new energy vehicles has empowered environmental and ecological protection.

Official statistics showed that in 2023, China produced 9.58 million new energy vehicles, sold 9.49 million and exported 1.2 million, marking a 77.6 percent year-on-year increase and maintaining its position as the world's leading NEV exporter.

The president signaled on Wednesday that there will be no let-up in the national drive to combat air pollution. The draft national budget plan, submitted to national lawmakers for deliberation on Tuesday, said the nation will allocate 34

billion yuan for air pollution prevention and control, aiming to offer continuous support for clean heating in northern regions during winter.

In his report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October 2022, Xi, who is also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, said that the nation will control pollutants in a more coordinated way, and severe air pollution will be eliminated.

"As long as we are making progress, we should maintain our orientation," Xi told the political advisers on Wednesday. "Instead of merely pointing fingers, we should take real actions."

He said the treatment of new pollution should be conducted in parallel with the tackling of traditional problems. "The protection of the environment is a long-term and arduous task, and we must continue to forge ahead in this regard."

"We must fully and accurately follow the principles of fighting pollution in a precise, scientific and lawful manner, so as to promote the greening and low-carbon transitioning of the economy and society," he said.

## Drawing to a close



The closing meeting of the second session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference is held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Sunday.

ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY See story, page 3

## Trust between China, Africa a precious asset

In the wake of unprecedented global challenges, the enduring trust forged by China's unwavering trade and investment growth in Africa faces a critical juncture.

The COVID-19 pandemic amplified existing difficulties, including limited access to financing, inflationary pressures, volatile commodities markets and soaring supply chain costs.

Concurrently, China's internal economic adjustments have

**WORLD WATCH**  
By Carlos Lopez

sparked concerns among Africans about the depth and sustainability of their partnership. Both Africa and China must address these challenges head-on to uphold the capital of trust that has been painstakingly built over the years.

The two sessions, China's annual meetings of the nation's top legislative and political advisory bodies, have provided a significant platform for reflection and action. The delivery of the Government Work Report by Premier Li Qiang during the two sessions set the tone for the nation's priorities and policies in the coming year. As Africa observes these proceedings,

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may leave others playing catch-up  
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## TWO SESSIONS

# Solar's bright future in powering rural areas

Policies needed to cover regulatory gap, improve maintenance to ensure safe operation, sustainability, deputy says

By ZHENG XIN  
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Solar energy will be a game-changer in China's rural regions, offering a reliable and affordable answer to local energy demands while facilitating the green energy transition nationwide, according to national legislators, political advisers and industry experts.

Solar energy, with no fuel costs and low maintenance costs, has been developing rapidly in China's rural regions over the past few years, and has created savings in rural communities by replacing expensive and inefficient traditional fuels, said Zhong Baoshen, chairman of Longi Green Energy Technology Co.

It has the potential to revolutionize the energy landscape in China's rural regions, enabling millions of people to access clean and sustainable power, and be the driver toward a net-zero world, said Zhong, who is also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress.

However, despite its rapid expansion, the sector is marred by various irregularities, including inconsistent component quality and inadequate corrosion prevention measures in crucial elements, as well as a lack of proper infrastructure such as grid connectivity and transmission lines to distribute solar energy effectively, he said.

The varying quality of photovoltaic components, coupled with a lack of maintenance and management of solar products in rural regions, pose risks to the overall construction quality of solar power stations in rural areas, leading to operational challenges and potential safety hazards, said Zhong.

He called for comprehensive policies at the national level to address the current regulatory gaps and ensure the long-term sustainability and reliability of the rural photovoltaic sector.

The absence of a dedicated operational and maintenance framework tailored specifically for rural photovoltaic installations makes it difficult to make better use of solar power, and it is urgent for the country to formulate comprehensive policies that address this gap, ensuring the development of high-quality standards for the construction and implementation of rural photovoltaic projects, he said.

According to a guideline underpinning green development in urban and rural areas released by the State Council, by 2035 green development will cover urban and rural areas in a comprehensive way, with an increased cut in carbon emissions.

China's rural areas, encompassing over 90 percent of the nation's total land area, hold immense potential for the development of rural photovoltaics. In the new era, photovoltaics will not only empower the vitalization of rural industries and contribute to shared prosperity, but also provide a robust driving force for green, low-carbon development



**Clockwise from top:** Police officers and electricians inspect a lake-based photovoltaic power station in Baoying county, Jiangsu province, in June. The county has integrated fishing with the PV industry in its green energy transition. SHEN DONGBING / FOR CHINA DAILY Workers install PV panels on residents' roofs in Xijie village in Zhangye, Gansu province, in November. WANG JIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY Farmers plant cabbages near PV panels in Tongwei, Gansu province, in September. WANG KEXIAN / XINHUA

and the construction of beautiful rural landscapes, said Zhong.

Figures released by the renewable energy center of the National Development and Reform Commission's energy research institute show that China's newly added distributed photovoltaic capacity reached 96.29 gigawatts last year, marking an 88 percent year-on-year growth. The cumulative installed capacity of distributed photovoltaics stands at 253 gigawatts so far, constituting 42 percent of the total installed capacity of photovoltaics in the country, it said.

Distributed solar power and utility solar power are two major types of solar power in China. The former refers to an approach to installing solar power facilities and generating power at or near where it will be used, such as on rooftops, and has become a major force driving installed capacity growth. It also has fewer requirements on land and cost, compared with utility



Workers prepare feed for cattle at a farm in Tangshan, Hebei province, in May. The farm installed PV panels on cattle shed roofs to raise farmers' incomes. YANG SHIYAO / XINHUA

solar power, which is usually deployed in massive land areas such as deserts.

As a result, numerous photovoltaic

enterprises, including Longi, JA Solar Technology, Jinko Solar Co and Sungrow Power Supply Co, are launching residential photovoltaic

products, while State-owned enterprises and local government enterprises, which have traditionally been enthusiastic investors in centralized photovoltaic power stations, have also joined in.

Longi said it has been teaming up with numerous State-owned enterprises, including China Energy Investment Corp and State Power Investment Corp, to jointly tap residential photovoltaic products and expand their rural use.

According to the National Energy Administration, the growth of distributed solar power's installed capacity surpassed that of utility solar power for the first time in 2021, making up about 55 percent of China's total newly increased solar power installed capacity. This trend means that distributed solar power, especially for family use, has become an important source in China's efforts to peak carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality before 2060.

In addition to reducing fees for self-consumed renewable energy and encouraging high-scale utilization of new energy sources, Zhong also suggested expanding the deployment of building-integrated photovoltaics, or BIPV, one of the two main types of rooftop solar power in addition to building-attached photovoltaics.

China's surge in rooftop solar power installations has driven up the world's total rooftop solar capacity. According to the China BIPV Association, BIPV, which takes up a major part of China's rooftop solar power market, will have a market size valued at up to 40 billion yuan (\$5.55 billion) in 2025.

China plans to cover as many as half of its new buildings that are classified as public institutions with rooftop solar panels by 2025, according to a statement jointly released by the NDRC and the NEA, which also noted that China will actively promote rooftop solar power installation in rural areas and industrial parks.

"Compared with cities, China's rural areas have more spare spaces to install solar power systems at lower costs," said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

"As developing distributed solar power in rural areas also offers residents extra earnings and helps reduce power expenses, local governments and power supply companies should continue to simplify processes to better tap the potential in distributed photovoltaics in China's rural regions as long as it is legal, compliant and beneficial to the industry."

Zhang Xiaobin, executive vice-president of the Shandong Solar Energy Industry Association, believes the southern markets will continue to remain robust, including those in Jiangxi and Fujian provinces and the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

Wang Dongsheng, chairman of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation who is also a political adviser this year, agreed, saying that joint efforts are required to promote the development of distributed photovoltaics in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

The GBA market is one of the most dynamic and internationally advanced regions in the Chinese economy, serving as a new engine for sustainable and high-quality development with massive potential for distributed solar power development and energy optimization, he said.

Research conducted by HSBC on the development of distributed photovoltaics in the GBA indicates that despite great potential, there are still various challenges in terms of investment and financing, he said.

Wang suggested enhancing government coordination and planning, innovating business models and introducing innovative green financial products to accelerate the development of distributed photovoltaics in the GBA.

## Advisers call for nuclear to be included in green energy transition

By ZHENG XIN

Nuclear power has massive potential to boost green electricity development in China and should be included in the country's green electricity system for low-carbon development, according to national legislators, political advisers and industry experts.

Nuclear-generated power should be certified as green electricity in China, as the country's expanding fleet of nuclear generators is capable of providing over 160 billion kilowatt-hours of electricity per year, said Yang Changli, chairman of China General Nuclear Power Group, China's largest nuclear power operator by installed capacity.

"Including nuclear power in the green electricity certificate system can help provide an authoritative certification platform for the green and low-carbon attributes of nuclear power, meeting the purchasing demands of the market," said Yang, who is also a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

China established a green electricity certification system in 2017 to promote the transformation and development of green and low-carbon energy. Wind and solar power sources are awarded certification and gain a premium in electricity market trading.

While several countries in Europe and the United States have included nuclear power, a stable and reliable high-quality green and low-carbon electricity source, in the category of green electricity at the policy or implementation level, it has not yet been included in China's green certification and green electricity system, making it the only nonfossil energy source excluded from the system, he said.

Yang said the fact that nuclear power companies do not have access to official green electricity certification has prevented them from meeting the rising market demand for green electricity and has curbed the supply of green power.

"The inclusion of nuclear power in the green electricity trading system would not only benefit the environment but also develop a new form of

productivity to support the nation's high-quality development," he said.

"It could also increase enthusiasm in purchasing nuclear power, enhancing the competitiveness of nuclear power in the electricity market while promoting the effective realization of the low-carbon value of nuclear power."

According to CGN, the domestic and international carbon reduction situation has led to a continuous increase in demand for green electricity from various entities. If nuclear power was included, it could greatly alleviate the constraints placed on the supply of green electricity to society.

According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, electricity generated from nuclear power stations has the lowest carbon emissions among renewable energy sources, with one kWh of nuclear-generated electricity only emitting 5.7 grams of carbon emissions, compared with 74.6 grams from solar, 64.4 grams from hydropower and 13.3 grams from wind.

Lu Tiezong, assistant general manager at China National Nuclear

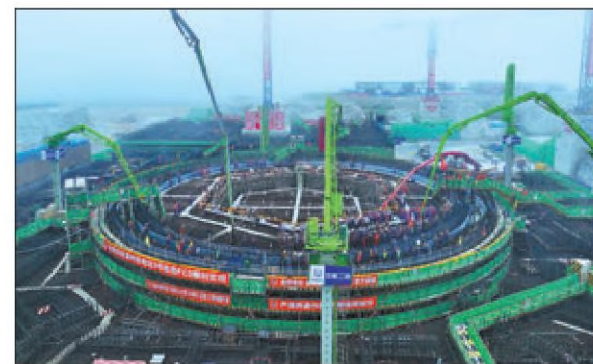
Corp and a member of the National Committee of the CPPCC, also called for the inclusion of nuclear-generated electricity into the country's green electricity certification system.

While the scale of nuclear power in operation in China will soon be the largest in the world, and the nation has the foundation to lead the development of the global nuclear energy industry, the value of nuclear energy has not been recognized in current green electricity trading.

Accelerating the inclusion of nuclear energy will help promote China's transition to a green and low-carbon energy mix while supporting its high-quality development, he said.

According to the China Nuclear Energy Association, the total installed capacity of nuclear power generators in operation and under construction in China exceeds 100 million kilowatts, accounting for 21.2 percent of the world's total and has a first-rated safety record.

As of the end of last year, China had 55 nuclear power generators in



An aerial drone photo taken on Feb 22 shows construction on the second phase of the Zhangzhou nuclear power project in Zhangzhou, Fujian province. The project uses Hualong One reactors, which are third-generation reactors developed domestically. XINHUA

operation, generating 4.86 percent of all power generated in the year, which helped reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 323.3 million metric tons, it said.

China is looking to develop its nuclear power sector as part of a broader push for renewables and

domestic energy security. Nuclear is expected to contribute about 10 percent of power generation in the country by 2035 and 18 percent by 2060, with a total generation capacity of 400 gigawatts by 2060, the China Nuclear Energy Association said.



# TWO SESSIONS

## Envoy: Sino-US ties key to global stability, growth

Much potential seen for China's further development, with quality upgrade as driver

By MO JINGXI

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Chinese Ambassador to the United States Xie Feng said China has brought much-needed stability and certainty to the turbulent world over the past year, through its steady economic growth, deepening of reform and opening-up, and commitment to peaceful development.

"The year 2023 has been an uphill battle for China, as the world struggles for growth, the Ukraine crisis drags on and the spillover effect of the abrupt escalation of the Palestinian-Israeli situation keeps growing," Xie said, noting that the relations between China and the US also encountered unprecedented difficulties in the first half of last year.

Xie, who is also a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, China's top political advisory body, said that despite the unfavorable factors, China still achieved GDP growth of 5.2 percent in 2023, maintaining its contribution of more than 30 percent to world economic growth.

"China's development is driven not only by a reasonable growth in quantity, but also an effective upgrade in quality, and it has a solid foundation," he said, noting that more potential for the country's further growth remains to be tapped.

"We have the confidence to tell the world that China's growth is far from reaching its peak and we are continuing to create more Chinese miracles," Xie said during the annual sessions of the nation's top legislative and political advisory bodies in Beijing.

According to the ambassador, China is committed to promoting the stable, healthy and sustainable development of China-US ties and exploring the right way for the two countries to get along with each other in the new era, on the basis of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.

"This not only serves the fundamental interests of the two sides, but also contributes to world sta-

bility and development," he said.

Since the historic meeting between President Xi Jinping and US President Joe Biden in San Francisco in November, dialogue and cooperation have been conducted in fields such as economy, finance, agriculture, trade, military, climate change response and drug control.

Starting at the end of this month, the number of round-trip passenger flights between the two countries will increase to 100 per week.

"The two sides are in communication on the renewal of the China-US Science and Technology Agreement and in discussions on a new round of giant panda conservation cooperation," Xie said.

According to media reports, the San Diego Zoo is expected to receive a new pair of giant pandas from China this year.

However, Xie noted that some forces in the US are still continuously playing up the so-called "China threat", overstretching the concept of national security, suppressing Chinese enterprises, using the Taiwan question to contain China, building "a small yard and high fence" and seeking to decouple or sever supply and industrial chains.

"We have told the US side that the progress in bilateral ties has been hard-won, and it is important to draw lessons from the past," Xie said.

He urged Washington to work with Beijing to consolidate economic and trade cooperation, promote people-to-people exchanges, gather positive momentum for dialogue and communication, and build a breakwater to prevent interference in the progress of the relations.

"We hope the US side will recognize, from the recent years' ups and downs in China-US relations, that China's development is unstoppable, turning back on each other is not an option, attempting to change the other side is unrealistic, and the consequences of conflict or confrontation between the two countries are unbearable for either side," Xie said.



Xie Feng

## Top political adviser calls for greater solidarity

By ZHANG YI

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China's top political adviser, Wang Huning, called on Sunday for greater unity and extensive collaboration in order to consolidate efforts to promote the country's modernization drive.

Wang, chairman of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, made the remark while delivering a speech to around 2,100 national political advisers at the closing meeting of the second session of the 14th National Committee of the CPPCC, the nation's top political advisory body.

President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, and other Chinese leaders attended the meeting, held at the Great

Hall of the People in Beijing.

A resolution on a work report of the Standing Committee of the CPPCC National Committee, a resolution on a report on how the proposals from political advisers have been handled since the previous annual session, a report on the examination of new proposals and a political resolution on the second session of the 14th CPPCC National Committee were approved at the meeting.

Wang said in his speech that modernization with Chinese characteristics is the common cause and shared dream of all Chinese people.

He also emphasized the significance of telling well Chinese stories to the outside world and clearly explaining that modernization with Chinese characteristics not only benefits the Chinese people but also promotes the modernization of various countries around

the world, which will help create a favorable external environment.

"Modernization with Chinese characteristics is a pioneering endeavor without precedent, requiring the solicitation of diverse opinions, the gathering of collective wisdom and the pursuit of sound strategies," he said.

Wang called on CPPCC members to diligently engage in research to grasp information firsthand, listen to grassroots voices, improve their proposals to make them more targeted and operable, and provide valuable references for scientific decision-making and effective implementation.

Gao Peixuan, a member of the 14th National Committee of the CPPCC, said: "I am very happy to have gained a lot of new insights through this year's conference. In the future, I will fulfill my duties well and advance our work through specialized research."

Tseng Chin-i, another national political adviser and a TV presenter who is from Taiwan and works in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, said, "This year's conference embodies the principles of being pragmatic, efficient and frugal in its organization."

With this session of the CPPCC National Committee lasting only six-and-a-half days, it was very compact, and each group discussion lasted for at least two hours, requiring everyone to brainstorm, offer suggestions and put forward their opinions, she said.

"Wang's speech at the closing meeting has raised higher expectations for us advisers with aims for China's modernization," she said, adding that members should improve their capabilities and prioritize the quality of proposals.

Shi Xuefan contributed to this story.

## Facing the media



Members of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference answer questions from journalists on Sunday during the second session of the CPPCC National Committee meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

## Defense budget increase to enhance peace efforts

By ZHAO LEI

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The moderate increase in the annual defense budget will enable the Chinese military to bring more benefits to the world by safeguarding peace, said a military spokesman.

"China sticks firmly to a peaceful development path and its military policies are defensive in nature. The Chinese military has always been a stabilizer in a turbulent world, a positive force that maintains global security, and a firm guardian of peace. As the Chinese armed forces become stronger, the international community hopes China can provide more public security services to the world," said Senior Colonel Wu Qian, spokesman for the delegation of the People's Liberation Army and the People's Armed Police Force to the second session of the 14th National People's Congress, on Saturday.

"Our defense expenditure, with a moderate and steady funding increase, will allow the armed for-

ces to better safeguard world peace, contribute more resources to international peacekeeping, maritime escorts and humanitarian relief operations, and make a greater contribution to the shared well-being of mankind," said Wu, who is the head of publicity department at the Ministry of National Defense.

He noted that the Chinese government takes into consideration the demands of both national defense and economic development when it decides the country's military expenditure.

"Over the past several years, the government has maintained a moderate, steady increase in defense spending to protect the country's sovereignty, security and interests, and to meet the needs of the ongoing military reform, and has managed to boost both our defense capability and economic strength," the spokesman said.

China's defense spending is always transparent, reasonable and moderate, Wu said.

"The country is an active partici-

pator in the United Nations' mechanism for transparency on military expenditure and has voluntarily provided data on its annual defense costs since 2008. Compared with military powers like the United States, our defense spending is much lower by every criterion, ranging from its share of GDP and overall government expenditure to the cost per capita and per service member," Wu said.

"History has proved, and continues to prove, that China's limited investment in the military is completely for protecting its sovereignty, security and interests, and for safeguarding world peace and stability. Our military is always a staunch force in maintaining world peace," he said.

China is facing drastic changes in global geopolitics, complex challenges in counter-separatism struggles, and more uncertainty and instability in its security situation. Meanwhile, the Chinese military shoulders heavy responsibilities in defending the country. The additional investment will

be spent on strengthening the armed forces' combat training; funding important projects to improve the integrated national strategic system and its capability; speeding up the construction of a modernized logistics system and fostering research and development for major defense technologies and weapon systems; deepening military reform and establishing a modern military management system; and improving the work and living conditions of military personnel, Wu said.

