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Deputies urged to advance modernization

Top legislator stresses important role played by whole-process people's democracy

By CAO YIN
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Stressing the importance of developing whole-process people's democracy, China's top legislator called on national lawmakers on Monday to unite and gather strength to continuously promote Chinese modernization and realize people's aspirations for a better life.

Inside "With a people-centered development concept, we'll fully respect the will expressed by the people, the experience they have created, the rights they have, and the role they play to stimulate the enthusiasm and vitality of the whole of society and build up a powerful force of unity," Zhao Leji, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, said at the top legislature wrapped up its annual session on Monday.

At the closing meeting of the second session of the 14th NPC, deputies voted to approve resolutions on the Government Work Report, the national economic and social development plan for 2024 and the central budget for 2024.

They also passed resolutions on the work reports of the NPC Standing Committee, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate, and the revised Organic Law of the State Council. The amended law, taking a people-centered approach to law enforcement, optimizes the workflow and functions of the central government, clarifying that all those working for the State Council must exercise power by the rule of law to build a law-based government that the people are satisfied with.

Zhao called on all NPC deputies to work hard and concentrate their



National People's Congress deputies attend the closing meeting of the second session of the 14th NPC in Beijing on Monday.

FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

efforts to achieve the annual economic and social development goals, and unwaveringly promote Chinese modernization.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China and is also a crucial year for achieving the goals of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), he said, urging NPC deputies to try their best to overcome difficulties and serve the people, in order to meet the public's aspiration for a better life.

Qin Baohua, an NPC deputy and a teacher from the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, said that she has long paid high attention to issues regarding education, especially in the middle school stage.

"In the process of performing my duties, I have implemented whole-process people's democracy, solicited suggestions and opinions on the balanced development of education from people at the grassroots, and brought their voices to the NPC session," she said.

"I will take the people-centered approach by increasing my visits and research, and expand my focus to other issues involving people's livelihoods, such as social insurance and nursing care services," she added.

At the second session of the 14th NPC, 298 motions put forward by NPC deputies had been submitted as of Friday noon. Of these, 292 concentrated on legislative items, with major themes including enhancing high-quality develop-

ment and promoting new quality productive forces.

Many motions were made based on surveys and opinions collected from the public, showing the implementation of whole-process people's democracy, according to the session's secretariat.

In addition, the secretariat had also received more than 7,000 suggestions from NPC deputies as of Friday, mainly covering the digital economy, education, emerging businesses and opening-up.

Experts: CPI data indicates demand is improving

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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China's economy is exhibiting renewed vigor, with recent indicators suggesting a robust start for this year, as the country's consumer prices returned to positive territory for the first time in six months thanks to Spring Festival holiday spending.

Analysts said the latest data point to a gradual improvement in domestic demand, and they estimated that inflation will be kept within a reasonable range in the coming months, supported by steady economic recovery and robust policy measures.

Meanwhile, they cautioned that the broader economy will continue to grapple with pressures and uncertainties both domestically and internationally. They also said they expect the government to step up both fiscal and monetary policy support, including more fiscal spending to bolster domestic demand alongside further reserve requirement ratio reductions and policy rate cuts.

Data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed that the country's consumer price index, a main gauge of inflation, rose 0.7 percent year-on-year in February after a 0.8 percent decline in January, well above market expectations.

The growth in core CPI, which excludes volatile food and energy prices and is deemed a better gauge of the supply-demand relationship in the economy, rose 1.2 percent year-on-year in February, after a 0.4 percent rise in January.

"The improvement in CPI indicates that the economy's endogenous driving force is strengthening amid robust demand for commodities and services," said Zhang Xuewu, head of the price analysis and forecasting division at the Price Monitoring Center, which is part of the National Development and Reform Commission.

China's producer price index, which gauges factory-gate prices, dropped 2.7 percent year-on-year in February, following a 2.5 percent fall in January, the NBS said.

Zhang said the PPI dropped at a faster pace because February marks the off-season for industrial production due to Spring Festival, and the decline is also affected by still-weak external demand.

As domestic demand is set to turn for the better, with a series of policies promoting consumer spending and expanding effective investment taking effect, a moderate rise in overall price levels is anticipated in 2024, Zhang added.