The central government has proposed a defense budget of 1.67 trillion yuan (\$231 billion) for the 2024 fiscal year, a 7.2 percent year-on-year increase, according to a draft budget report submitted to the annual meeting of the National People's Congress, the nation's top legislature.

If approved by lawmakers, the proposed expenditure will maintain single-digit growth for a ninth consecutive year since 2016, and is the same percentage increase as 2023.

## Question time



A foreign journalist interacts on Sunday with delegates from Sichuan province who are attending the second session of the 14th National People's Congress in Beijing. CUI NAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICES

## Partnership: Africa has long benefited from economic collaborations

From page 1

stakeholders must recognize the importance of recalibrating their partnership to navigate these turbulent times.

Africa has long benefited from China's investments, infrastructure projects and economic collaborations. These initiatives have played a pivotal role in fostering development across the continent. However, the evolving global landscape demands a reevaluation of strategies

and a renewed commitment to mutual growth and prosperity.

The challenges confronting Africa, exacerbated by the pandemic, necessitate innovative solutions and collaborative efforts. Access to financing remains a significant barrier to realizing Africa's full potential. China, with its financial resources and expertise, can play a pivotal role in addressing this challenge by facilitating investment and providing technical assistance.

Moreover, the volatility of com-

modities markets underscores the urgency of diversifying Africa's economic landscape. China's support in developing local industries and promoting sustainable growth can mitigate the risks associated with overreliance on commodity exports, as outlined in the promissal made during the two most recent meetings of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation.

The FOCAC commitments aimed to incentivize industrialization in Africa, emphasizing the need for

strategic partnerships and investment in sectors crucial for economic diversification. By actively engaging with initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area, China can further bolster its visibility and participation in Africa's industrialization agenda, fostering a mutually beneficial environment for sustainable economic development on both sides.

As Africa and China chart their courses amid uncertainty, it is imperative to prioritize long-term

sustainability over short-term gains. Building resilient economies requires patience, perseverance and a shared commitment to inclusive growth.

The trust between Africa and China is a precious asset that must be nurtured and preserved. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic and internal adjustments, there exists immense potential for deeper cooperation and mutual benefit. As China deliberates on its future trajectory during the two

sessions, let us aspire to renewed commitment and collaboration that will uphold the spirit of partnership and pave the way for a brighter tomorrow.

The road ahead may be challenging, but with determination and cooperation, Africa and China can overcome obstacles and forge a path toward shared prosperity.

The author is a professor at the University of Cape Town's Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance, a visiting professor at Sciences Po Paris, and an associate fellow of Chatham House. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



# TWO SESSIONS

PERSPECTIVE

## China a model for peaceful development

Countries urged to find own paths to modernization rather than copy West

By YANG HAN in Hong Kong  
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China's way of modernizing itself by pursuing peaceful development serves as an example for other countries to find their own path in achieving sustainability and prosperity, said Woo Su-keun, president of the Seoul-based Korea-China Global Association.

In today's world, the development process and pattern of a few Western countries has almost become the only standard for others to emulate. This has led to a situation where countries are forced to follow solutions that may not fit their specific needs, Woo told China Daily.

"In the face of such difficulties, China has taken the lead in proposing a Chinese-style modernization, which has solved a number of problems," Woo said. "This has not only contributed to China's sustainable growth and prosperity but also has had a great impact on other countries by encouraging them to find solutions based on their own situations."

"This is a big achievement," he added.

While taking part in a deliberation with his fellow deputies from the delegation of Jiangsu province at the second session of the 14th National People's Congress on March 5, President Xi Jinping emphasized the need to plan for further comprehensive deepening of major reforms to inject stronger impetus into high-quality development and propel sustained momentum for Chinese modernization.

Woo said that countries differ from each other in various aspects, from their origins, geography to history and current status. Hence, it would be unwise to apply the development pattern of certain countries to all others in the world as if it were the "panacea".

"With this in mind, it is entirely natural for China, the world's second-most populous country, third-largest country by land area, and a country with 56 ethnic groups, to continuously pursue Chinese-style modernization in line with its own characteristics," Woo said.

Noting that it is not an easy task for China to promote Chinese



Woo Su-keun

modernization since it has no precedent to follow, Woo said China has done well despite facing accusations from, and being the target of conspiracies of, certain quarters in the West.

Over the past 40-plus years since reform and opening-up, the Chinese government has lifted over 800 million people out of poverty, and enlarged the middle-income group to over 400 million people. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, the total population at the end of last year on the Chinese mainland was 1.40967 billion.

According to an analysis by the International Monetary Fund, every one percentage point of China's GDP growth will boost the growth of other countries by 0.3 percentage points, and the country will remain the main contributor to global growth this year.

"The world is watching closely how China is striving with perseverance to solve one challenge after another," Woo said.

Though many countries need specific solutions to their respective problems, Woo said they have to follow others even if the solution is not the most suitable option because they care too much about the opinions of some countries.

"In fact, I have also been emphasizing in South Korea that we need a 'South Korean-style modernization' strategy for our continued development and prosperity," Woo said.

Noting that an increasing number of countries are learning from China, Woo said that more people in South Korea have also renewed their understanding of China after seeing its progress despite encountering many difficulties.

"Even from this point, Chinese modernization has had a positive effect on China, both at home and abroad," Woo said.

For countries that are seeking suitable solutions to their domestic problems, China's pursuit of its own style of modernization has become a catalyst for them to make brave decisions, he added.

## Meeting time



The delegation from Yunnan province to the second session of the 14th National People's Congress holds an open group meeting on Sunday in Beijing. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

## Spotlight cast on students' healthy growth

A round of warm applause filled the Great Hall of the People on Friday after Zhang Jun, president of the Supreme People's Court, delivered the court's work report during the ongoing two sessions, the annual gatherings of the National People's Congress and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

The report mentioned the importance of ensuring that children grow healthily, called for zero tolerance for crimes against adolescents and advocated for safeguarding security on campuses. These key points resonated deeply with the national legislators and political advisers in attendance.

Whether they were Party officials, researchers or business tycoons, most were concerned about education matters as they are parents of students themselves.

As a reporter focusing on the sector that encourages innovation and promotes sustainable national prosperity, I noticed a number of intriguing ideas that were offered on the high-quality development of students.

Li Guohua, a national political adviser and an official with the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang, said socializing among students should not be limited to bathroom breaks in the name of ensuring school safety.

In recent years, children are not allowed to go to the playground or



Zhao Yimeng  
Reporter's log

even hang out in the hallways of some school buildings during class breaks. The schools say they have imposed such rules to avoid accidents on campus, but this means the only way students can talk or share snacks with their classmates is when they go to the bathroom.

"We should not let the best childhood memories of this generation be of time spent in restrooms," Li proposed.

The strict rules against activities outside classrooms on campus are partly the result of the fear schools have of the accountability and compensation claims they may have to shoulder if safety accidents occur.

Accidents have led to laws being introduced to maintain security on some campuses while promoting children's healthy growth. Zhang shared some of the SPC's rulings on related cases while delivering the work report.

In one case he shared, a primary school student was accidentally injured during a physical education class. The parent sued the school, but the court ruled in favor of the school because it had fulfilled its necessary duties regarding management and medical aid, deter-

mining that the school should not be held liable. Even though some accidents have occurred on campuses, the court highlighted the shared responsibility between parents and the school for maintaining campus safety, Zhang said.

I've seen progress being made. I recently walked by the Experimental High School Attached to Beijing Normal University, where I saw a dozen students doing jump-rope during a 10-minute break between classes in an open area on the first floor.

Students' energetic nature, rather than just parents' safety concerns, has been taken into consideration while formulating regulations.

Lawmaker Tuo Qingming suggested incorporating early childhood education for two- to three-year-olds into the preschool education system amid the decline of births, saying that China has the necessary facilities to do so.

The move can alleviate the burden parents face of taking care of such young children themselves or paying for expensive childcare services, and therefore boost productivity and promote population growth, said Tuo, who is also an official with the education examination authority in Sichuan province.

He is among many education and health experts who have made suggestions during the two sessions on modifying preschool education standards due to population decline.

Apart from NPC deputies and political advisers in the education sector, leading figures in other fields also expressed their concerns about students' health and the need to cultivate talent for particular industries.

Participants from healthcare institutions focused on issues such as introducing sex education to children in kindergarten, and improving teenagers' mental health through traditional Chinese culture.

Lei Jun, an NPC deputy and co-founder and CEO of electronics giant Xiaomi, suggested incorporating artificial intelligence literacy into the nine-year compulsory education curriculum amid the new global trend of generative AI.

Lei, who is at the forefront of cutting-edge technology, said he hoped to cultivate AI literacy and the ability of students in primary and secondary schools to lay a solid foundation for their future development.

The desire among two sessions participants to help students was so strong that during my interviews, I felt more comfortable starting a conversation by talking about education issues, because I believed that those I talked to would have common feelings about their children's schoolwork, regardless of their professional backgrounds.

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## What CPPCC members say



Zhu Songchun, CPPCC National Committee member, head of the Beijing Institute for General Artificial Intelligence

The society is entering the era of intelligence, and artificial general intelligence, or AGI, is a typical example of "new quality productive forces". As AGI becomes a key battlefield in global technological competition, it is of crucial importance to cultivate talent. I believe that with our joint efforts, we can definitely chart a technological path that suits China's national conditions to enable the safe development of AGI and benefit humanity.



Zhou Yuan, CPPCC National Committee member, founder and CEO of knowledge-sharing platform Zhihu

China's internet development will play a more positive role in driving "new quality productive forces" by giving birth to new types of workers. These workers will pay close attention to the latest technologies and development trends and proactively share their professional knowledge online. They will make the internet a friendly online space for knowledge sharing and a classroom that is always open.



Ni Minjing, CPPCC National Committee member, head of the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum

The CPPCC National Committee has launched a Members' Science Lecture Hall, where many academicians and renowned scientists are taking the lead in popularizing science. An increasing number of scientists are taking on part-time roles as vice-principals for science and technology in primary and secondary schools. Scientific education is not just about high-tech education. Everything is open to exploration, and even rural areas are full of scientific resources. Every inch of soil, every flower and every clear night sky presents excellent opportunities for scientific exploration.



Lin Xiaofa, CPPCC National Committee member, chairman of Jomoo Group, a Chinese smart kitchen and bathroom products maker

Private enterprises should strive to carry forward the "Jinjiang Experience", give play to the entrepreneurs' hard-working spirit and promote technological innovation. (Jinjiang, a county-level city in Quanzhou, East China's Fujian province, is the birthplace of many private enterprises and homegrown

brands. This unique situation created the phrase "Jinjiang Experience".) Currently, private enterprises contribute more than 70 percent of tax revenue in Fujian, as well as over 80 percent of employment opportunities and over 90 percent of market entities in the province. Jomoo is dedicated to self-independent technological innovation and has realized intelligent and digital transformation, while creating the world's first green "lighthouse factory".



Lu Jin, CPPCC National Committee member, chairman of China National Gold Group Co

State-owned enterprises have made significant contributions to promoting high-quality economic development, ensuring the implementation of major Party and State strategies, advancing self-reliance in high-level scientific and technological development, and better meeting the people's aspirations for a better life. It's important to support the development of both SOEs and private enterprises, and more efforts should be made to promote the innovative development of companies and propel China's economy towards sustained growth and stability.

MA SI, CHENG YU, FAN FEIFEI,  
OUYANG SHIJIA AND LI LEI

## City working with Saudi company

By WU YONG and ZHAO YIMENG

Panjin, Liaoning province, will play a strong role in the Belt and Road Initiative and facilitate the development of the province as a pivotal hub for reform and opening-up in East Asia, the city's top official told China Daily.

Xing Peng, mayor of Panjin and a deputy to the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, said the city will serve as a model of cooperation between China and Saudi Arabia through the Huajin Aramco Petrochemical Co, an energy collaboration project promoted by the leaders of the two countries.

With a total planned investment of \$3.7 billion yuan (\$1.62 billion), the project involves the construction of 32 processing facilities with an annual refining capacity of 15 million metric tons.

The project is a strategic initiative to ensure national energy security and will be a powerful engine that drives local economic development, Xing said during the ongoing two sessions, the annual meetings of the NPC and the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

The project is designed to upgrade the entire chain of Panjin's



An aerial photo shows a gas storage factory of Liaohe Oilfield in Panjin, Liaoning province, in 2021. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Xing Peng

petrochemical industry from crude oil to organic chemicals.

Once completed, it will play a major role in Liaoning's plan to become a world-class petrochemical and fine chemical industrial base, he said.

Since the project started construction in March last year, it is now nearly 30 percent complete. Over 18 billion yuan will be invested to ensure that the project, which will cover nearly 9 square kilometers, is half finished by the end of the year, Xing said. Xing said the project is not only a model for Sino-Saudi stra-

tegic cooperation, but also aims to promote more investment in Panjin and facilitate breakthroughs in practical cooperation within emerging sectors.

The city will strengthen capital cooperation with Saudi Arabia and other countries in the Middle East in sectors such as specialized chemicals, high-performance rubber and engineering plastics, he said.

Panjin is also conducting promotional activities in Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands to foster discussions with global chemical giants that have the most advanced technologies in the petrochemical industry, he added.

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# TWO SESSIONS

## Economic recovery gains momentum

Senior adviser emphasizes need for enhanced measures to sustain growth

By FAN FEIFEI and OUYANG SHIJIA

The recovery momentum of China's economy is poised to be consolidated and strengthened, while the country's GDP growth target of around 5 percent for this year is reasonable and achievable via enhanced efforts, a senior political adviser said.

Ning Jizhe, deputy director of the Committee on Economic Affairs of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body, expressed confidence in China's economic prospects, saying that the economy has shown signs of a steady rebound since the country optimized its COVID-19 response measures last year, with contact-based consumption

witnessing speedy growth.

Ning, who is also vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges and a former deputy head of the National Development and Reform Commission, said the favorable conditions for economic development outweigh unfavorable ones, given that the country boasts a super-large market, a complete industrial system, improved innovation capacity and abundant high-quality talent.

China's economy expanded by 5.2 percent last year, significantly higher than that of the United States at 2.5 percent, the eurozone at 0.5 percent and Japan's 1.9 percent, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed.

As the broader economy is still facing pressures at home and abroad,

Ning said the country needs to strengthen macroeconomic measures and implement policies conducive to stable growth. Countercyclical adjustments must also be strengthened to maintain an annual growth rate of around 5 percent this year.

"The proactive fiscal policy must be moderately strengthened, with improved quality and efficiency," Ning said, adding measures include expanding fiscal expenditures, advancing the quota for special-purpose bonds for local governments, and effectively implementing structural tax and fee reduction policies.

Heightened efforts should also be made to reinforce the dominant role of enterprises in driving innovation, increase spending on research and development relative to GDP, and expand venture capital and equity investment for technological innovation, as part of a broader push to accelerate the development of new quality productive forces.

Acknowledging that consumption has become a primary force bolstering the country's economic development, Ning highlighted the need to increase household incomes, improve residents' purchasing power and optimize the consumption environment to spur consumption.

As for expanding productive investment, Ning said the investment demand for new types of infrastructure containing digital, intelligent and green technologies will continue to rise, adding there will also be opportunities arising from large-scale equipment renewals and transformation of traditional industries.

Tian Xuan, vice-dean of Tsinghua University's PBC School of Finance, said the GDP growth target of around 5 percent for 2024 indicates expectations of better economic performance this year compared to last year, given the low base rate in 2022.

Tian, who is also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, said

China's economy has sustained robust growth despite uncertainties and challenges — in stark contrast to the situations in some other major economies.

He said the country has ample policy space to bolster the economy, adding that it will be advisable for the country to expand central borrowing.

Cui Jingyi, vice-president and general manager of industrial software developer Aveva China, said: "We remain optimistic about the long-term potential of the Chinese economy. China's economic landscape is dynamic and resilient, characterized by ongoing reforms, technological advancements and a strong commitment to sustainable development."

She said the country's robust infrastructure, thriving innovation ecosystem and large consumer base continue to underpin its economic vitality.

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## Lasers in space ready to start sending data

By ZHAO LEI zhaolei@chinadaily.com.cn

China Aerospace Science and Industry Corp, a major space contractor, has deployed a set of advanced laser communication devices in space and will soon carry out a host of technological tests, according to a project leader.

Song Xiaoming, president of the CASIC Second Academy, said that the devices, called Weihai-1 laser communication terminals, were designed and built by engineers from his academy's Beijing Institute of Remote Sensing Equipment and Harbin Institute of Technology. The devices were onboard two satellites placed in orbit by a Smart Dragon 3 rocket launched in early February from the South China Sea, he said.

"From this month to June, engineers will operate the devices to conduct a number of tests related to inter-satellite and space-ground laser communications as well as inter-satellite telemetry and telecommand," Song said. "After the in-orbit tests, the equipment will start formal operation."

He said that with the rapid growth of China's marine economy, the market demand for oceanic and maritime data continues to rise, and users want such data transmitted in large quantity and in real-time, and that was why the Weihai-1 terminals were built and launched.

The Weihai-1's deployment marked the first time the laser communication technology has been used in ocean remote-sensing operations by China, he said.

Remote sensing refers to the process of detecting and monitoring the physical characteristics of objects on land or at sea by measuring the targets' reflected and emitted radiation.

The devices feature high-precision aiming and tracking, ocean atmospheric turbulence correction as well as other advanced technologies. They are capable of real-time, large-capacity transmission of remote-sensing data about designated sea areas and ships, Song said.

He added that each of the devices weighs only 8 kilograms and can work for at least five years in orbit.

Song made the remarks on the sidelines of the second session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which opened in Beijing last Monday. He is a member of the CPPCC National Committee, the top political advisory body in China.

According to engineers at Song's academy, laser communication technology has become increasingly important in the satellite business, especially in the operation of low-orbit internet satellite networks.

"A major attraction of laser communication is that it will be able to transmit a vast amount of data that far exceeds the capacity of microwave transmission equipment on existing satellites, so it is the preferred choice for the low-orbit internet satellite network," said Qiao Yuanzhe, who conducts research on laser communication technology at the Beijing Institute of Remote Sensing Equipment.

## HK, Macao see bigger role in opening-up

By LIU YIFAN in Hong Kong euanliu@chinadailyhk.com

National political advisers from the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions said the SARs will play a crucial role in building new systems for the nation's higher-level opening-up by linking the Chinese mainland with the world.

Hong Kong, while adhering to the principle of "one country", can also give full play to the advantages of "two systems", said Pansy Ho Chiu-king, a member of the Standing Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the nation's top political advisory body.

The city should capitalize on its institutional strengths in finance, trade, law and patents to act as a "super-connector" and a "super value-adder" to promote the further alignment of the mainland with the world, Ho said at a meeting during the annual gathering of the CPPCC National Committee, which closed in Beijing on Sunday.

For decades, Hong Kong's status as a global financial hub has made it a prime offshore fundraising hub for Chinese mainland firms.

More than 1,400 mainland enterprises had raised HK\$8.3 trillion (\$1 trillion) in the city by the middle of last year, according to Hong Kong Exchanges and Clearing, the local bourse operator. Today, their combined market value accounts for around three-quarters of total market capitalization.

Apart from its highly internationalized stock market, Hong Kong's strength in green finance and its push to become a hub for family offices can open doors to the global stage for mainland businesses and investors, Ho said.

Ho, who is also group executive chairman and managing director of Hong Kong-listed conglomerate Shun Tak Holdings, said Hong Kong's position as an East-meets-West center for international cultural exchange is expected to bring Chinese culture to the world in a way that is more diversified, internationalized and understandable.

According to Ho, Hong Kong's auction transactions in art, collectibles and antiques totaled more than HK\$66 billion in 2021.

Home to over 1,100 port and shipping-related companies providing diversified maritime servi-

ces, Hong Kong is also the only common law jurisdiction in China and is renowned for its efficient terminal facilities.

More maritime arbitration and legal services will be needed by the mainland due to increased trade and capital investment, Ho said, adding that Hong Kong should move toward high-value-added maritime businesses to meet rising demand.

She also suggested enhancing the cold chain logistics capacity of Hong Kong International Airport. As one of the world's busiest air cargo centers, the airport handled about 4.2 million metric tons of cargo and mail in 2022, Ho said.

With the rapid development of the mainland's logistics sector, Hong Kong's air freight industry can enhance the cold chain logistics capacity of Hong Kong and the mainland, Ho said.

Concerning intellectual property, Ho said Hong Kong should seize the opportunity brought by the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area to attract patent applications from the mainland and promote the transformation of scientific research results.

The nation is the world's largest source of patent, trademark and design applications, with its total IP trade surging from \$3.2 billion to \$57.8 billion between 2002 and 2022, Ho said, describing Hong Kong, a regional IP trade center with a sound system in place, as an ideal platform for mainland enterprises to conduct IP transactions with peace of mind.

Addressing the meeting, Zhang Zongzhen, a CPPCC National Committee member from Macao, suggested speeding up construction of the Guangdong-Macao In-Depth Cooperation Zone in Hengqin, Guangdong province.

According to the cooperation zone's statistics department, 11,500 Macao residents were working or living in Hengqin by the end of last year, up more than 70 percent year-on-year.

Zhang said Hengqin should be built into a demonstration zone by aligning its economic and trade rules with international standards and promoting cross-border trade in services.

More efforts should be made to polish Macao's image as a world heritage and gourmet city, to be involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as to deepen collaboration with Portuguese-speaking countries, Zhang said.



Wang Wanfu (center) speaks during an open discussion of the Gansu delegation attending the second session of the 14th National People's Congress in Beijing on Sunday. MENG JIE / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Lawmakers briefed on Mogao protection

By MA JINGNA and WANG RU

Gansu province is continuing to enhance the protection of cultural heritage at Dunhuang and promote Dunhuang studies, Wang Wanfu, a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, said during an open discussion at the two sessions on Sunday.

Wang is also deputy director of the department of conservation and research at the Dunhuang Academy, the institute that oversees the Mogao Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Dunhuang. The hundreds of Buddhist caves at the site, dating from the fourth to the 14th centuries, feature exquisite murals and statues.

Located on the ancient Silk Road, the site is often seen as a symbol of exchange and mutual learning among various civilizations.

In 2019, when President Xi Jinping visited Mogao Caves, he noted the importance of protecting the site, and urged the building of the Dunhuang Academy into a model of world cultural heritage site protection, and a highland for Dunhuang studies.

"In recent years, we have always kept in mind President Xi's sincere exhortation, regarded implementing the spirit of President Xi's important speeches as the main principle of our work...and achieved progress toward realizing the goal," Wang said.

He said important research platforms have been built for Dunhuang studies. For example, China's first multi-field coupling laboratory in the cultural heritage field has been established in Dunhuang for protecting ancient murals and earthen ruins. It can simulate different environmental conditions and check their influence on cultural heritage.

"As long as no major changes happen in the external environmental conditions, we believe it's possible to make Mogao Caves stand for another 1,000 years with current technological efforts for protection," Wang said.

The academy has also completed the digital recording of 290 caves covering 26,000 square meters and opened the Digital Dunhuang repository, providing high-definition images and panoramic roaming of 30 caves to a global audience, Wang said.

"In the 1990s, Fan Jinshi, then executive deputy director of the Dunhuang Academy, proposed protecting endangered cultural relics with digital measures," Wang said. After 30 years of exploration and development, the academy has formed a complete set of procedures and equipment systems for the digitization of murals in cave temples, he added.

With their high-level protection experience and skills, researchers at

Dunhuang Academy have also been invited to participate in more than 60 domestic cultural relics protection projects and offered technical support for countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative like Kyrgyzstan and Myanmar, he said.

In recent years, scholars have continued to improve the system of Dunhuang studies, and published more than 90 academic books and 560 essays. More than 50 academic seminars have also been held, promoting Dunhuang culture in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative, Wang said.

More than 150 exhibitions at home and abroad and more than 300 public welfare activities with Dunhuang as their theme have been held in recent years, he said.

"We will enhance technological innovations in cultural relics protection and Dunhuang studies, continue to dig into the value and connotations of Dunhuang culture, and promote creative transformation and innovative development of the cultural heritage," Wang said.

"We will continue to build the Dunhuang Academy into a model of world cultural heritage protection and a highland for Dunhuang studies, and contribute to building China's cultural strength and adding new luster to Chinese culture."

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Vehicles travel on the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge on Saturday. WANG XIANGGUO / XINHUA

## Xinjiang deputy refutes forced labor allegation

By CUI JIA cuijia@chinadaily.com.cn

A National People's Congress deputy from the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region on Thursday refuted allegations that forced labor exists in the region's cotton industry.

During an open discussion session of the region's delegation to the top legislature's annual session, Akrem Memetmin, Party chief of Sayimaili village in southern Xinjiang's Luntai county, said villagers never need to be forced to plant cotton, because they know they can make handsome returns from growing it.

He was responding to a question about the United States' move to impose sanctions on cotton products from the region over the forced labor allegation.

The US and its allies have been cracking down on Xinjiang's cotton industry since 2020 over the allegation.

"Machinery has already replaced most manpower at different stages of cotton farming in the village," Akrem said. "How can we force machines to work?"

He said most people in the village make a living by producing cotton. The villagers now use drones to

spray pesticides, and autonomous tractors are used to sow seeds and harvest cotton. People prefer to use machinery for cotton picking because it can cut costs by 75 percent, Akrem said.

"On behalf of the ethnic Uygur villagers, I want to say something from the bottom of my heart," he said. "We bought cars and houses and improved our lives because of cotton. We don't need to be forced to make more money."

Jin Zhizhen, deputy chairman of the Xinjiang Regional Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said Xinjiang

has been the biggest production base for quality cotton in China since the 1990s, and its annual output has exceeded 5 million metric tons for five consecutive years.

The development of the cotton industry can boost the development of other related industries, such as textiles and agricultural machinery, which can create more job opportunities for the people, Jin said.

"By curbing the development of Xinjiang, the US aims to contain China's development. But the US won't succeed. And cotton products from Xinjiang will continue to be popular around the world," he said.



# TWO SESSIONS

## Hefei plans to create AI 'innovation consortium'

By CHENG YU in Beijing and ZHU LIXIN in Hefei

More focused methods are needed to develop artificial intelligence and the related ecosystem to make the frontier technology a new quality productive force, a national lawmaker said at the two sessions.

Luo Yunfeng, mayor of Hefei, capital of Anhui province, and a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, said the city is striving to integrate innovative resources to develop AI and industry-specific large models and create an innovation consortium for AI.



Luo Yunfeng

"To tackle the bottleneck problems of AI is never to rely on a single company," he said. "Joint forces are needed from the government, companies and universities to

build an innovation consortium for new quality productive forces."

Compared with traditional productive tools that are driven by elements like labor, land and capital, new quality productive forces are driven by technological innovation, data, smart or intelligent technologies and the like.

Hefei was overshadowed by coastal cities for decades but has emerged in recent years at the forefront of AI, quantum computing, new energy and many other future industries.

It is building a next generation AI experiment zone with a thriving ecosystem comprising 2,400 upstream and downstream enterprises in sectors ranging from hardware to data computing, applications and terminals, including some leading AI companies like iFlytek.

Luo said that when new technological achievements or breakthroughs are made, it is important to apply them and drive their industrialization.

He said Hefei will continue to step up the transformation of technological achievements by first finding the person who made the breakthrough, promoting seed investment by government and businesses, and driving the first application scenarios.

"With such efforts, the last mile of transforming new quality productive forces into real applications will be connected," Luo said.

During the process, the city government acts like a pathfinder, he said, adding that Hefei has actively promoted the application of AI across various sectors and opened more than 600 application scenarios to drive industry-wide innovations in AI.

February's launch of the text-to-video application Sora by US company OpenAI, the creator of ChatGPT, has been viewed by industry experts as a significant stepping up of AI competition between China and the United States, the world's two largest economies.

"More efforts are needed to tackle common challenges of AI development," Luo said. "It is urgent to accelerate the construction of computing power centers, as computing power is the supporting tool of AI."

Hefei has completed the construction of a national-level smart computing cluster and center, which has served more than 5,000 scientific research institutes and enterprises.

Luo said more efforts are needed to support the development of computing power infrastructure and data annotation.

He also highlighted the importance of expanding investment in key AI sectors like intelligent algorithms, robotics and chip technology, while nurturing a vibrant developer ecosystem to empower various industries with higher-level AI technologies.

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## Open meeting



The Taiwan delegation holds an open meeting at the second session of the 14th National People's Congress in Beijing on Saturday. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

## Zhuhai aims high in low-altitude economy

City's mayor sees vast market prospects in development of new aviation sector

By WANG KEJU

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Huang Zhihao

The mayor of Zhuhai, in South China's Guangdong province, said the city will leverage its favorable location and strong technological ecosystem to accelerate the development of the low-altitude economy — a wide-ranging industry revolving around manned and unmanned civil aviation vehicles operating below an altitude of 1,000 meters.

"China's low-altitude economy is experiencing rapid growth, and its market prospects are vast," Huang Zhihao, who is also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, said in an interview in Beijing during the ongoing annual session of the country's national legislature.

"Zhuhai, recognizing the immense potential, is actively seizing the opportunity and pushing for accelerated development in this sector."

The city's efforts echo the emphasis on developing new quality productive forces laid out in this year's Government Work Report. The low-altitude economy is one of the sectors that has been identified as a significant

component of the initiative.

China's low-altitude economy — including passenger transport, cargo delivery and other fields of operation — was estimated to be worth more than 500 billion yuan (about \$70 billion) at the end of last year, and the Civil Aviation Administration of China expects its annual value to rise to 2 trillion yuan by 2030.

Many international and domestic participants in the low-altitude economy sector attended the 14th China International Aviation and Aerospace Exhibition in Zhuhai in 2022, Huang said.

The event served as a catalyst for innovation, communication and collaboration within the low-altitude economy sector, Huang said, adding that the air show will encourage greater participation from international organizations, professional associations and leading enterprises in the field.

Zhuhai boasts an extensive coastline and many islands, creating fer-

tile ground for innovative logistics solutions and the exploration of new frontiers in the low-altitude economy, Huang said, adding that such scenarios include logistics and distribution, aerial inspection of islands and responding to emergencies.

China is promoting the construction of a low-altitude flight service system and aims to simplify application and approval procedures for low-altitude flight plans. It will also provide support to enterprises to carry out drone logistics distribution pilot projects in provinces including Guangdong.

By capitalizing on its geographical advantages and aligning with national policies, Zhuhai aims to establish itself as a testing base, driving the growth of the low-altitude economy and setting an example for the rest of the country, Huang said.

The Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has emerged as the world's largest aviation market, establishing a robust foundation for the application of new technologies, he said.

Among the cities in the region, Zhuhai's proximity to Hong Kong and Macao provides convenient access to shared resources and a seamless integration of strengths and opportunities from all three regions, Huang added.

## Integration of prevention and treatment can improve respiratory illness response

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai

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Political advisers suggested beefing up the country's primary medical services by integrating treatment and prevention to better cope with outbreaks of respiratory illnesses, such as those that have swept many parts of the nation this winter.

It is necessary to carry out targeted and multidimensional training for community health centers, focusing on their ability to respond to the arrival of seasonal respiratory diseases, they said.

They made the suggestions in Beijing during the annual gatherings of deputies to the country's top legislature and members of the top political advisory body.

Another focus for such community health centers will be to strengthen the management of diseases with a mindset of integrating medical treatment and prevention, said Zhang Wenhong, a national political adviser who is also head of the infectious disease department at Shanghai Huashan Hospital.

"For elderly patients with chronic respiratory diseases, if their disease management is done in a standard manner at the primary medical institutions, which also do more in early diagnosis and intervention, the pressure of coping with respiratory infection outbreaks in large hospitals can be reduced a lot," he said.

The country experienced a surge

in respiratory diseases driven by the circulation of multiple pathogens this winter. Both the elderly and children have been hit hard, stretching the capacities of elderly care and pediatric facilities in some regions.

However, people have strong preferences for big hospitals. According to a report on Shanghai TV, more than 1,500 patients sought emergency treatment at a campus of Shanghai Children's Hospital in Putuo district on Dec 17. On the same day, at Changfeng Community Health Service Center, a primary medical institution in the same district, just one patient showed up.

Zhang said he believed deficiencies in testing capabilities and medicine supplies were one reason for such a contrast in patient numbers. He suggested improving the availability of basic medicines and diagnostic methods at grassroots institutions.

Wang Chen, a member of the Standing Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference National Committee, the country's top political advisory body, suggested including health management for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease patients in the country's basic public health services, which would be conducive to building a public health system at the grassroots to combat outbreaks.

"COPD afflicts roughly 100 million people in the country," said Wang, who is also vice-president of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and president of the Chinese

## New youth visa category could boost exchanges

By ZHAO YIMENG and LI MENGHAN

A national political adviser has proposed to add a new visa category that allows more young people around the world to participate in work-based cultural and educational exchanges during their gap years to deeply integrate into the country.

Liu Aiping, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, said the new visa category could allow young people to have part-time jobs to cover their expenses during a year of travel in China.

"The new visa would be different from a work visa, which has complicated application procedures. It would be the kind that enables foreigners to get paid while holding a short-term visitor visa or student visa," said Liu, who is also Party secretary of the China International Youth Exchange Center.

Similar visa categories have been set up in other countries. The J-1 visa in the United States allows individuals to join work and study visitor programs such as Bridge USA. The program attracts about 100,000 international students each year to engage in paid internships in the US during summer vacations, Liu said.

"Based on the current X1 visa for long-term students in China and the Z visa for employment in China, we propose that the departments including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Immigration Administration and the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security could look into the introduction of working holiday visas, in a bid to offer a more immersive experience and facilitate better integration for foreign youths in China," she said.

Based on her work experience with young people, Liu found that those who visited China had a better impression of the country than those who did not, and the longer they stayed, the more rationally they viewed the country.

A pilot program could be initiated before the introduction of the new visa category, inviting foreign youth

“Amity between people, which should start from youth-to-youth communication, holds the key to sound state-to-state relations.”



Liu Aiping, Party secretary of the China International Youth Exchange Center

annually to participate in short-term paid work in China, she said.

Apart from adding a new visa category, more policy and financial support, including subsidies to encourage overseas voluntary service, can be instrumental in advancing global youth communication and enhancing understanding of China, Liu proposed.

"Amity between people, which should start from youth-to-youth communication, holds the key to sound state-to-state relations," she said.

Her proposal to the second session of the 14th CPPCC National Committee follows China's repeated emphasis on the significance of interaction between its citizens and those from other countries.

Having engaged in global communication for years, Liu pointed out that China faces limitations due to the relatively small scale and low subsidy standards of its overseas volunteering programs.

"During the 14th Five-Year plan (2021-25), it is suggested to dispatch around 200 volunteers each year to countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative."

Liu also underscored the unique roles of overseas Chinese-funded enterprises in global youth communication.

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## Country still a magnet for foreign investment

By YAO YUXIN

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Countering assertions of a foreign capital exodus, a national political adviser who heads a foreign company in China said the country remains a magnet for foreign investment, bolstered by its unyielding commitment to refining its business environment and fostering innovation-led growth.

Jiang Ying, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and chair of market consultancy Deloitte China, referenced data from the Ministry of Commerce to corroborate her conclusion.



Jiang Ying

The ministry said foreign direct investment in 2023 was over \$1.1 trillion yuan (\$155 billion). Jiang said that last year over 53,000 new foreign-invested enterprises were established in China, marking a year-on-year increase of 39.7 percent. Notably, the structure of FDI is also evolving, with high-tech industries hitting a record high, comprising 37.3 percent of total investment.

These statistics, Jiang said, provide a solid testament to China's dynamic and attractive business environment. "We serve a lot of foreign investors. They are all positive about the Chinese economy," she said.

Jiang said she has always been keenly interested in topics such as the country's business environment, innovation and sustainable development.

She said China has made huge efforts to enhance its business environment, including the reduction of the negative list for foreign

investment. It has opened up numerous sectors such as financial services, healthcare and education.

"The Chinese market belongs to the world," she said. "Everyone is welcome to invest."

She said she wholeheartedly agreed with the five key advantages of the Chinese market outlined in this year's Government Work Report: China's distinctive institutional strengths, the massive scale of market demand, a comprehensive industrial supply system, a large and high-quality workforce, and the country's continuous investment in research and development.

She said these factors collectively create a wealth of opportunities for all business entities in the Chinese market. Especially with China advocating the development of new quality productive forces, symbolizing high value, high tech, high efficiency, and a greener future, businesses are empowered to achieve more.

Companies deciding to leave or stay is a normal part of their business strategy, Jiang said. However, she said the Chinese market is too significant to overlook and possesses strong allure.

No market is easy, Jiang said, and the days when foreign companies could simply replicate their products or supply chains in China and achieve success are gone. As China has developed, they now need to bring higher quality, higher value goods and supply chains to prevail in the fiercely competitive market.

"I'm sure when this product is competitive in the Chinese market, it will also be able to serve globally," Jiang said. "So, this is not only for a China-for-China strategy, but also is a China-for-global strategy."



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## CHINA

By ZHAO RUINAN in Nanchang  
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Public relations worker Wendy Wu joined a makeup class with 15 other young people at a studio in Chaoyang district, Beijing, in January.

The first session focused on teaching the group how to apply a proper base layer of makeup, with the teacher explaining the method while the students practiced it.

It was the first time that Wu had taken part in a night school course.

"I got the idea to learn makeup six months ago, but was too busy to start until last month. After I found the information to enroll for the night school near to where I live, I signed up for the course right away," she said.

She said the course, which cost 500 yuan (\$70) for five sessions, each lasting two hours, was an affordable and enjoyable experience.

"Joining the night school is cheaper than enrolling at commercial training institutions. Although the number of classes is limited, the school provides an opportunity to gain experience and learn basic knowledge," Wu said.

Night schools have recently become a new trend, attracting eager learners such as Wu, who work during the day and acquire new skills in the evening.

Yang Zhaodi, founder of the school Wu joined, said that since she posted a recruitment message on the Xiaohongshu lifestyle-focused social media platform in November, more than 5,000 people have expressed an interest in joining classes. The school is named Dawanpianyi, which translates as "high quality with low price".

The classes cover a range of artistic and cultural pursuits, including dancing, vocal training, traditional handicrafts, beauty, fitness lessons, wine tasting, filming vlogs, and making coffee. Some of them are highly sought after.

China's latest night school trend began in Shanghai in September, when enrollment for the Citizen Night School for Arts attracted 650,000 applicants competing for 10,000 places, which caused the enrollment platform to crash.

Since then, night schools have become increasingly popular in big cities, with many young urban residents choosing to join classes after work.