Xiong Yuan, chief economist at Guosheng Securities, said the large gain in the year-on-year CPI was mainly due to the effect of the shifting Chinese New Year.

"Stripping out the shifting holiday effect, the price will remain at

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Annual event offers window into Chinese leadership's priorities

In the grand tapestry of international politics and economic strategies, China's annual two sessions in Beijing stands out as an event that encapsulates the aspirations, challenges and strategic roadmap of the nation and resonates with the world.

The annual meetings of the nation's top legislative and political advisory bodies represent a reflection of China's governance model — a blend of top-down directives and bottom-up democratic mechanisms — which is designed to navigate the

WORLD WATCH

By Maarif Farooq

country through the tumultuous waters of global uncertainties.

The significance of the two sessions cannot be overstated. It is here that China's legislative framework and policy directions for the year ahead are unveiled, touching upon every facet of governance, from economic growth targets and military spending to environmen-

tal policies and social welfare.

The National People's Congress, China's top legislature, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, an advisory body that draws members from various sectors of society, together embody the spirit of collective decision-making and policy formulation that is characteristic of the whole-process people's democracy in China's political ethos.

Why do these sessions matter to the world at large? The answer lies in the sheer impact of China's

domestic policies on the global stage. The growth trajectory of China, the world's second-largest economy, as well as its commitment to combating climate change and its technological ambitions have far-reaching implications for global markets, international security and environmental sustainability. The two sessions event offers a window into the Chinese leadership's priorities and the approach to addressing internal challenges and the external geopolitical landscape.

The annual gatherings were par-

ticularly noteworthy for several reasons. Against the backdrop of a global economic slowdown, China set forth an economic growth target both pragmatic and reflective of a strategic shift toward high-quality development, at around 5 percent GDP growth this year. This underscores China's recognition of the need for a sustainable economic model that balances growth with environmental stewardship and social equity.

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Winning smiles



Jennifer Lame holds the Oscar for Best Film Editing for *Oppenheimer* as she poses with Cillian Murphy, the winner of the Best Actor Oscar for *Oppenheimer*, at the Governor's Ball following the 96th Academy Awards ceremony in Los Angeles, California, the United States, on Sunday. **See story**, page 7

SPRING FESTIVAL EARNINGS GIVE FILM MARKET SHOT IN THE ARM

Extraordinary tales of ordinary people pack powerful punch to boost confidence in industry's growth

By YANG YANG and LI YINGXUE

A boxing match is about to start at the Xiangjiang Boxing Club. The reigning champion clenches her fists as the adrenalin courses through her veins. The crowd of spectators goes wild in eager anticipation. The challenger's coach is heard off-camera saying that he could stop the match if the going gets tough.

The dramatic opening scene of

In-depth

YOLO, an acronym for "You Only Live Once", sets the tone for the rest of the film that tells the heartfelt story of an obese, reclusive woman in her 30s who transforms her life after meeting a boxing coach.

Little surprise that *YOLO*, directed by and starring Jia Ling, topped

the box office with 2.7 billion yuan (\$375 million) during the Spring Festival holiday period from Feb 10 to 17.

Despite being a cross-cultural adaptation of the Japanese film *100 Yen Love*, the domestic production infused with humor stands out as an audience magnet and goes a long way in bolstering confidence in China's film market.

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TWO SESSIONS

Films: Use of AI, big data recommended to better develop industry



Moviegoers watch the animated film "Boonie Bears: Time Twist" on Feb 25 in a cinema in Shanghai. Statistics showed that as of March 4, the animated feature had made more than 1.9 billion yuan (\$260 million) from its opening on Feb 10, the start of the Spring Festival holiday. CHEN YUYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

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YOLO is Jia's second directorial venture. She made her directorial debut in 2021 with *Hi, Mom*, the tale of a woman who travels back in time to befriend her mother, which raked in more than 5.4 billion yuan, making it the highest-grossing film directed by a female director before *Barbie* took the mantle.