Weekend Charging is one of the first new night schools in Shanghai. Its founder, Kevin Wang, a 32-year-old finance industry worker in the city, has devoted all his free time to running the school for more than a year.

Over 1,000 young people are currently taking more than 20 different courses as members of the Weekend Charging community. A typical class in Shanghai or Beijing, which consists of six to 12 lessons, costs about 600 yuan.

As dining out in these cities often costs several hundred yuan, the school's classes are reasonably priced for young people.

Wang believes Weekend Charging's popularity is mainly due to a desire to "learn something else after work".

"Young people in big cities often focus too much on their careers, but lose track of their own lives, hobbies, and what's happening outside their fields of expertise. This can add to their mental problems, triggering a sense of anxiety and depression," he said.

### Positive turn

Li Shiyu, 28, a white-collar worker in Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu province, used to be bogged down by intense work pressure, often toiling late into the night. However, her life took a positive turn after she enrolled in a night school ballet course at the end of last year.

"I started leaving work early to catch up on classes, and gradually developed more interests in my life," she said.

In addition to ballet, she signed up for lessons on playing African drums.



Left: White-collar workers take part in a seminar in November at a night school in Shanghai. Right: Young women dance at a night school after work in Beijing in November. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



# Young workers head to classes after the sun sets

Night school courses attract students eager to broaden their knowledge

"I started to look forward to what would happen after I left work," Li said.

Yang, founder of the night school in Beijing, said that one of the most popular courses focuses on interpreting *I Ching*, also known as the *Book of Changes*, one of the oldest classic Chinese texts. Lessons for tarot card reading are also in demand.

Yang said this shows that young people are more uncertain than others and sometimes feel lost about their place in today's society.

"The COVID-19 pandemic also disrupted people's lives for three years, leaving them more uncertain about the future. The atomized urban lifestyle also makes it difficult for young people to express their frustrations, with not enough help on hand to provide guidance. As a result, young people might turn to divination for some psychological comfort," Yang said.

Besides makeup and fortunetelling, sports courses are also highly sought after, with tennis, badminton and other pursuits extremely popular.

In the 1980s, night schools were also popular in China, offering courses such as computer technology and foreign languages, with participants joining them mainly to enhance their skills.

However, young people today — driven by their interests and passions — are testing themselves, broadening their educa-



White-collar workers discuss a point during a night class in Nanchang, capital of Jiangxi province in December. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

tion and making new progress through various night school courses.

### Sufficient income

Zhang Yiwu, a Chinese language and literature professor at Peking University, said many young people now have sufficient income to meet their daily needs, while still having some money left to pursue their interests.

"A significant proportion of them can maintain a good standard of living and still have time to pursue their interests. This phenomenon of enhancing personal development is not surprising — it is a natural result of social progress," he said.

Night schools are not only popular in metropolises, they are the preferred after-work destinations for young people in second- and third-tier cities.

At the start of this year, Jiang Jiumin and a friend established the Hongru Night School in Nanchang, capital of Jiangxi province. Jiang was surprised to find that many young people living in the city shared his desire for a life beyond work.

"To be honest, I started the night school for myself. I come from Shangrao city, Jiangxi, and worked in the neighboring Fujian province for several years. After returning to Nanchang a few years ago, I found that I had no friends with similar interests and ideas as myself," Jiang said.

"My childhood friends and classmates now have their own families, and it's hard to make friends with new colleagues in Nanchang."

Jiang decided to establish a part-time night school to help young people facing similar challenges expand their social circles.

"I was initially worried that night school courses in a second-tier city would not

attract enough students, but I was proved wrong," he said.

A few days after Jiang posted details about the night school courses on Xiaohongshu, he received hundreds of messages inquiring about the classes.

"There is real demand among young people today to reconstruct their cultural lives and cultivate their interests after work," Jiang said.

Moreover, he believes that sharing is the core concept of night school courses.

In addition to teachers from professional training institutions and educational organizations working part-time at the Hongru Night School, Jiang encourages individuals with specific skills to share their expertise.

"For example, if a student has been honing his or her skills in a particular field for many years and has valuable insights, we encourage the student to open up a class and share this knowledge. This not only provides an opportunity to learn, but also a chance to make like-minded friends through sharing and discussion," Jiang said.

Fan Yechao, an associate professor at Minzu University of China's School of Ethnology and Sociology in Beijing, said night schools offer specialized spaces and professional equipment, creating a social space for city residents who share similar interests. This, in turn, promotes the formation of new interest groups.

"Although online interest communities are popular, they cannot replace the emotional satisfaction of face-to-face interaction. People still crave in-person deep communication with like-minded individuals," Fan said.

### Choice available

Office workers are not the only ones seeking self-improvement at night schools.

Wu, who joined the makeup class in Beijing, said one of her classmates is a mother who knew nothing about makeup before enrolling in the course.

The mother decided to take the lessons after her child praised her appearance when she wore makeup to attend a parent-teacher meeting.

Wu said: "My classmate hoped to show a more energetic side of herself, so she decided to learn makeup. She is very serious about it."

"I thought that those learning makeup skills would mainly be young office workers, but many of them are mothers. That impressed me a lot."

Students can enroll for different types of night schools. The first type has been established through coordination with local governments, community organizations, village committees, and training institutions.

However, Yang, founder of the night school in Beijing, said these institutions with official backgrounds, such as cultural activity centers, are limited in number, have relatively fixed class times, and cannot meet young people's diverse needs.

This has resulted in the emergence of another type of night school run by individuals or teams, who act as intermediaries by connecting students with institutions, and earn a proportion of the enrollment fee. These schools are major players in the market.

Wang said, "These new night schools are currently thriving, but are still in the early stages of development."

"Everyone is exploring uncharted territory in the hope of establishing a comprehensive and smooth operational system that covers courses, pricing, faculty, and after-sales support to foster positive growth and attract and retain young learners' enthusiasm."

Jiang, from Nanchang, said operational challenges are increasing as the number of night school students continues to rise.

"Only when this trend passes can high-quality night schools with unified standards be better sustained," he said.

Although online interest communities are popular, they cannot replace the emotional satisfaction of face-to-face interaction. People still crave in-person deep communication with like-minded individuals."

Fan Yechao, an associate professor at Minzu University of China's School of Ethnology and Sociology



A student practices calligraphy at a night school in Beijing in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Young women learn how to make coffee during a lesson at a Beijing night school. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



White-collar workers take part in a panel discussion at a Beijing night school. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## WORLD

## No letup in fighting in Gaza; no truce seen

GAZA/JERUSALEM — Deadly fighting continued in Gaza on Sunday, with no truce in sight as hopes dimmed for a cease-fire during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan amid a dire humanitarian crisis gripping the besieged Palestinian territory.

Fighting and bombardment again rocked Gaza, where dozens of bodies arrived overnight at barely functioning hospitals, according to the health ministry.

The Israeli military said its troops had killed 13 militants in airstrikes and with tank and sniper fire in central Gaza over the past day.

A Spanish charity ship carrying food aid was expected to soon set sail from the Mediterranean island nation of Cyprus to help alleviate the suffering in the coastal Gaza Strip, now in its sixth month of conflict.

The nongovernmental group Open Arms said its vessel would carry 200 tons of food and unload on the shores of Gaza, where it had built a basic dock.

As famine looms in Gaza, foreign countries have airdropped food aid there, but UN agencies warn this falls far short of the needs of its more than 2 million people.

The conflict started on Oct 7 when Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel, in which about 1,200 people were killed, according to Israeli tallies.

Israel's bombardment and ground offensive have killed at least 31,045 people, the health ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said on Sunday.

Weeks of talks involving US, Qatari and Egyptian mediators have aimed for a six-week truce and the release of many of the about 100 hostages Hamas is still holding in return for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails, with no result so far, Agence France-Presse reported.

The widely shared target had been to halt the fighting by the start of Ramadan, depending on the first sighting of the crescent moon, with some people saying the holy month would begin in the evening on Sunday.

Both sides have blamed each other for failing to reach a cease-fire deal, with Israel demanding a full list of surviving hostages, and Hamas calling for Israel to pull out all its troops from Gaza.

As the civilian death toll rose, US

President Joe Biden told broadcaster MSNBC on Saturday that Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "must pay more attention to the innocent lives being lost as a consequence of the actions taken". At this stage, Biden said, Netanyahu's approach to the conflict was "hurting Israel more than helping Israel".

Israeli military spokesman Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari said Israel was preparing for "all possible operational scenarios" during Ramadan.

Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh called for the speedy distribution of aid and the full opening of border crossings "to end the siege of our people".

## Two-state solution

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez added his voice to a chorus of other European leaders and government officials who have said they could support a two-state solution in the Middle East as international frustration grows with Israel's actions in the Palestinian territories.

Sanchez said on Saturday that he will propose that Spain's parliament recognize a Palestinian state.

After a special summit in Melbourne on March 6, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Australian government issued a joint statement calling for "an immediate and durable humanitarian cease-fire".

Mustafa Izzuddin, a senior international affairs analyst at Solaris Strategies Singapore, told China Daily that he is observing this year's Ramadan in a "solemn and somber way in light of the atrocities being committed in Gaza and the plight of the Palestinians".

The conflict has "catalyzed a renewed sense of urgency and responsibility among humanity to support peace, justice and recovery efforts, irrespective of geographical boundaries", Fazal Bahardeen, founder and chief executive of CrescentRating, a travel consultancy in Singapore, told China Daily.

"Understanding, tolerance and cooperation are crucial in navigating the current situation and working toward solutions that respect the dignity and rights of all individuals involved," he said.

Prime Sarmiento in Hong Kong and Leonardus Jegho in Jakarta contributed to this story.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Closer collaboration for Africa and China urged

By WANG XIAODONG  
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With significant progress made in bilateral cooperation between China and Africa under the Belt and Road Initiative over the past 10 years, African experts have called for closer collaboration to deliver more benefits to the two sides.

"The African-Chinese partnership during the last 10 years is without question a great step forward, which carries promise and huge potential for both sides," said Maged Refaat, a member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs.

"We have all witnessed during the last decade how the Belt and Road Initiative grew from planning to execution."

In that time the initiative has greatly boosted infrastructure development, connectivity and trade across Africa. In Egypt a number of infrastructure and industrial development projects have been carried out, including the Central Business District in its new administrative capital, the Suez Canal Corridor and the Suez Canal Economic Zone, Refaat said.

"The BRI is a global economic endeavor like no other, which engages some 70 percent of the world's population and accounts for more than 50 percent of global GDP."

The BRI is one of the most important and far-reaching projects in modern history, he said.

More than 150 countries, including many European ones, have been involved in the initiative, which shows its great vitality and potential in promoting develop-

ment and connection, Refaat said.

He made the comments during the 13th Meeting of the China-Africa Think Tanks Forum held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on Friday.

James Mdoe, deputy permanent secretary of Tanzania's Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, said at the opening ceremony of the meeting that the BRI and other platforms for collaboration such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation have boosted Tanzania's development in various fields.

## Significant contributions

"The government of Tanzania recognizes the significant contributions made by China through the BRI in building infrastructure, promoting trade and people-to-people exchanges." China has offered thousands of scholarships to Tanzania and stepped up collaboration in vocational training, Mdoe said.

Ezechiel Nibigira, a former foreign minister of Burundi, told the meeting that relations between China and Africa are based on trust and mutual benefit and should be maintained.

"If you want to lift yourself up, lift up someone else; this is exactly what China is doing. I have a dream that some African developing countries will one day become developed countries because of the teamwork and the win-win cooperation established between China and Africa."

Nibigira described China as a friend that has been with Africa "during hard moments and good times", and he suggested Chinese investment in Africa should be increased to promote industrialization in the continent.



## Riders in the sky

Tourists ride high-altitude bicycles in front of snow-covered mountains in the city of Gangneung, 163 kilometers east of Seoul, on Sunday. Gangneung is a mountainous city, making it a tourism hot spot.

YONHAP NEWS AGENCY

## TWO SESSIONS

## Resilience in economy hailed

Experts welcome Beijing's emphasis on growth and balanced development

By EDITH MUTETHYA in Nairobi, Kenya and YANG WANLI in Bangkok

China's economy has a stable structural foundation and possesses the necessary resilience to withstand external shocks, and it is heartening to see its emphasis on growth and supporting the economy this year, global experts said.

Premier Li Qiang delivered the Government Work Report to the National People's Congress on Tuesday, and disclosed major targets for this year's development, including a GDP growth of around 5 percent. He also outlined major tasks for this year, including striving to modernize the industrial system and developing new quality productive forces at a faster pace, invigorating China through science and education, and continuing to deepen reform and pursuing higher-standard opening up.

Charles Onunajiu, director of the Centre for China Studies in Abuja, Nigeria, said that China again demonstrates that the structured foundation of its economy is stable and sufficiently resilient to withstand external shocks.

China maintained the momentum of growth at 5.2 percent last year and is projected to continue on this trajectory, according to the report. The steady and stable trajectory of the Chinese economy, with the aim being to create more than 12 million new jobs in urban areas, demonstrates the soundness of its fundamentals, Onunajiu said.

Moving forward, China would accelerate endeavors in research on disruptive and frontier technologies, thereby putting science, technology and education at the forefront of its modernization drive, he said.

"The forward-looking and prospects of China's economy in the coming years give concrete expression to China as a major power with a high sense of understanding of its responsibility to the world, especially in maintaining and supporting global recovery and balanced development that delivers win-win outcomes to the world," Onunajiu said.

Xn Iraki, an associate professor in the University of Nairobi's Faculty of Business and Management Sciences, said the focus on disruptive and frontier technologies would make

China a leader in areas such as artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, space technology, quantum computing, and genetics among others.

The focus on such technologies and innovations could help China achieve its targeted economic growth. That would also ensure more jobs, and social stability and that China gives a boost to the rest of the world with its growth, Iraki said.

## Confidence demonstrated

Rhys Whalley, executive director of Manchester China Forum in England, said that it is encouraging to see the prioritization of growth and supporting the economy, something that will undoubtedly be welcomed both domestically and within the wider international community. China's economic growth target for the year demonstrates both the leadership's ambition and its confidence, he said.

Perhaps most important for overseas observers was the Chinese government's commitment to the further opening up of markets to foreign companies. Given the continued global economic malaise and the challenges in stimulating post-pandemic recovery, the implementation of practical measures that serve to enhance the operating environment for foreign businesses in the Chinese

mainland will undoubtedly be welcomed among leaders of foreign-owned enterprise, Whalley said.

Such measures will serve to reassure both existing and future investors, and serve to support ambitions around creating a more stable, transparent and predictable policy environment; underpinning long-term ambitions to transform its economy, Whalley added.

Varut Kanchanapattana, treasurer of the Association of Thai Travel Agents, said that according to the report, the country will make it easier for foreign nationals to work, study and travel in China.

"This is encouraging information for Thai people because many Thai students are looking for chances to study in China and China is among the top popular travel destinations among Thai people," said Varut.

He also spoke highly of the agreement on mutual visa exemption between China and Thailand that came into force on March 1 for holders of ordinary passports and passports for public affairs.

Xing Yi in London and Chen Yingqun in Beijing contributed to this story.

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## Europeans gear up to vote, with one eye on Trump return

BRUSSELS — Three months from now, 370 million Europeans will be called to elect a new EU parliament under the shadow of a contest playing out across the Atlantic, as Donald Trump, the former US president, fights to reclaim the White House.

How exactly the prospect of a Trump 2.0 presidency, growing more tangible by the day, could nudge voters across the 27-nation European Union one way or another, is an unknown.

But one thing is certain: it would have a major impact on the bloc, at a crossroads when it comes to fighting climate change, shoring up Ukraine and ensuring its own security.

"For Europe, Trump 2 is both a huge exclamation mark and a huge

question mark," said Sebastian Mallard, associate fellow at the think tank Chatham House in London.

Trump's disruptive first term, with his "America first" credo dismissing multilateralism in general, and the EU in particular, is still fresh in European minds.

The twice-impeached former president has caused consternation in Europe with his threats to walk away from US NATO commitments, fueling a push by Brussels toward greater security independence.

"The Trump scenario is very, very consequential for what the European project is going to be able to do over the next period," said Susi Denison, senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Rela-

tions, or ECFR. Any number of the bloc's strategic priorities become "much, much harder to achieve" if he returns to power, she said.

On the most critical of these, the conflict on the EU's eastern rim, US Republicans are, at Trump's behest, blocking aid to Ukraine.

While the EU seeks to spearhead the global fight against climate change, Trump's second-term plans tack radically the other way, vowing to tear up a massive clean energy bill.

Both European priorities, preserving Western unity on Ukraine and transitioning to carbon neutrality by 2050, could already be complicated by the June 6-9 European Parliament vote.

The balance of power in the 720-

seat legislature determines how the EU's top jobs, heading the commission, the parliament and the European Council, and leading foreign policy, are shared.

Indicators suggest a surge by far-right parties, fueled by anti-establishment currents coursing across the bloc. The center-right European People's Party is set to remain the biggest force, followed by the Socialists, but the centrist Renew Europe could lose third place to the far-right Identity and Democracy group.

The ECFR says "anti-European populists" are likely to come out on top in nine member states including France, Hungary and Italy.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## Turkiye offers to host Ukraine peace summit

ISTANBUL — Turkiye will facilitate a peace summit that includes Russia to solve the Ukraine conflict, Turkiye's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said.

Erdogan made the remarks during a joint news conference with the visiting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky following their discussions at Dolmabahce Palace in Istanbul on Friday.

"Turkiye will continue to stand in solidarity with Ukraine while working for a negotiated, peaceful end to the war," Erdogan said.

Zelensky, accompanied by his defense minister, visited a shipyard where Ukrainian navy ships were under construction. He inspected "the readiness and equipment of the Ivan Mazepa corvette and assessed the progress of construction of a second Ada-class corvette."

"I thank Turkiye's President and all Turkish and Ukrainian defense companies for their partnership and for working together to bring peace closer and make it a lasting one," Zelensky wrote on the social

media platform X.

Later in the day, at the news conference, Zelensky said his visit was devoted to bilateral cooperation, and that the two countries are working toward joint arms production.

Erdogan also addressed the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which was halted in July last year, affirming Turkiye's readiness to support a renewed agreement.

The initiative, brokered by the United Nations and Turkiye in July 2022, created a humanitarian maritime corridor allowing food and fertilizer exports from Ukrainian Black Sea ports.

Erdogan said they also discussed issues such as the safety of navigation in the Black Sea, the security of ports along the maritime route, and prisoner exchanges.

Zelensky underlined his country's efforts to bolster security and achieve a fair peace for both Ukraine and the broader Black Sea region.

Before the media briefing, the two leaders held a meeting that lasted

about 90 minutes.

During the visit, the two sides signed an agreement to establish an electronic preliminary information exchange system relating to goods and vehicles transported between the two countries.

Salih Yilmaz, an academic at Ankara Yildirim Beyazit University, said depending on its existing budget, Ukraine would like to establish a partnership with Turkish arms industry companies to produce artillery shells.

"Turkiye seems to be the safest country that can quickly produce the artillery shells that Ukraine needs most," Yilmaz told the state-run Anadolu news agency.

Baris Doster, an academic at Istanbul-based Marmara University, told Xinhua that Turkiye also maintains very strong political and trade relations with Russia.

"Fostering good relations with both Ukraine and Russia would bolster Ankara's position to act as a mediator in a potential peace summit," Doster said.

XINHUA-AGENCIES

## WORLD US

## Shandong culture delights US visitors

By LIAZHU in San Francisco  
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Shandong province, a cradle of Chinese civilization in East China, is rolling out the welcome mat for US tourists, eager to showcase its rich cultural heritage and tourism scene.

At a promotional event held at the Chinese Consulate General in San Francisco on Thursday, visitors were enthralled by the intangible cultural heritage of Shandong.

Maneuvering puppets, their expressive faces coming alive in your hands, meticulously "painting" a masterpiece with tiny grains, or playing with miniature kites, smaller than one's palm, the event showcased several art forms that embody Shandong's cultural heritage.

Lively Laixi puppetry, with its demonstrative, rod-controlled puppets, captivated the audience. The Weifang kite, renowned for its intricate designs and vibrant colors, symbolizes not only a love for the skies but also the yearning for home and a pioneering spirit. Paper-cutting, another traditional art form, was also on display, showcasing delicate depictions of people, flowers, animals and landscapes.

"Shandong is blessed with a wealth of cultural and tourism resources," Vice-Governor of Shandong Deng Yunfeng said.

Deng emphasized Shandong's commitment to becoming a global cultural and tourism destination. "We are building an industry with international perspectives while retaining our unique charm," he said.

San Francisco was the first stop of the Chinese delegation's visit to the US with the aim of turning the province into an international destination.

Shandong is home to four UNESCO World Natural and Cultural Heritage sites and is the second-most populous province in China, with more than 100 million residents.

It is also an economically developed province, with a GDP of nearly \$1.3 trillion, ranking third in China. In addition, it generates China's highest agricultural output and is the country's second-largest industrial producer, Deng said.

To make travel easier, the province has expanded its visa-upon-arrival and visa-free programs, which aim to deliver a seamless inbound and outbound tourism experience.

The event also served as a bridge between people, said California Secretary of Government Operations Amy Tong, representing Governor Gavin Newsom.

She said she "followed in Newsom's footsteps" to visit China last year to help foster the relationship between sister cities. Among climate exchange, business, economic development and other topics she discussed with her counterparts, it was the people-to-people exchange that "everybody focused on," she said.

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Actors perform the modern dance, *Dongpo: Life in Poems*, in Washington on Friday.  
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Captivating performance presents poetry in motion

By YIFAN XU in Washington  
yifanxu@chinadailyusa.com

Soothing sounds emanate from a *guqin* being played on the stage, a huge painting hanging high seems to transcend time and space, while artists from China dance in front of a packed audience at the Kennedy Center in Washington on Friday.

It was the US premiere of the poetic modern dance, *Dongpo: Life in Poems*, marking a two-week tour of the United States' capital and New York with eight performances in total.

The contemporary dance weaves together renowned Chinese poet Su Dongpo's timeless verses with his personal experiences, offering a compelling exploration of the human mind. Guided by the haunting melodies of live *guqin* music performed by Zhao Xiaoxia, audiences were transported to ancient China nearly 1,000 years ago and the depths of self-perception.

Through a fusion of body movements and facial expressions, *Dongpo: Life in Poems*

transforms poetry into a magical experience.

## Integration of arts

The performance displays the deep integration of Chinese opera, tai chi and visual arts with a combination of *guqin* music and contemporary music. It also showcases Dongpo's soul, affection, melancholy, and optimism, while using multiple art forms such as poetry, calligraphy, and painting.

The audience loved the show. Speaking to China Daily, they called the performance "enchanting," "fantastic," "magnificent" and "breathtaking."

"I love the choreography. The colors were so special and perfect, and the choreography was really special. I thought the whole performance was a masterpiece, really," David Gossack, an admirer of Chinese culture and a former diplomat, said.

"It's a complicated production, because basically we start with Dongpo's life. His spirit, his thoughts, and his ideas are transformed into a poem, which forms the base for this production," Shen Wei, the director and

choreographer of the show, said.

The show was produced and performed by the China Oriental Performing Arts Group and Meishan Song and Dance Theatre. The American Dance Festival is co-sponsoring its US tour.

China Arts and Entertainment Group Chairman Li Jinsheng said during a reception before the show's premiere that this work was "an innovative production based on Chinese traditional culture, and boldly exploring the integration of Chinese and foreign arts."

"It is the art that brings hearts closer and builds a better communication with the world," he said.

Jing Quan, the Chinese embassy minister, said at the reception that this performance followed the important common understanding between the presidents of China and the US in San Francisco.

"I believe it will improve mutual understanding and learning between Chinese and Western civilizations. Art can serve as a bridge. *Dongpo: Life in Poems* opens up a new chapter in the cultural exchange between our two countries," Jing said.

## Stories of Japanese WWII camp in China revealed at exhibition

By CHANG JUN and  
ZHIZHI CEN in San Francisco

An exhibition on China-US friendship at the Weixian Concentration Camp — in which Japanese fascists during World War II imprisoned about 2,000 Western nationals in Weifang, Shandong province — has opened in San Francisco.

Barely known to the West, the camp serves as a testament to the deep-rooted friendship between the Chinese and American peoples dating to 1942.

The history of the camp should never be forgotten by future generations, said Chen Baiwei, deputy director of the Shandong Foreign Affairs Office, who spoke to an audience that filled the WWII Pacific War Memorial Hall, the museum where the exhibition was hosted.

The exhibition contains seven units, using about 180 artifacts, pictures and documents including oral history to showcase and replicate the concentration camp.

Following Japan's invasion of China in 1931, the Imperial Army eventually penetrated the Shandong peninsula in 1937. In March 1942, the army looted several European-style missionary buildings and transformed the multi-functional complex — Courtyard of the Happy Way, as it was originally called — into a concentration camp.

Targeting Western expatriates from the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Netherlands and Belgium, the Japanese put more than 2,000 civilians, including more than 300 children, into the camp.

Inmates were mistreated — food

was rationed, clothes were limited and cells were overcrowded. There was mandatory labor and mental burdens, such as isolation.

"You could only write short letters, only about a paragraph through the Red Cross (stationed in the Camp)," said John Stanley, professor at Kutztown University in Pennsylvania, a descendant of camp inmates, in explaining how the Japanese suppressed communications.

Against all odds, the light of humanity flickered — "whole-hearted assistance" from local Chinese people in various formats and through combined channels empowered inmates.

Night-watch men between shifts helped relay SOS messages; farmers stuffed much-needed food into the hands of inmates; guerrilla forces managed to rescue prisoners, risking their own lives.

Mary Taylor Preville, who was detained in the camp at age 9, later recalled,

"Here, in a place once filled with despair, I saw heroes planting seeds of hope."

Arthur William Hummel, the US ambassador to China from 1981 to 1986, was an inmate. In one of his recollections of the camp, he highlighted the solidarity and teamwork of the Chinese and American peoples when fighting Japanese fascism. He once said, "Even today, I feel very close to China. Whenever I have the opportunity, I go to China for visit."

The Chinese and American peoples, like others across the world, cherish and uphold peace, said Chen.

"Weifang city has been awarded the title of International City of

Peace. ... The Chinese people know full well the value of peace, and China will stay committed to the path of peaceful development."

Chen also said that "solidarity gives us strength", calling the camp a true record of the solidarity between international expatriates, including American expatriates, and the Chinese people in their fight against Japanese fascism during the war.

"History has proved that only solidarity can help mankind overcome difficulties and obstacles, and only solidarity can enable our global village to have a bright future."

Although the camp was shut down on Aug 17, 1945, following Japan's defeat in the Pacific, its historic significance is far-reaching and multifaceted, said Betty Yuan, one of the organizers of the exhibition.

"It is so touching to learn that in the 1940s ... the Chinese people have devoted their lives to help, protect and save the Westerners, including Americans," said Yuan. "Stories happened there were less told in America, heroes there unsung."

Calling the 10-day exhibition "just a start to a great cause," Yuan said she felt an urgency to publicize the camp's history.

The camp has produced a deep bond of friendship between the Chinese and American peoples.

"Friendship needs to be passed down through generations. We need to carry on," said Yuan.

Kathleen Liu contributed to this story.

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## TikTok targeted once again by US politicians

Outcry on social media over new attempt to force sale of app with 170 million US users

By HENG WEILI in New York  
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A renewed effort by US lawmakers to force the sale or ban of TikTok has generated outspoken opposition by many in the country, where 170 million people use the immensely popular social media platform.

The premise for the "Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act" is that because TikTok is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company, user data would be accessible to the Chinese government.

TikTok has repeatedly denied that it shares any user information with the government. The Beijing-based company has said that it would not turn over such information and has never been asked.

To date, the United States government has not provided any information that shows TikTok shares information with Chinese authorities, The Associated Press reported.

And in a peculiar US presidential election-year twist, President Joe Biden, whose campaign made its first TikTok post on Super Bowl Sunday in February, said he would sign a new bill to ban the app, while former president Donald Trump, Biden's presumptive opponent in the November election, does not agree with forcing a sale even though he did when he was president.

In an article Friday, The New York Times carried a headline that said: "Biden the President Wants to Curb TikTok Biden the Candidate Embraces Its Stars".

The article said that for the State of the Union address Thursday, "dozens of social media influencers — many of them TikTok stars — were invited to the White House for a watch party."

A video posted by the Biden campaign about the North Carolina governor's election primary piled up comments asking Biden to stop a TikTok ban, the Times reported.

"Aren't you about to ban TikTok? Why did your team even make you an account?" one user posted.

In 2020, Trump attempted to ban TikTok by executive order, which was blocked by federal courts after TikTok sued.

"If you get rid of TikTok, Facebook ... will double their business," Trump posted on social media, adding that he does not want Facebook "doing better."

Billionaire hedge fund manager Jeff Yass, a Republican donor, has been calling GOP members of the House to try to halt the legislation, according to the New York Post, which reported that Yass' fund has a \$33 billion stake in ByteDance. Yass reportedly visited Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida last week.

The Biden administration revoked Trump's executive order on TikTok but continued a review of the platform by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the US (CFIUS), an intra-agency committee that reportedly threatened to ban TikTok last year if ByteDance didn't divest. The White House acknowledged last month that the review is continuing.

On Thursday, the House Energy and Commerce Committee by a 50-0 vote approved a bipartisan bill that would require ByteDance to divest TikTok and other applications it owns within six months of the bill's enactment in order to avoid a nationwide ban.

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, a Louisiana Republican, said that he would bring the bill to the House floor for a vote next week.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said a TikTok ban "should be looked at" but did not say whether he would bring the House bill to a Senate vote.

"The government is attempting to strip 170 million Americans of their constitutional right to free expression," a TikTok spokesperson said. "This will damage millions of businesses, deny artists an audience, and destroy the livelihoods of countless creators across the country."

Under the legislation, the platform would be prohibited from app stores — such as those on Apple and Google — as well as web-hosting services, until ByteDance divests.

But even if that were to happen, it's likely that users still could have access to the platform using virtual private networks that bypass such restrictions, said telecom analyst Roger Entner.

On Thursday, many TikTok users inundated congressional offices with calls, leading some to shut off their phones.

TikTok user "kelseywont", who has

“  
Fear mongering over China is nothing more than a thinly-veiled pretext for the US govt & its security state to deprive American citizens of TikTok: the one social media app outside of their direct control.”

Journalist Glenn Greenwald

15,900 followers and described herself as a single mother who lives in a "very small" apartment with her daughter, posted: "If the United States bans TikTok, I would be absolutely devastated. ... TikTok is opening doors for me to live somewhere nicer. I make a few extra hundred dollars a month from views now that I have a little bit of a following, and I now have the ability to afford a higher rent."

Another TikTok user "baldnewsnetworks" told his 1.9 million followers that the bill as proposed "also severs multiple millions of people and their livelihoods and jobs and shops that they've started, communities that they've grown, followings that they've had. ... One hundred and 70 million Americans, they don't care about you."

TikTok user Joe "Pags" Pagliarulo told his 328,000 followers: "Yes, I'm a conservative guy, but no, I don't think we should be banning TikTok. The reason why I'm here is because there are hundreds of millions of people here and they use this platform as a search engine literally."

Prominent voices also have weighed in on X, formerly Twitter.

"The lengths some in Congress will go to for more authority and control over Americans' freedom of speech never ceases to amaze me," US Senator Rand Paul, a Kentucky Republican, posted on X on Friday. "The TikTok bill recently advanced by the House would endanger the 1st amendment and empower the federal govt to ban social media platforms."

Mollie Hemingway, editor-in-chief of the Federalist website, told Fox News Sunday that "members of Congress who are conservative or Republican should also care at least as much about Google, which we saw recently with its Gemini AI, which was teaching divisive and historically inaccurate information."

"Google controls nearly all of our search; it's on nearly every American's phones," she said. "And Congress doesn't seem to care as much about what Google is doing to harm America as they care so much about TikTok, and they should."

Elon Musk, the owner of X, wrote: "Sounds like there is much more to be concerned about in this bill than who owns TikTok!"

"Fear mongering over China is nothing more than a thinly-veiled pretext for the US govt & its security state to deprive American citizens of TikTok: the one social media app outside of their direct control," journalist Glenn Greenwald said on his System Update podcast.

"This new, bipartisan bill to ban it, supported by Biden, is menacing."

Greenwald earlier posted to his 2.1 million followers on X, "Banning TikTok in the US means huge numbers (of) Americans will have to use Google and FB (Facebook), which the Govt can censor."

Agencies contributed to this story.

## BUSINESS

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## China set to narrow AI gap with firm efforts

Two sessions stress tech lead, focus on future, allaying concerns over lagging behind

By CHENG YU  
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

During the ongoing two sessions, the Chinese government has unequivocally put the development of the domestic artificial intelligence industry high on its agenda — and this should help allay any lingering concerns that the country is lagging behind advanced economies in key technologies, experts said.

The latest concerns arose in February when US firm OpenAI, which had created a sensation with ChatGPT, launched a text-to-video model called Sora, sending ripples through China's AI industry. Reactions ranged from admiration and appreciation to "AI anxiety".

Why weren't groundbreaking technologies like ChatGPT and Sora emerging in China? Is the AI gap between China and the United States widening? Has China lost the tech plot? Has its innovation drive lost its edge? Questions like that have stoked anxiety among both netizens and industry experts alike.

It is natural to have such anxiety, but what it indicates really is the underlying sense of urgency to catch up with huge changes brought by cutting-edge technologies, said Shen Hao, deputy chief engineer of the Shanghai Artificial Intelligence Research Institute.

Industry insiders believe Sora — it allows users to create photorealistic videos up to a minute long, all based on prompts they have written — will actually end up narrowing the AI gap between China and the US. For Chinese companies will likely soon ramp up their efforts to make similar products, given their unique advantages.

But they also believe Sora is a wake-up call for China as it shows there is a gap with US counterparts in terms of AI development, especially in aspects like computing power and talent.

"The gap between China and the US in AI mainly lies in (tech) direction. Once the direction is settled, Chinese companies can quickly catch up using their rapid learning capabilities," said Zhou Hongyi, founder and chairman of 360 Security Technology, who is also a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body.

Zhou explained that the direction could be transformer, a deep learning model that learns context and meaning by tracking relationships in sequential data. Both ChatGPT and Sora are based on transformers.

"There is a gap between China and the US in terms of AI development. But the gap is not as big as the one in semiconductor lithography machines.

"Considering that transformer, Sora or Sora-like products are all fundamentally 'software', such an AI gap between China and the US can be bridged within one to two years," Zhou said.

From December to February, more than 10 A-share companies operating in AI-related fields, including Wondershare, BroadV, Eclittech and Hanvon Technology, had all disclosed their investment and progress in the development of text-to-video models.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Although the current text-to-video technologies developed by Chinese companies are less effective than Sora, industry experts believe that China already has all the core infrastructure required to develop Sora-like products, including large language models, DALL-E 3, large-scale video data sets, AI computing power systems and large model development tool stacks.

LLMs serve as foundation models, or general-purpose models pre-trained on huge datasets. DALL-E 3 is an AI system that takes a text prompt as input and generates a new image as output.

Ma Xin, secretary-general of the

IEEE metaverse standards committee and chairman of the IEEE metaverse standards working group, said that Sora does have a strong visual impact, but it does not break away from ChatGPT and DALL-E to reach another level.

"Sora's capabilities are all perceived — they exist only in people's minds. In the short term, it can only help improve efficiency, in terms of interaction with people, but it's not possible to truly penetrate the industrial field," Ma said.

Zhou Chengxiang, an analyst from the Institutes of Science and Development of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said: "Although most

of the current major breakthroughs in AI technology emerge from US companies, latecomers also have obvious advantages. For instance, latecomers face fewer risks and uncertainties during the progress."

China has a huge opportunity to be at the forefront of the world in the application of AI technologies in the future, he said.

Concurred Wang Peng, a senior expert from the Tencent Research Institute. Wang said Sora's launch further proves that diffusion transformer is a feasible direction for multi-modal AI.

DTIs adhere to the best practices of vision transformers, which have

been shown to scale more effectively for visual recognition than traditional convolutional networks.

"It is still possible for major Chinese AI manufacturers to leverage existing resources to catch up with Sora's current level in about a year," he said.

Last month, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission, or SASAC, of the State Council, China's Cabinet, said the country will push centrally administered State-owned enterprises to integrate the development of AI into their overall planning, actively promote industrial renewal and accelerate the layout and devel-

opment of the AI industry.

On Tuesday, the Government Work Report submitted to the national legislature for deliberation assured that China will promote innovative development of the digital economy, actively develop the digital industry, transform traditional industries with digital technologies, and fully integrate digital technology into the real economy.

Specifically, the country will step up the launch of an AI Plus initiative, R&D and application of big data and AI, and build digital industry clusters with international competitiveness, the report said.

Chinese companies have also been racing to launch AI large models to compete with OpenAI's ChatGPT and GPT-4.0. Earlier, Baidu, SenseTime and AI startups such as Baichuan Intelligent Technology and Zhipu AI released their AI chatbots.

Zhou Yu, chairman of Beijing Fan-yu Technology Co, a startup specializing in natural language processing products and services, said that as the stakes are high, Chinese and US startups appear to be adopting different approaches to developing LLMs that drive generative AI.

"Founders of US startups put more emphasis on the research and development of underlying technology and groundbreaking innovations. The US is a world leader in terms of hardware and deep learning frameworks," Zhou said.

"Chinese AI startups focus more on applications, and those launching these startups are better at adapting technology to various industries, and commercializing different applications. They are also more flexible in creating personalized products and innovations," she added.

Zhou Hongyi from 360 said that 2024 should be the "year of application" for Chinese AI, believing that large models will have great potential in many vertical fields of enterprises this year.

"Developing a universal large model that surpasses GPT-4.0 may be challenging at the moment, but GPT-4.0 currently knows everything, yet is not specialized," Zhou said.

"If we can excel in a particular business domain by training a large model with unique business data and integrating it with many business tools within that vertical sector, such a large model will not only have intelligence, but also possess unique knowledge, even hands and feet. It is entirely possible for China to surpass GPT-4.0 in some vertical domains."

Not everyone agreed though. Wang Peng, a researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said China should make more efforts to fill the gap with the US in AI development, especially in key technologies and related supporters.

"Computing power, cloud servers and AI chips are critical to the AI industry, and their technical level and performance directly determine the depth of AI applications. China still has an obvious gap with the US in terms of these key drivers," Wang said.