Sony Pictures Entertainment has purchased the rights to remake *Hi, Mom* in English, and has also bought the global distribution rights for *YOLO*, which has touched millions of moviegoers, especially women, with its uplifting and honest narrative.

Mao Jian, a film critic and professor of Chinese language and literature at East China Normal University, said in a video post on the livestreaming platform Bilibili that *YOLO* surpasses *100 Yen Love* in the final five minutes of the film as the protagonist finds the courage to live life to the fullest, regardless of risks, and embraces her newfound freedom.

According to writer Dan Bao, who posted a comment on the micro-blogging site Sina Weibo, *YOLO* is China's answer to *Barbie*, rather than a remake of the sports drama *100 Yen Love*.

The heart and soul of *YOLO* is Jia's emotionally versatile and physically demanding performance — she gained and lost 50 kilograms to play the lead role of Du Leying — that kept audiences riveted to their seats from start to finish.

Roaring success

Ji Shaoting, head of Future Affairs Administration, a company that deals with sci-fi publications, consulting and filmmaking, said in a podcast program that only movies that offer a novel plot and stunning spectacles can top the box office during Spring Festival, such as *The Wandering Earth* (2019) by Guo Fan and *Mercy* (2016) by Stephen Chow.

That's why *YOLO* has been a roaring success, Ji said. "We have never seen such a strong Chinese woman, who is muscular, throws punches for real and says 'no' to a man so directly. We have never seen a woman who makes sharp remarks and feels so free and delighted after reconditioning herself."

Deng Yun, who also works at Future Affairs Administration, echoed Dan and said that *YOLO* is very different from its Japanese predecessor. "It does a great job in localization, adding a lot of vivid scenes and conversations that can only happen in China, especially those involving men's attitudes toward women," she said.

"The movie is amazing also because it has created and will continue to create intertextuality and interpretations. You can't excise Jia Ling's real life, her roles as a female director and the leading actress, and the diverse voices from male audiences from the movie's 'overflowing text'. That's why it is so interesting and is China's *Barbie*," Deng added.

According to box-office tracker Denta Data, women accounted for 63 percent of the total moviegoers during Spring Festival.

YOLO is just one of the movies that scored success during the eight-day holiday, when the total box-office revenue in China surpassed 8 billion yuan, and more than 163 million people walked into cinemas, setting a new record for the Spring Festival season, according to the China Film Administration, the country's top industry regulator.

Making proposals

Buoyed by the film's huge success, members of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference expressed great confidence in the prospect of Chinese films while making proposals during the two sessions on how to better develop the industry with the help of big data and artificial intelligence.

Wang Pingjiu, a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee and deputy editor-in-chief of State broadcaster China Central Television's movie channel, said that at first, he was worried about the Spring Festival box-office results because many people choose to spend the eight-day holiday traveling.

Also, there were no large-scale productions such as *Creation of the Gods I* or *The Wandering Earth*, but only comedies similar to *YOLO*, Wang said. Nevertheless, the box-office results were great. "Now we have very strong confidence in domestic films," he said.

Wang pointed out that many foreign films fail to impress at the box office today because they tend to tell clichéd stories, but domestic productions can always deliver a pleasant surprise.

"They are getting closer to our life, so people become more interested," he said. "That's why I'm confident in China's film market. Sooner or later, the annual box-office revenue in China will surpass 100 billion yuan."

Wang also talked about a few problems the film industry in China has faced in recent years, such as an investment crunch and a lack of good scripts and acting talent.

"The challenge now is that if a film wants to succeed in China, everything needs to be right — its story, theme, value, investment, publicity, and actors and actresses. You cannot fool the audiences," he said.

Huangfu Yichuan, a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee and editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine *Contemporary Cinema*, said he was able to predict the Spring Festival box-office success because the films released were different from each other despite all of them being comedies.

"The great success of Chinese films during this season has indeed given us great confidence in the film market in 2024," he said.

The confidence stems from the presence of a mature film market with more than 80,000 screens, a developing film industry with many

well-trained young professionals who have mastered the most advanced technologies and keep upgrading their skills, the great support from China's fast-developing industry, and the flair of a group of creators who not only love making films but also care about audience sentiments, Huangfu said.