Chen Zhi, a researcher with the Institute of Innovation and Development, the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development, said: "But for both China and the US, the path to AI development is challenging and requires substantial effort. If the two countries collaborate and complement each other in terms of resources, they can leverage their relative strengths to reap mutual benefits, promote technological progress and ensure the safe, trustworthy and reliable application of AI."

## Huawei, OpenAI show tech evolution is relentless

## REPORTER'S LOG

By Cheng Yu

When the United States removed China's tech giant Huawei Technologies Co from its global semiconductor supply chain in 2019, anxiety gripped the Chinese electronics industry.

But there was a silver lining too. Anxiety pushed Chinese firms to

work on chips for more advanced smartphones. For their part, the authorities concerned emphasized that self-reliance in key technologies is critical to the future.

What ensued in consequence over the past few years is that the whole Chinese tech ecosystem developed unprecedented capabilities that even the US probably had not anticipated or expected.

So, when Corporate China appeared to be anxious again in the wake of OpenAI's launch of its text-to-video model Sora in February, it gave me a sense of *deja vu*. I breathed easy.

For, I, being a dyed-in-the-wool

tech reporter, am aware that nearly four years after the US ban, Huawei has already unveiled its Mate 60 series phone powered by the Kirin 9000S chip, despite the obstacles. For the uninitiated, the Kirin 9000S performance is comparable to one- or two-year-old chips from Qualcomm, according to various testing teams.

It is by now clear that no technological breakthrough happens overnight — and no technological progress elsewhere, nor unfair policy curbs imposed by other countries, can stymie China for a long time.

So, at the people level, it helps to view technological advancements

rationality and become aware of the kind of challenges China is facing. As for the emergence of OpenAI's Sora, Chinese tech fans don't need to get anxious over local firms' perceived ceding of lead to their foreign counterparts. Huawei's experience should indicate that any sense of lagging behind in the cutting-edge technology will likely be temporary.

Truth to tell, China has the ability to develop text-to-video models. It's just a matter of time before similar products emerge eventually.

To reiterate, technological evolution doesn't happen overnight. Nor is it the sole preserve of a certain com-

pany. Patience is the watchword here.

When Huawei made its chip breakthrough, it was its US counterparts that turned anxious. Many voices blamed the US government, saying its ban merely ended up accelerating China's drive for self-reliance in advanced chips.

"Perhaps the most surprising fact about the Huawei breakthrough is that so many US government leaders were evidently surprised," said Gregory Allen, director of the Wadhvani Center for AI and Advanced Technologies, in a report about Huawei's new phone.

It is as though tech anxiety is shutting between the world's two largest economies, given that the US has always tried to make everything on its own.

But history shows no country can single-handedly drive or control the future of tech. As China always insists, in the era of globalization, any attempts by a country to impede globalization will only hurt its own interests.

As for ChatGPT, Sora and similar tech breakthroughs, their proliferation, application and commercialization are more important than their advent itself. I doubt if the US can progress on its own in these aspects.

It's worth recalling that OpenAI was founded with the intention of making the evolution of AI open. Recent developments seem to suggest that only openness and collaboration can lead to technological momentum that will benefit the global society.

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## New quality productive forces call for meaningful input from political advisers

The second session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, China's top political advisory body, concluded on Sunday in Beijing.



A resolution on a work report of the Standing Committee of the CPPCC National Committee, a resolution on a report on how the proposals from political advisers have been handled since the previous annual session, a report on the examination of new proposals, and a political resolution on the second session of the 14th CPPCC National Committee were all approved at the closing meeting of the session.

Consisting of more than 2,000 members from all walks of life, mostly experts, professionals and industrial leaders in their respective fields, the 14th CPPCC National Committee has played its part well over the past year, and made its due contribution to helping the country fulfill its socioeconomic development objectives. The country's gross domestic product grew by 5.2 percent in 2023 year-on-year, which was undoubtedly a hard-earned result given the tremendous downward pressure on the economy caused by internal and external uncertainties and risks.

China's development still faces many unpredictable factors this year. To achieve the annual economic growth target of around 5 percent will be challenging given the comparatively high base of last year.

That requires the country's political advisers to provide support for the authorities, as they work to stimulate domestic demand, foster innovation and smooth the economic cycle by demonstrating their expertise, knowledge and experience in the form of practical suggestions to aid the efforts of the policymakers and lawmakers.

The country has to vigorously shape new drivers for high-quality economic development and create new advantages; it must strive to strengthen its innovation-driven development, accelerate the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, and make great efforts to forge new competitiveness; and it must enhance the resilience and competitiveness of its industry and supply chains.

To these ends, the CPPCC National Committee members are expected to help put meat on the bones of the concept of "new quality productive forces". The development of such productive forces was introduced as one of the 10 key tasks for this year in the Government Work Report, which demands the nation strengthen its scientific and technological innovation, especially original and major scientific and technological innovations, and fight for key core technologies.

At the same time, the country has to persist in consolidating its agricultural foundation so it can firmly hold the rice bowl in its own hands, accelerate reform of its financial system, address the challenges posed by its fast aging society and negative population growth — China's population reduced 2.08 million last year and 15.4 percent of its population were aged 60 and above — and the lingering risks of local government debts that are aggravated by the contraction of the real estate sector and the impacts of the vicissitudes of geopolitical situations.

All of these are tough tests for the political advisers, who are expected to offer valuable insights and suggestions to the policymakers. The advisers need to find a proper position and clear direction for their active participation in the policymaking process, and perform their duties by better leveraging the characteristics and advantages of their respective sectors. They should conduct in-depth investigations and research in their fields of expertise so they can proactively offer recommendations and proposals to help the government successfully complete its tasks for the year and achieve its targets.

By being good advisers, helpers and partners to the ruling party, they can ensure it better meet the needs of the country and people in this challenging time.

## US in saddle for another attack on TikTok

To its millions of users in the country, TikTok, the second most popular social media platform in the United States, is a beloved tool of fun, fortune or free speech. To a number of Washington politicians, however, TikTok, with its developer ByteDance being Chinese and headquartered in China, is a tool of the Chinese government that they claim undermines individual privacy and threatens US national security.

So after various unsuccessful attempts to restrain TikTok over the past few years, a bipartisan group of US lawmakers has introduced the "Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act".

Neither the lawmakers nor the bill's government proponents call it a ban. But it will be, because it gives the US president the authority to ban any app under the pretext of protecting US citizens and the app concerned will be removed from app stores or websites in the US, unless its parent company divests it within 165 days. Another attempt at theft on a grand scale. Something that the US has shown it is not shy of doing on previous occasions.

Given the strong bipartisan support for the bill — all 50 members of the US House Committee on Energy and Commerce voted on Thursday to advance the legislation — many expect it to sail through all legislative reviews without much trouble. President Joe Biden has already promised to sign it into law.

Yet banning the app presents legal and moral dilemmas, if not minefields, in this critical election year and it could be a tricky test for either candidate. "This legislation will trample the First Amendment rights of 170 million Americans and deprive 5 million small businesses of a platform they rely on to grow and create jobs," a TikTok spokesperson said.

Jobs are no doubt a sensitive topic in election rhetoric. But the First Amendment implications may prove a far more rigid test, which is why all restrictions engineered so far have ended up abortive.

Although Donald Trump, Biden's immediate predecessor and potential rival again on the campaign trail later this year, has reversed course and dented the new bill against TikTok, he was the first to attempt a ban, and failed. Trump tried twice to ban TikTok via executive action, but failed with both attempts. Biden signed a bill that banned TikTok on government phones in 2022. But that has in no way dampened public enthusiasm for the app, and an outright ban on it has proved to be a step too far.

According to US constitutional law, Congress cannot simply ban TikTok or any social media platform unless it can prove it poses clear and present dangers that can't be addressed by any other means. But the lawmakers have yet to provide convincing proof for their allegations of TikTok's digital espionage or manipulation. On the other hand, the proposed law will definitely threaten free speech.

And there is a moral dilemma facing the Biden administration. It is certainly awkward for the US president to outlaw TikTok while employing it as an election tool himself. They have invited influencers on the app to briefings on the COVID-19 vaccines and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. More recently, the Biden campaign joined TikTok on the night of the Super Bowl. Dozens of social media stars — many of whom are active on TikTok — were invited to the White House last Thursday night, when Biden delivered his State of the Union address.

Such moves are described by the White House as those to meet the American people where they are. But isn't that at odds with its national security narrative?

The US people don't see TikTok as a threat. It is only US lawmakers who have no answers to the real problems in US society who are employing it as a saddle for their hobbyhorse to signal their political correctness.

Shi Yu



## Opinion Line

## Education and scientific research need to be invigorated to produce talents

The Government Work Report released last week during the annual gathering of the country's top legislature in Beijing identifies implementing the strategy for invigorating China through science and education as one of the top 10 tasks for governments at various levels this year, second only to the development of "new quality productive forces".

To implement that strategy is conducive to creating new development space and opening new tracks for development, and shaping new drivers for growth and forming new industrial advantages.

In accordance with the requirements for developing new quality productive forces, the government should try and smooth the virtuous cycle of education, science and technology, and talents, and deepen the institutional reform of the

education, economic, scientific and technological systems and talent mechanism.

To accelerate the development of new quality productive forces, the country must optimize the subject setting of higher education based on new trends in scientific and technological development and major national strategic needs, and cultivate talents that are urgently needed.

To that end, the authorities need to promote and establish a high-quality education system and run compulsory education well. More emphasis should be placed on all-round education rather than exam-oriented education. It is necessary to strengthen vocational education and lifelong education so as to enhance social human capital.

Researchers are at the forefront of developing new quality productive forces. They should strengthen basic research,

and seek to make breakthroughs in core technologies. The country is in an urgent need of establishing a network-based composite innovation system that integrates industry, academia and institutes. More also needs to be done to improve the science and technology evaluation system and incentive mechanism.

Education and scientific research are a long-term investment process. Governments must change their short-term investment concepts, reform their evaluation methods of and supports for basic research to nurture an institutional environment that encourages exploration and tolerates failure. Meanwhile, China should expand its international scientific and technological exchanges and attract more talents from foreign countries.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

## Structure more important than growth rate in trade

In the first two months of 2024, the total value of China's goods trade was 6.61 trillion yuan (\$919.8 billion), up 8.7 percent year-on-year, of which exports increased by 10.3 percent, imports increased by 6.7 percent, and the trade surplus was 890.87 billion yuan, up 23.6 percent year-on-year.

China and its major trading partners have maintained stable import and export scales. The United States is still the largest trading country with China, with a total bilateral trade value of 707.7 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 3.7 percent, accounting for 10.7 percent of China's foreign trade over the past two months.

In terms of regional trade, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' trade value with China increased by 8.1 percent, accounting for 15 percent of China's foreign trade; the European Union is the second-largest trading partner of China, accounting for 12.6

percent of China's foreign trade.

China's trade with Latin America and Africa has achieved a rapid growth of 13.9 percent, especially the export growth rate of more than 20 percent year-on-year.

Notably China's major export products have all achieved marked growth. Exports of mechanical and electrical products increased by 8.5 percent, accounting for nearly 60 percent of China's exports. The growth rate of the exports of traditional labor-intensive products reached 22.2 percent, indicating that China's traditional industries still have strong competitiveness.

China's imports of major commodities, such as natural gas, coal, iron ore and crude oil, increased steadily over the past two months. Indicators such as corporate finished product inventory, raw material inventory, and inventory growth have gradually stabilized at the bottom of the

cycle. With the recovery of market demand, imports of upstream primary products are on the rise, ushering in the starting point of a new round of inventory cycle recovery.

All signs show that China's foreign trade in 2024 is expected to be better than the previous year. Yet it should also be noted that the high growth rate of foreign trade may be difficult to maintain due to volatile world situations and the rise of protectionism. With the rising costs of domestic labor and raw materials, it is also difficult for the export of labor-intensive products to maintain rapid growth. Compared with the expansion of trade scale, China should do more to enhance the quality and efficiency of foreign trade and the continuous optimization and upgrading of its export product structure.

— THE PAPER.CN

## What They Say

## Chinese student deportations sign of shift in policy

The Chinese Foreign Ministry expressed disappointment and anger after a Chinese student was repatriated back to China from the United States last week. The student's visa was groundlessly revoked after being detained and questioned for more than 20 hours by US border control staff at San Francisco International Airport. This was at least the second time the ministry has responded to similar incidents in two months.

The US out of political purposes has been frequently harassing, interrogating, and deporting Chinese students without just cause since 2019. As Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning said at a regular news conference on Friday in Beijing, the acts by the US far exceed the scope of normal law enforcement and have a strong ideological bias.

The US moves seriously infringe on the legitimate and lawful rights and interests of

the persons concerned, disturb normal cross-border travel between China and the US and go against the common understandings reached by the two presidents on enhancing and facilitating China-US cultural and people-to-people exchanges. That's why China strongly deplores and firmly opposes this and has made solemn demarches to the US.

The US always portrays itself as being open to US-China cultural and people-to-people exchanges and welcoming Chinese students to study in the US. In fact, as Mao pointed out, the US keeps overstretching the concept of national security and takes selective, discriminatory and politically motivated law enforcement actions against Chinese students. These actions are essentially driven by the Cold War mentality held by certain people in the US.

Washington should realize that its unfair treatment of Chinese students has already prompted many students who plan to study abroad to divert their attention from the US to other developed countries. If it does not change course, the US will lose its appeal to Chinese students and travelers.

That will unavoidably affect the US' interests, as the Chinese students, a major body of international students in the US, are not only a main source of revenue for the country's schools and colleges but also a key source of foreign talents for US companies, labs and universities.

For decades, the US administration pinned high hopes on influencing young Chinese people to regard the US as a friendly and open country, and work for the improvement of Sino-US relations in the future. That the US takes the initiative to turn down the young people from China who look forward to studying in the US would have been unimaginable back then.

The only explanation is that Washington has de facto given up its plan of influencing the young Chinese people in that way. So although it still claims that it recognizes the importance of the people-to-people exchanges, its rude treatment of the Chinese students over the past few years is a clearly telling sign of a paradigm shift in its China policy.

— LIYANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | New Quality Productive Forces

**Editor's note:** The rise of new quality productive forces signals a transformative shift in China's economic landscape, with research and development serving as the driving force behind emerging technologies and the advancement of new quality productive forces. Two experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Sudheendra Kulkarni

# Why West misreads new development paradigm

In all ancient civilizations, especially in Asia, material and socio-cultural-spiritual development progressed more or less hand-in-hand. Hence, there was generally balanced human progress, even though all the civilizations had their share of shortcomings.

A major disruption occurred with the Industrial Revolution in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Spurred by new productive forces, the Industrial Revolution facilitated epoch-changing discoveries in science and innovations in technology, which exponentially raised many European nations' capability to generate material prosperity. As a result, European countries became fabulously wealthy.

However, the European countries used, rather misused, the new productive forces to consolidate their hold on their colonies in Asia, Africa and Latin America. They ruthlessly exploited and pillaged the colonies' resources, seeking to destroy native cultures and establish European civilizational superiority. Their fierce internal rivalry, though, led to two horrific world wars, which claimed millions of lives and ruined the economies of both the victims and perpetrators.

Hence, Western nations, despite their superior material wealth, became culturally, morally and spiritually impoverished. Even the birth of the United States was an outcome of the sordid history of colonization. European powers literally mass-annihilated almost all the Indigenous peoples in the Americas in their lust for land and riches.

The US, in the last century, contributed to the further explosive growth of productive forces with revolutionary advances in science and technology, especially in computers and the internet, heralding the "information age".

Nevertheless, these productive forces, being at the service of an uncontrolled capitalist system, have been misused leading to the extreme concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a minority. Moreover, US administrations have abjured neither the Western instinct for global domination nor the habit of using their country's powerful productive forces to

launch illegitimate wars.

The importance of the rise of "new quality productive forces" in China needs to be understood against this historical background. Many in the West have dismissed it as just another "buzzword" meant to divert the international community's attention away from China's economic slowdown.

However, the concept can be properly understood only in the context of the Chinese leadership's goal of developing "China into a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful". Seen from this perspective, the new quality productive forces, wedded to people-centric and planet-protective development, could be the harbinger of a significantly different kind of, and balanced, human development.

The rise of new quality productive forces in China will have both domestic and global impacts. It is accompanied by, and is contributing to, positive changes in the West-dominated world order. For the first time in modern history, China is surging ahead of Europe and the US in scientific research and innovations in technology, especially in deploying new technologies and innovations.

China's new quality productive forces are primarily in the areas of new energy, new materials, new hi-tech manufacturing systems, and new applications of artificial intelligence. In terms of the production and use of solar photovoltaic panels and other clean and green energy products, China is far ahead of the rest of the world. In fact, China installed more solar panels in 2023 than the US has ever built, setting new standards in low-carbon footprints.

Besides, there are more industrial robots in Chinese factories than in any other country. In space and ocean

research, too, China is advancing at a pace faster than the West. For instance, it is developing the world's first quantum communications satellite network. China now ranks No 1 in science and technology innovation clusters in the world.

While China is making rapid strides in developing its strategic industries, its agriculture and traditional industries are also becoming smarter and more innovative.

As a result of the huge innovation-led increases in productivity, quality and efficiency, the Chi-

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

nese economy is sure to navigate its current challenges satisfactorily.

However, China's new development paradigm differs from that of the West in the past in one crucial respect: Chinese leaders have time and again emphasized that China will never seek hegemony irrespective of how prosperous it becomes. China is not trying to replace the West in global domination. Instead, it aims to help improve the world order by making it equitable, fairer, more representative and more democratic.

Five features set apart China's new quality productive forces from the Western template.

First, China has not

become the world's second-largest economy by colonizing any other country or by exploiting or stealing other countries' resources. On the contrary, it has made much of the self-reliant technological advances despite the unlawful sanctions imposed by the US and other Western countries.

Second, China has not misused its technological prowess by waging deadly wars against far-off countries. As a matter of fact, it advocates resolving disputes through dialogue.

Third, China aims to use the scientific and technological breakthroughs primarily for boosting all-round development so its vast population can lead a high-quality life and the country can achieve common prosperity. It has already lifted about 800 million people out of extreme poverty within a short span of four decades — a feat unparalleled in history. The fact that the common people are living much better lives, as I have seen during my travels across the country, shows China is committed to using its resources to enrich its human capital, an obligation many Western governments have nearly abandoned.

Fourth, China is sharing its development experiences with other countries so they can learn from them and apply them, if necessary, to boost their development. As a matter of fact, the Belt and Road Initiative shows China is committed to helping build a community with a shared future for mankind.

And fifth, in its 5,000-year history, China has achieved great feats in arts, culture, and science and technology, while seeking harmony in society — and in the world at large — although it has suffered many setbacks and foreign aggressions. Now that China has become a moderately prosperous society in all respects, it views its development propelled by new quality productive forces as a contributor to the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and a driving force behind the creation of a better world order. Most Western observers fail to understand this civilizational wisdom guiding China's modernization.

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

Liu Hua

# China's advancements in global innovation dynamics inspiring

The launch of ChatGPT in November 2022 and the release of the first text-generated video model Sora last month symbolize key advancements in frontier technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing, big data, metaverse and Web 3.0. These advancements are catalyzing a new scientific and technological revolution, transforming every aspect of human life.

The World Intellectual Property Organization's Global Innovation Index 2022 identifies two primary innovation waves shaping the future: a "digital age wave" propelled by supercomputing, AI and automation; and a "deep science wave" driven by advances in biotechnology, nanotechnology, and new materials. The convergence of these waves promises to redefine innovation across industries.

According to the WIPO's World IP Report 2022, there has been 172 percent growth in digital innovations from 2016-20, with AI, big data and cloud computing leading this surge. Three critical trends underscore the evolving landscape of global innovation.

The first is the eastward shift of innovation hubs. Asia now accounts for 70 percent of global IP applications, up from 50 percent two decades ago, with East Asia being host to six of the top 10 science and technology clusters. This shift reflects the leading global position of Asia in the advancement of technology.

The second is collaborative

exchange of innovation. The top science and technology clusters are deepening collaboration, particularly in patent applications and research publications, highlighting the importance of openness and cooperation in the innovation process.

The third trend is of enterprise-led innovation. Enterprises are spearheading the advancement in technologies, with companies like Mitsubishi Electric, Sony, BOE, Baidu, Xiaomi, Huawei, Oppo and ZTE leading the charge in their respective clusters, reflecting the pivotal role of enterprises in the innovation ecosystem.

Frontier technologies such as AI and the metaverse highlight the growing importance of and challenges facing IP in fostering growth and development. The challenges include safeguarding AI algorithms, establishing patent and copyrights criteria for AI innovations and AI-generated content, and integrating virtual and real-world assets' intellectual property rights (IPR). The evolving digital landscape calls for an adaptable IPR system that would promote innovation in a way that benefits all stakeholders, including small and medium-sized enterprises, women and youths.

The WIPO has been at the forefront of addressing these issues through its WIPO Conversation on IP and Frontier Technologies series. Since 2019, eight sessions have convened global experts from among stakeholders at all levels.

A particularly impactful session

was the eighth, dedicated to generative AI and IP, attracting more than 5,000 participants from 162 countries to discuss the implications of AI on IP policy and regulation. The upcoming ninth session, themed "Training the Machines — Bytes, Rights, and the Copyright Conundrum", scheduled for March 13-14, will focus on the critical role of training data in AI development, addressing quality, bias and accessibility issues. The session aims to foster a deeper understanding of training data's influence on the IP ecosystem, inviting a wide range of participants to contribute to the future of AI and creative industries.

## China's advancements in frontier technologies

China has made remarkable achievements in digital frontier technologies like AI, 5G and cloud computing, becoming a leader in innovation. China's information and communications technology (ICT) patents comprise 14 percent of the global total. By the end of 2023, the most rapidly growing sectors in China's domestic patent registrations were IT methods for management, computer technology and basic communication processes, with year-on-year increases of 59.4 percent, 39.3 percent and 30.8 percent respectively. This growth underscores China's robust innovations in digital technology, significantly contributing to the digital economy's high-quality development, which now exceeds 50 trillion yuan (\$6.94 trillion) and accounts for more than 40 percent of its GDP.



*The author is director of the WIPO Office in China.*

Intellectual property has emerged as a crucial driver of innovation and creativity, playing a vital role in China's high-quality development strategy. To develop new quality productive forces, it is imperative that China strengthen intellectual property protection. In February, the WIPO Office in China highlighted the achievements of Chinese companies in frontier technologies, providing a platform for sharing best practices and exploring IP's role in innovation.

Tech giants such as Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, Huawei, BOE, Douyin and Oppo are leading the way through technological innovation. In fact, Huawei invested more than 80 billion yuan in R&D in the first half of 2023 alone, securing numerous patents, trademarks and designs, and it is the largest user of WIPO's PCT system for international patent registration. Such IPR protection supports Huawei's growth but also helps advance the ICT industry.

Additionally, new energy companies such as BYD, GCL ET, and Goldwind are promoting innovation in blade battery technology (lithium battery), photovoltaic panels and wind turbines, enhancing

## Milestones in IP and innovation in 50 years

The 50th anniversary of the collaboration between the WIPO and China, celebrated in Beijing and Geneva, underscores China's tradition of innovation, which goes back 5000 years. WIPO Director General Daren Tang said the occasion was a testament to China's remarkable progress in IPR and its pivotal role in leveraging IP to foster socioeconomic development.

China's contribution to global IP filings is unparalleled, holding leading positions in the WIPO's PCT, Madrid, and Hague systems for international IP registrations. By the end of last year, China had set a new global benchmark with 4.99 million valid invention patents, including 4.01 million domestic patents — making it the first country to surpass 4 million valid domestic invention patents.

In the 2023 Global Innovation Index, China ranked 12th; it was the only middle-income country to break into the top 15. This achieve-

ment is further bolstered by its leadership in science and technology clusters, boasting 24 of the world's top clusters, including Shenzhen-Hong Kong-Guangzhou, Beijing and Shanghai-Suzhou, which are respectively ranked 2nd, 4th, and 5th globally.

The ascent of China's innovation-driven economy reflects comprehensive strength across all facets of the innovation ecosystem, marking a significant chapter in the country's enduring legacy of creativity and invention.

The WIPO envisions a bright future for innovation and creativity in China, and it remains dedicated to working alongside Chinese stakeholders to harness the opportunities and tackle the challenges presented by emerging technologies. The WIPO's goal is to cultivate a more open and inclusive global IP ecosystem, and using the IP system to promote innovation, sustainable development and economic growth.

Serving as the WIPO's arm in China, the WIPO Office in China will act as a crucial link, fostering connections between the market, stakeholders and the media. Embracing new technologies, new generations and new initiatives, the WIPO Office in China aims to highlight China's exemplary IP practices and accomplishments, and provide targeted, timely and tailored services in the country to promote new quality productive forces.

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

## GLOBAL VIEWS



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

JOSEF GREGORY MAHONEY

## No ghost in the machine

US wants world to imagine China's EVs as a threat rather than a means to reduce emissions

For decades, the United States has been hostage to domestic oil and automotive industries. It accounts for the highest per capita emissions in the world, and President Joe Biden believes transitioning to electric vehicles is vital for national and even global well-being. The problem, however, is that aside from Tesla, most US EV makers aren't competitive, and even Tesla is too pricey for a lot of consumers. Furthermore, the US lacks the manufacturing capacity, the most advanced battery technologies, and even the capacity to produce a national network of charging stations.

China is mass producing high-quality and affordable EVs, charging stations and renewable energy products, including solar panels and wind turbines. And yet, Washington is doing what it can to prevent US citizens from having the right to buy these products, effectively prolonging their unsustainable dependence on fossil fuels. Why?

It's easy enough to see that the US is afraid of a rising China displacing its traditional dominance in oil and legacy automotive production, and is worried about what happens to the dollar in a post-oil global economy. So it's not surprising that Washington is saying the primary justification for blocking Chinese EVs relates to national security. Nevertheless, the security concerns being hyped are rather spurious, claiming for example that Chinese EVs can be used by the Chinese government for spying and acts of sabotage.

Keep in mind that Chinese EVs don't actually have a presence in the US market given all the discrimination they face and that Chinese EV companies are not State-owned enterprises. Therefore, the keyword here seems to be "imagine", as was repeatedly said by Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo numerous times in recent remarks. She said imagine if hundreds of thousands of EVs made in China — which she described as a "foreign adversary" — were driving on US roads, then "it's not difficult to imagine the security risk this would pose". Even so, she imagines it for us, telling us that we should see Chinese EVs as smartphones on wheels, collecting sensitive data about US drivers, EV cameras recording videos of US infrastructure, warning that "someone in Beijing" might control them remotely, perhaps like enemy drones.

Such risks, even if they did exist, could be easily mitigated, as Tesla did in the Chinese market, as security experts have pointed out. However, real solutions are not

**In short, there are many reasons why the US is afraid of Chinese EVs, and why it will continue to restrict their access to the US market. Nevertheless, Chinese EVs will continue to expand globally, and sooner or later US consumers will find themselves left further behind, stepping on the gas, trying to catch up.**

wanted in the US. Rather, in an era where the US cries wolf over any Chinese tech, from Huawei to TikTok, no amount of accommodation seems possible because the US always points to the possibility of a ghost in the machine, where the specter haunting the US, we're told, is the Communist Party of China.

What's funny of course is that even Huawei has an EV line now, and one can well imagine the US horror of a Huawei EV on US roads, quietly tracking how many times people secretly visit a McDonald's Drive Thru well past their dinner time, and then selling that information to Taco Bell. One can only assume that some people would like to take such secrets and infidelities to an early grave.

The Chinese position is that the US fears competition, not spying or sabotage, and that the real goal here is US protectionism. Presently US tariffs on Chinese EVs stand at 27 percent. US citizens can qualify for substantial federal income tax credits for purchasing an EV, but only if it or its battery isn't made in China. Further, Biden claims that US protections are warranted to counter Chinese protections, that the Chinese EV industry benefits from Chinese State subsidies and policy supports, and that international EV companies have faced discriminatory practices in China. Ironically, the development of China's EV industry is already emerging as a textbook case study of free market competition. Indeed, the fact that Chinese companies were forced to compete with international companies such as Tesla, which were encouraged to produce and sell in China, has been cited as a key reason why China has emerged as the global leader in EVs after more than a decade of hard work.

Meanwhile, US "experts" argue that China might put its overca-

capacity to work and start dumping EVs in the US market regardless of tariffs, thereby justifying increasing efforts to keep them out of the market entirely. That's extremely unlikely, but if it happened, then what an incredible boon for US consumers and the environment.

Protectionism aims largely at protecting domestic industries, but in fact, US policy also wants to damage the Chinese economy, above all in areas where it enjoys comparative advantages or anything related to high technology. The US understands that China has substantially closed the technology gap that previously made China vulnerable to foreign aggression and hegemony, emerging in the new era as one of the world's leading technological societies. This is another reason why the US is moving against Chinese EVs and other technology products, including suppressing China's access to advanced chips, part of a broader US strategy aiming to encircle and suppress Chinese modernization overall.

In a difficult campaign for reelection, Biden is trying to appeal to voters in the industrial Midwest, including Michigan, home to many of the big US car companies that have failed to offer competitive EV products. While Biden previously has joined autoworker picket lines during strikes, his policies toward Israel's attacks on Gaza have alienated a huge block Muslim voters residing in Michigan. Meanwhile, former president and current leading Republican candidate Donald Trump has attacked the very idea of climate change as a "communist plot", one designed to transfer the US' automotive and energy dominance to China. We all know where he stands and what will happen if he returns to office.

In short, there are many reasons why the US is afraid of Chinese EVs, and why it will continue to restrict their access to the US market. Nevertheless, Chinese EVs will continue to expand globally, and sooner or later US consumers will find themselves left further behind, stepping on the gas, trying to catch up.

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CAI CUIHONG AND ZHANG RUOYANG

## Globalization of science interrupted

Humanity faces common challenges such as climate change, digital divide and poverty, which are in desperate need of global cooperation and solutions inspired by technological advancements

As a nation's capacity of technological innovation is increasingly getting linked with its national strength, wealth and security, technology has turned into a focal point of major country competition, and the politicization of technological issues has emerged as a prominent problem. Geopolitical competition is exerting an ever larger impact on technological innovation. As a consequence, the global technology landscape is becoming more and more divided.

On the one hand, some major countries view technological innovation as a core capacity crucial for national security. They have thus scaled up efforts to develop key high-tech industries including artificial intelligence, new energy vehicle batteries, semiconductors, microelectronics and quantum information by rolling out incentive policies to lure tech industries back home and encouraging investment in research and development while restricting exports of cutting-edge technologies.

In the frontier fields such as cyberspace and aerospace, several major countries have strengthened strategic planning, issued policy guidelines and enhanced infrastructure building. Take the case of the semiconductor industry as an example. The United States, the European Union, the United Kingdom and Japan have unveiled road maps to guide the development of this industry.

In February, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy issued an updated list of critical and emerging technologies — covering areas such as AI, energy and semiconductors — that are potentially significant to the US' national security. The list will be used to inform the US and its allies and partners to advance technology cooperation and devise technology development strategies.

On the other hand, the global technology landscape risks getting divided — in some areas, division and fragmentation have already occurred. The US is attempting to link its technology policies with ideology in order to create an exclusive economic circle with its allies. The country's tech war against China has not de-escalated since 2023 though the narrative has changed from "decoupling" to "de-risking", a term coined by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in March 2023, which quickly gained traction in the US. In May,

"de-risking" was included in the communique issued after the G7 Hiroshima Summit, signifying that it has become an official economic policy of the G7 member states toward China.

While European countries' primary goal is to enhance their capacity to withstand risks and economic pressure, the US is attempting to isolate and contain China economically and technologically by cutting China off from cutting-edge technologies in the name of "de-risking". This is far beyond the normal scope of competition between nations. In essence, it is intended to preserve the US' dominance in technology by dividing the global technology system and intensifying protectionism, which run against the interests of a majority of countries in the world. Since 2023, the US has not relented on imposing sanctions against Chinese internet and telecommunications companies, and, in the semiconductor industry it has joined hands with its allies to exert investment and export controls targeting China.

In January, the US, Japan and the Netherlands reached a deal on restricting exports of advanced chip-making machinery to China; in February, the US Department of Justice and the Department of Commerce launched the Disruptive Technology Strike Force to tighten the enforcement of export controls; in March, the US issued the "guardrails" provision in the CHIPS and Science Act, which prohibits the recipients of CHIPS incentives funding from investing in semiconductor manufacturing in China for 10 years; in August, US President Joe Biden signed the Outbound Investment Executive Order, which bans US enterprises and citizens from investing in cutting-edge technologies such as semiconductors in China.

Following the US' steps, Japan and the Netherlands have tightened curbs on China's access to advanced technologies in a bid to reshape the global technology and industrial chains landscape, exacerbating the division of the global technology landscape.

The governance and regulation of emerging technologies are also an arena of competition among major countries. The US and European countries have deepened cooperation in creating a unified front and a "small circle" to promote their standards and rules in the governance and regulation of the AI industry and take

the lead in the area.

In the field of AI regulation, the EU has launched a debate over its ethics, and pushed for the legislation of governing the utilization of AI. The bloc has also expanded cooperation with other countries. After passing a draft act on AI regulation in June, EU officials held negotiations with Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, India and the Philippines over the issue, seeking to promote the AI Act across the world. On Dec 8, EU lawmakers and member states reached a political agreement on the key provisions of the AI Act, making it the first-ever comprehensive legal framework on AI worldwide.

As technology increasingly becomes a key strategic foundation for a country's economic and military strength, and determines the well-being of its people in an unprecedented way, it is also getting more and more closely intertwined with national security. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine crisis have intensified the trend of politicizing technological issues.

Currently, humanity faces common challenges such as climate change, the digital divide and poverty, which are in desperate need of global cooperation and solutions inspired by technology advancements. To this end, certain countries should shun the mentality of zero-sum confrontation, and actively participate in global technology cooperation.

That being said, some countries should abandon their confrontational mindset of the global science and technology system, actively participate in and promote the globalization of science and technology, and improve their level of openness. On the one hand, China has been enhancing its capacity for scientific and technological innovation, and on the other hand, it has actively shared knowledge and technology through global development initiatives, injecting impetus into global scientific and technological exchanges.

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TONG JIAHANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

# CULTURE



## LORE of the RINGS



Exquisite jade discs and rings help illustrate how ancient Chinese civilizations learned to shape intractable natural resources, and in doing so, developed a thriving culture that still resonates today, **Zhao Xu** reports.

**Above:** A jade disc with grooved concentric circles from the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century–11th century BC). **Left and right:** A pair of jade slit-ring earrings from the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century–771 BC).

If there's one type of item that embodies the ancient Chinese jade story, it could well be *jue*, known to Western researchers as a "slit ring". The circular jade ware item features a slim opening that runs from its outer edge, across the radius, to its holed center. Believed to be an ear adornment, the oldest, dated to some 9,200 years ago, were found at a Neolithic site dubbed "the cradle of the Chinese jade culture".

Measuring 400,000 square meters, the site, known as Xiaonanshan (Little Southern Mountain), is located in the far north-eastern tip of the country, on the western bank of the Ussuri River overlooking Russia. There, along with the jade slit rings, archaeologists have unearthed more than 200 pieces of jade ware, including discs, tubes and flat beads, all similarly aged.

"The discovery has helped to make Northeast Asia the place where evidence of the world's earliest jade usage is found," says Zuo Jun from the prestigious Nanjing Museum, where he was curator to a grand exhibition tracing the entire trajectory of China's jade history. "This is no coincidence: Stonework was highly developed in that region during the early stage of the Neolithic Age. And we have every reason to believe that people who were experts with stones were also good at looking for, and working with, the more beautiful ones."

And they were very, very choosy, says Zuo. "Being beautiful was not the only criteria — our ancestors were looking for a specific type of stone with a soft shine, one that modern-day geologists call 'nephrite'."

A silicate of calcium and magnesium, nephrite is not a mineral species, but rather a mineral aggregate formed by tightly interlocking microscopic crystals. This chemical structure has given the stone a sturdiness second only to that of black diamond, a remarkable trait from which metaphors of unbreakability and tenacity would be extracted some 7,000 years later.

Yet, none of the interpretations would be possible without the tenacious and ingenious efforts of those who were behind the jade discs and slit rings of Xiaonanshan. By finding ways to work the most "intractable" stone into primitive pieces of art, they had helped to not only bring out its sheen, but uncovered a charm that would hold eternal appeal for those who came after them.

"In no other region of the world has this material been worked with such skill in such a long and unbroken tradition," says Zuo. "From the very beginning, there was the realization that to fully tap into the potential of nephrite jade, one must give up the approach long adopted for the making of stone tools."

Since the Paleolithic period, stone tools



"In no other region of the world has this material been worked with such skill in such a long and unbroken tradition."

**Zuo Jun**, jade expert from Nanjing Museum



**Top:** A jade disc with mythical animal patterns from the Warring States Period (475–221 BC). **Above:** The jade pig-dragon from Hongshan culture, dated to around 3500 BC. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY NANJING MUSEUM AND TENG SHU-PING TO CHINA DAILY

had been made from rocks such as flint, shale and obsidian. All three, while dry, are very brittle, allowing stone flakes to be produced with repeated pounding. These flakes, sharp around the edges, made for ideal cutting tools.

Nephrite jade is different in that its unusual obdurateness forbids the easy separation of one part from the rest by means of chipping. Besides, it was simply too precious to be treated in a haphazard manner, which would almost certainly cause huge waste and would never be able to produce the delicate shapes intended for the material by its handlers.

String saw — that was the answer to the problem from the jade artisans of Xiaonanshan. Chunks of jade were sliced apart as the string, sturdy enough to sustain the repeated friction, was pulled back and forth against the jade's surface until it started to sink deeper and deeper, into the material. More than that, the technique proved very effective when it came to achieving precise and minute control over the shaping of the material — traces of string sawing, visible as a series of curved undulations, can be found in the slits of the Xiaonanshan *jue*.

"In Chinese, we have the phrase '*yi rou ke gang*', meaning 'to subdue the strong with the gentle,'" says Zuo. "It conveys the idea of employing a flexible approach to overcome or deal with a powerful, rigid force, an idea

embraced by almost everyone in ancient China, from philosophers and military strategists to martial artists.

"Yet, few had any idea that the use of a string saw, as we call it today, was perhaps one of the earliest and most successful attempts at breaking the seemingly unbreakable using subtle force, applied resolutely and relentlessly," he says.

While the string saw was doing its job, abrasives like quartz sand were continually added where the string chafed against the jade. They were moist, and therefore clingy, following the movement of the string. The aim was to expedite the reduction of jade with the help of a tougher material. (The nephrite grains resulting from this process served the same purpose.)

In a seminal piece of writing, Tang Chung, a leading expert in ancient Chinese jade, suggests a possible link between the string saw and the hunting bows widely used during the Neolithic period. In both cases, an extremely tough cord — believed to have probably been made of wild bull or deer tendons — was involved.

Within the vast area of what was to become China, the gradual adoption of the string-sawing technique followed — quite naturally — a similar north-to-south direction as the spread of jade culture.

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**Top:** A jade slit-ring shaped dragon from the late Shang Dynasty. **Above:** The Neolithic site of Xiaonanshan, dubbed "the cradle of Chinese jade culture".



**Top:** A jade slit-ring shaped dragon from the late Shang Dynasty. **Above:** Thin pieces of jade found inside the stone-walled platform at the Neolithic site of Shimao.

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# Narrative arc set in stone

With the help of jade, people who inhabited the vast area of prehistoric China had engaged in spiritual and artistic exchanges, exchanges that would eventually allow them to acquire a common cultural identity without which the notion of China would not have existed," says Teng Shu-ping, a leading scholar of ancient Chinese jade.

She has partly based her conclusion on the study of one particular type of ritual jade known as *cong*, which typically features a cylindrical tube encased in a square prism.

Today, for the general public, the most famous jade *cong* pieces come from the Liangzhu culture, a regional civilization that existed in the Yangtze River Delta region between 3300 and 2300 BC. The most finely made examples bear, across their surface, patterns of a mythical man donning a feather headdress and seemingly riding a big-eyed, wide-mouthed beast — interpreted separately as both ancestor-god and divine animal.

Well studied, they are long held by many Chinese archaeologists as the ancestors for the jade *cong* found in other, later cultures, including Qijia (2300-1500 BC), a late Neolithic to early Bronze Age culture centered around the upper Yellow River region in today's Gansu province in northwestern China.

One of them is Fang Xiangming, head of the Zhejiang provincial institute of cultural relics and archaeology, who had once spent more than six months recording many Liangzhu jade items through hand-drawing. "Never underestimate the ability of our ancestors to pass on materials and ideas across distances and generations," he says. "Such exchanges may have been enabled by a trans-regional network maintained by the elite members of the various cultural groups."

Teng both agrees and disagrees with Fang. "The exchanges had always been taking place, to an extent that often challenges our imagination. However, we shouldn't assume that the jade *cong* had originated in Liangzhu in eastern China. For one, jade *cong* pieces have also been discovered in Miaodigou culture, which existed between 3500 and 2900 BC in Shaanxi province, northwestern China."

"In fact, I am tempted to think the contrary."

In an article she wrote that appears in the catalogue for an exhibition of ancient Chinese jade, held previously at the Nanjing Museum, Teng elaborated on her idea. "By 3500 BC, jade pieces were being made across China to serve various purposes, among which was the facilitation of communication between the heaven and the earth, the mortal and the immortal," she wrote. "While eastern China at the time featured mainly watery lowlands — it still does today — the expansive terrain in western

It was the continual, omnidirectional flow of communication among the nation's ancient cultures that helped to form the foundation of Chinese civilization as we know it today, **Zhao Xu** reports.

China gradually rose up to form plateaus with a dry climate. The two parts were further divided by a chain of mountain ranges that runs north-east to southwest.

"These geographical and environmental factors had most likely worked their way into the jade cultures that developed relatively independently in the two vast regions. In the east, a strong animal worship formed; in the west, primitive veneration of celestial bodies evolved," she says, citing Liangzhu and Qijia as salient examples of the two traditions.

Asked whether this was because the warm, humid weather of eastern China was more of a haven for animals, while the western highlands lent their inhabitants an unimpeded panorama, making them feel closer to the heavens, Teng says that, although this might be the case, she would generally refrain from saying so, since jade and pottery items produced in the western regions around this time also featured a variety of animal images.

## Spiritual evolution

The Nanjing Museum exhibition, which ended last month, included a rather special piece believed to have belonged to an early stage of the Liangzhu culture. Featuring on one end a bird perching atop a beast held up high by a kneeling man, the piece tapers down toward the other end to form a pointy finish, which probably had been once inserted into a wooden pole to form a scepter-like wand wielded by an officiant during ritual ceremonies.

"Seeing birds piercing through clouds or beasts roaming the boundless earth aroused in the people of Liangzhu a sense of devotion they had always harbored toward the heaven and the earth, the holy spirits of which they believed these animals embodied," says Zuo Jun, curator of the exhibition.

Reflecting on the symbolism of the iconic Liangzhu jade *cong*, Fang believes that they amount to an enunciation of "the Liangzhu people's view of the universe."

"From the top to bottom, the cylinder — if it can be called one — has a very slight taper. If you have the experience of standing in an open field surveying your surroundings, with an unobstructed view, you would know that the earth is a circle — or at least appears so to you — with its border defined by where it meets the heaven. The heaven, of course, is also a circle, albeit a bigger one encompassing you," he says.

Teng would have said almost exactly the same thing about the jade *cong* from both Miaodigou and Qijia. Only that she believes the elevated terrains of western China, the prehistoric jade tradition of which is exemplified by the two cultures, is where the jade *cong* had originated, not the low-lying delta home of the Liangzhu culture.



Six archetypes of ritual jade: (from top) jade *huang* in the shape of a double-headed dragon, from the Warring States Period (475-221 BC); jade disc from Qijia culture (2300-1500 BC); jade *gui* from the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC); jade *zhang* from the Western Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-771 BC); jade *cong* from Qijia culture; and jade *hu* in the shape of a tiger, dated to between 2200 and 1800 BC.

"The Liangzhu jade *cong* — if they could be called so — were derived from a type of wide jade bracelet known today as *cong*-style bracelets, that have been unearthed in large numbers from the sites. Therefore, although the Liangzhu *cong* did bear a striking resemblance to the jade *cong* from western China, they are better examined within their own cultural framework," she says.

"While the *cong*-style bracelets continued to exist toward the end of the Liangzhu culture, the Liangzhu jade *cong* gradually stopped being pieces of ornamental art to take on other, more significant duties, including functioning as a cultural emblem and a communicative tool between the terrestrial and the celestial." (The Liangzhu *cong* believed to have fallen into the latter category are often too chunky or feature an opening that's too small for a hand to be put through, ruling out the possibility of them being wrist accessories.)

To better perform that function, the jade *cong* that appeared during the later stages of the Liangzhu culture tended to grow higher and "be closer to the heaven", to use Zuo's words.

"One of the ways ancient people performed sacrificial ceremonies using ritual jades was to burn them, believing that the smoke generated in the process would help accomplish the mission," says Zuo. "We know this thanks to what was recorded on the oracle bones during China's Shang Dynasty between the 16th and 11th centuries BC."

According to similar recordings, ritual jades had also been buried or sunk in water in honor of the earth and the rivers. At Shimao, a late Neolithic to early Bronze Age site in Shenmu, Shaanxi province, northwestern China, ceremonial jade axes and shovels have also been found inside the stone-walled platforms of a palatial complex, dated to around 2000 BC.

## Circles of influences

Reflecting on the differing views concerning the origin of jade *cong* and their westward — or eastward — spread, Zuo believes that a lot more archaeological evidence is needed before "we can arrive tentatively at any conclusion."

"Chances are we may never be totally convinced one way or the other, since the very nature of such exchanges is that it was a two-way street. And, what actually happened must have been infinitely more complicated than what we could possibly gather from all vestiges of the past," he says. "What we do know, however, is that the cumulative total of these cultural interactions extended across both time and space. And it included the formation of a whole set of rules governing the use of ritual jades, articulated for the first time in the book *Rites of Zhou*."

Although the book was once tentatively attributed to a younger brother

of the founder of the Zhou Dynasty (c. 11th century-256 BC), these days, a greater number of scholars believe that it was written somewhere between the 5th and 3rd century BC. In it, the author came up with the concept of six archetypes of ritual jade, which, apart from the prismatic tube that is *cong*, also included *bi*, a disc with a hole in the center, which Teng believes was born out of ancient people's observation of the sun's journey across the sky.

Another two types are *hu*, which took not only the shape of a tiger but also its pronunciation in Chinese, and *huang*, which often resembled a double-headed dragon or — on fewer occasions — a tiger. (For those in the know, the arch or half-ring shaped *huang* is highly evocative of one ancient character that had been etched on oracle bones during China's Shang Dynasty between the 16th and 11th century BC, meaning "rainbow".)

Teng believes that her theory applies here. "The jade *hu* and *huang*, connected to the worship of animal spirits, were mainly found at prehistoric sites in eastern China," she says. "As to *bi*, although they were much more ubiquitous during the period, the bigger ones that were clearly ritualistic rather than ornamental seem to have made their first appearance in Miaodigou culture around 3500 BC, where they were buried separately from the jade *cong*."

"The two were later combined in Qijia culture, clearly serving as two of its dominating forms of ritual jade as they both expressed the cosmological views of the people," she says.

On top of these four, the Zhou people added another two: *gui* and *zhang*, the shape of which indicated that both had developed from weaponry. "The symbolic significance of the jade *gui* and *zhang* attested to the ascending role of an army in a society, as that society became a powerful state," says Zuo.

Zuo was talking about Xia (c. 21st century-16th century BC), considered by most to be the first dynasty in traditional Chinese historiography. One of the most recognizable types of ritual jade associated with Xia is known today as *yazhang*, or "toothed *zhang*" thanks to the two rows of small teeth jutting out from right above its handle. (It's worth noting that although the academic world has debated over whether direct link had existed between the *yazhang* of Xia and the *zhang* as listed by the *Rites of Zhou*, all agree that both symbolized military power.)

Up until now, four pieces of jade *yazhang* have been unearthed at Erlitou, an archaeological site in Central China's Henan province. The site is long deemed to be the one-time capital of Xia, a Bronze Age culture that existed in the Yellow River region, from where its influence rippled outward in all directions, across the entire land of modern-day China and beyond.

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PHOTOS PROVIDED BY NANJING MUSEUM AND TENG SHU-PING TO CHINA DAILY



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## String: A story told by works of friction



A jade ceremonial blade from the Shang Dynasty. Ritual jades developed from weaponry attested to the ascending role of the military in society.



**From top:** Yazhang from the Xia Dynasty (c. 21st century-16th century BC); a ritual item featuring a bird atop a beast and a man.

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About 1,200 kilometers to the southwest of Xiaonanshan lies another important Neolithic site known as Xinglongwa. The Xinglongwa culture, believed to have prospered between 6200 and 5400 BC, is noted for its pottery and jade creations. In fact, some scholars consider it to represent the beginning of nephrite jade's preeminence in East Asia, pointing to what they call a "regional standardization" that dictated both the selection and production of its jade ware. A yellow-green nephrite was favored above all else, and the use of the string saw became de rigueur.

"In Xinglongwa societies, nephrite jades were rare, exquisite and enduring objects, which are qualities within the modern definition of precious stones," goes a line from a co-authored chapter that forms part of *The Oxford Handbook of Early China*, published by the Oxford University Press.

And for exactly that reason, jades were associated with special members of the Xinglongwa settlements, which were "exceptionally large for their time period" to quote from the same chapter. "Those who were buried with jades often had other exceptional burial goods, such as animal sacrifices and human skull accessories," it goes.

Almost exclusively found within the burials were slit rings, which, judging by their relative position to the human remains, were most likely to have been worn as earrings.

The influence of the culture was felt far and wide. From the fifth millennium BC, Xinglongwa nephrite slit rings, pendants and beads spread into the Amur River region, coastal Far East Russia and the Sea of Japan region. (It's worth noting that the world's earliest nephrite jade usage is believed to have taken place nearly 30,000 years ago, during the Upper Paleolithic period in Russia Siberia, although there's no evidence indicating that this tradition was somehow related to the jade culture of Xiaonanshan.)

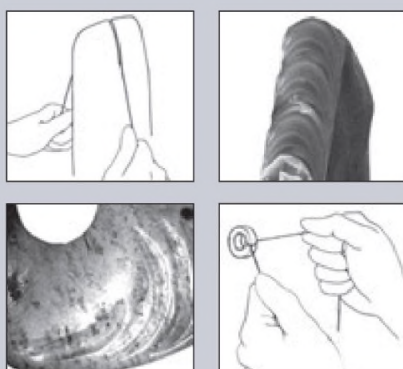
Down south, imitations of the Xinglongwa jade ware, realized using other materials, including quartzite, talcum and seashells, were discovered in major Neolithic cultural groups in the Yangtze River Delta region, including Majiabang.

Lasting between 5000 and 3900 BC, the Majiabang culture is of special significance in the sense that it eventually gave rise to the Songze culture (3900-3300 BC), which culminated in the formation of the Liangzhu culture (3300-2300 BC).

"An early regional state" — that's what Liangzhu represented according to the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, which in 2019 put Liangzhu's archaeological ruins on its World Heritage List.

Those who arrived at that conclusion must have examined, very closely, the splendid jade creations of Liangzhu artisans, which testify to the existence of a unified belief system, one of the benchmarks for early statehood. And judging by the tooling marks left on these creations, the use of a string saw seems to have been employed, not diligently, but religiously.

"I am tempted to believe that it was not a mere technical decision. The Liangzhu jade workers, in their single-minded adoption of the string saw, were aiming for something other than handiness and efficiency, something that's deeply spiritual," Tang writes.



**Top:** Map of major archaeological sites: 1. Xiaonanshan; 2. Xinglongwa; 3. Hongshan; 4. Liangzhu; 5. Qijia; 6. Miaodigou. **Above:** The usage of a string saw and the traces left by it.

The scholar has found support for his view in the 1993 book *Technological Choices: Transformation in Material Cultures Since the Neolithic*, edited by Pierre Lemonnier, which asserts that in any society, the choices of technology are made on the basis of cultural values and social relations, rather than on the inherent benefits of the technology itself.

"From Xiaonanshan to Liangzhu, symbolism had been accruing where there was once a simple technical solution," says Tang, who's also a professor at Shandong University.

In fact, the Chinese jade story has been steeped in symbolism since day one, says Teng Shu-ping, an ancient Chinese jade scholar from Taiwan. One example she gives is the slit ring. Continually being made in relatively large quantities until the 5th century BC, the slit ring was, according to Teng, connected to a prominent type of ancient Chinese jade known as *bi*, meaning disc, which she believes was created to reflect the cosmological view of people in prehistoric times, thousands of years before these views were committed to words.

Pointing to the incised concentric grooves that had started to appear on the surface of the discs around 1400 BC, Teng suggests that these lines could be "the sun's different tracks as it moves across the sky over the course of one year".

"The sun's height varies through the seasons. While its course at the summer solstice is represented by the innermost of the concentric circles, its course at the winter solstice, the outermost of the circles," she says. "The center represents the North Celestial Pole, one of the two points — the other being the South Celestial Pole — in the sky where the Earth's axis of rotation, indefinitely extended, intersects the celestial sphere, or the 'canopy heaven' as Chinese would call it."

By cutting an aperture across the radius of a disc, the ancient jade workers had not only created a celestial passage, but also imbued a form of ornamental jade with heavenly meaning.

"It's believed that the slit rings, before their secularization, were worn solely by religious figures — the officiants for example — in prehistoric societies," says Teng. "During China's Spring and Autumn Period, between the 8th century and the 5th century BC, they were routinely worn by female members of the aristocracy, and were listed in contemporaneous documents as *tian*, which shared the same pronunciation with the Chinese character for 'heaven'."

"The name *jue*, as it's called today, is a misnomer which has only served to conceal the story behind the slit ring."

And that story didn't end there. About 1,300 km southwest of the Xiaonanshan site, in relative proximity to Xinglongwa, lies the heartland of another, later Neolithic culture known as Hongshan (the Red Mountain). There, archaeologists have unearthed not only slit rings dated to between 3300 and 3000 BC, but also what's believed to be one of the oldest types of jade dragon ever found in China, whose wrinkled nose and pricked ear have earned it the nickname "pig dragon".

Dated to around 3500 BC, these pig dragons, whose making clearly involved the use of string saws, all feature a curled-up body with a barely touching head and tail. "They had clearly taken a cue from the slit rings of Xiaonanshan," says Teng.

In the 16th century BC, Chinese history entered the Shang Dynasty, the existence of which is firmly supported by archaeological evidence, including tens of thousands of pieces of bronze and jade ware. Among the latter group is a type of jade dragon coiled in a way that allows its head and tail to almost meet. "*Jue*-formed dragon" is how they are referred to by archaeologists, who couldn't help but notice the striking resemblance between them and the slit rings.

"The ancestors of the Shang people are believed to have migrated from the frozen ground of the northeast to the fertile land of the Yellow River Valley, before they settled down, rose to power and ruled until 11th century BC," says Teng.

"The continuity of Chinese culture, although not always easily noticeable, is remarkable to say the least," she says. "Someone just needs to connect the dots."

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**From top:** A tall jade *cong* bracelet from the Liangzhu culture (3300-2300 BC); a jade bird from the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC).



**From left:** Jade *cong*-style bracelet from the Liangzhu culture; a Liangzhu jade *cong*; a jade plaque showing a pair of eagles standing atop a mask, from the Xiaojiauwuji culture (2200-1800 BC); a jade *cong* from the Qijia culture (2300-1500 BC); a combination of jade *cong* and *bi* unearthed from a site of the Qijia culture. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY NANJING MUSEUM AND TENG SHU-PING TO CHINA DAILY

## Identity: Continuous exchanges forge long-lasting cultural bonds

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"From the Yellow River Basin to the Yangtze River Basin and then the Pearl River Basin in southern China and continental Southeast Asia including Vietnam, the jade *zhang* has proven as effective a traveler as other types of ritual jade, most notably *cong* and *bi*," says Zuo.

Between them, China was coming together fast. Xia, whose ancestors migrated to the Yellow River valley

from northwestern China, was followed by the dynasty of Shang, founded by people hailing from the country's northeast. When Shang eventually met its end in the 11th century BC, it was overthrown by the founders of Zhou who entered the spotlight of history from roughly the same area as the ancestors of Xia, that is, the upper and middle reaches from the Yellow River in northwestern China.

"One remarkable aspect of the

rule of Zhou was that it reaffirmed the role of ritual jades in ceremonies considered essential to the well-being of a country, and that it did so in a way that had taken into full account the history of the various jade cultures that had been accumulating up to that point," says Teng.

According to *Zuo Zhuan* (The Commentary of Zuo), an ancient Chinese narrative history authored by a man named Zuo Qiuming in

around the 5th century BC, Yu, the legendary first ruler of the Xia Dynasty who is known for his flood-control efforts, once convened a meeting of various tribal leaders, each holding "jades and silks" as tokens to be exchanged.

Those who doubt whether jade had a role to play in an occasion like this one only need to look at some jade plaques dated to around the 5th century BC that have been unearthed from Houma, Shanxi

province in northern China. The words written on their surface in minced cinnabar turned out to be the content of a covenant, into which all attending parties had entered.

In another book credited to Zuo Qiuming, a vassal king who lived around the same time was told by his trusted counselor that silk and jade should be offered to heaven since they, emanating the same soft shine, were "the essence of the cosmos". The fact that this man,

who went by the name Guan She Fu, was a statesman as well as a theologian, speaks about the prominence of jade in the overlapping worlds of politics and religion in China before the Common Era.

In the following centuries, as silk, exported to the rest of the world, came to represent China for those dwelling in faraway lands, jade continued its hold on the imagination of the Chinese, who never stopped pondering and reflecting on the relationship between man and nature.

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