He highlighted that the demographics of film audiences have changed this year, and the number of moviegoers during the Spring Festival holiday was more compared with last year.

According to the China Film Administration, box-office earnings from third- and fourth-tier cities accounted for 54 percent of the total revenue, up from 50 percent in 2023.

Demographics have a big influence on China's film market. In recent years, the number of cinemas in counties and townships has increased, which effectively means the number of moviegoers in those places has also increased, Huangfu said.

The audiences in townships are different from those in first-tier cities. "You can tell what kind of films

they like through the Spring Festival season. Since these audiences are people who return to their hometowns from first- or second-tier cities, it can be said that their preferences represent the collective preference of the Chinese people," he said.

The growing number of audiences in townships significantly influences the fate of new films thanks to discussions on social media, Huangfu said. "They love watching films and making amusing short videos. They often learn how to amuse their audiences with crosstalks and skits. And Jia is an outstanding actress of crosstalk and skit."

Empathize with people

According to Huangfu, Jia is an excellent artist and has an exceptional ability to observe, empathize and mimic aspects of everyday life. When she creates, she delves deeply into the lives of ordinary people.

"YOLO may not be a great movie by many standards, but people are willing to buy tickets to see it," he said. "That's why I had very high

expectations even before the movie hit the screens."

Huangfu said the most impressive thing about Jia is how she effortlessly guides and portrays the character of Du Leying as the director and leading actress.

"I'm truly impressed by the surge of female filmmakers and women-centered narratives in Chinese cinema lately. I believe that China will see significant development in this regard in the future," he said.

The box-office triumph of *YOLO* also mirrors a paradigm shift in audience preference — from formulaic individual success stories to narratives focusing on personal growth and transformation. This change in aesthetic taste underscores China's societal development and evolving priorities, Huangfu said.

The way a few other movies performed during the Spring Festival season further highlights this shift in preference.

For example, Han Han's *Pegasus 2*, which has ranked second this season with 2.4 billion yuan in box-office earnings, is fairly conventional, neither cutting-edge nor overly clichéd, but it has resonated with the audiences because it draws inspiration from the journey called life.

"For me what's most interesting is the beat-up car, which symbolizes a spirit. When it finally crosses the finishing line, all entrepreneurs ... and ordinary people get a sense of the arduous journey of life," Huangfu said.

Zhang Yimou's *Article 20*, which grossed 1.3 billion yuan, mirrors a type of social psychology — that contemporary society can ultimately change through the collective efforts of many different people.

"This film displays a genuine cultural confidence, showing that our society is progressing," Huangfu said. "How legal articles are created is closely related to real life. As an art form, the film displays the creator's courage."

Apart from the social issues it focuses on, *Article 20* also shows how an ordinary man, smart and hardworking, an opportunist sometimes, summons his courage to pursue justice. "A good portrait of the greatness of ordinary people," he said.

In addition to stories and themes, Huangfu emphasized the role innovation plays in making these films successful.

"Judging by the Spring Festival seasons in recent years, we can tell that what audiences dislike the most is 'following the trend' without innovation and creativity, which is the essence of art," he said, adding that directors Jia, Zhang and Han have been exploring new frontiers in their filmmaking, in order to reach more audiences.

Speaking of the challenges brought by the fast development of AI, Huangfu said "there's nothing to panic about" as it is "an inevitable progression of technological advancement in historical development."

"Technological advancement provides infinite possibilities that can inspire creators' imagination, so I

see it as a tremendous opportunity, providing Chinese cinema a chance to overtake on the bend," he said. "We only need to make good use of an important tool."

Huangfu suggested that China could conduct more research on digital technology applications in the film industry and regulate the applications through legislation.

Wang, from CCTV, couldn't agree more. "You can't stop the advancement of AI. It's (happening) right before our eyes, but there's no need to worry. The application of AI is a must for the growth of the global film industry," he said.

During the two sessions, Wang submitted a proposal to "vigorously promote the role of artificial intelligence in building a powerhouse in the film industry."

Fostering a favorable atmosphere and promoting the construction of a powerhouse in the film industry require innovative application of new concepts, technologies and methods, he wrote in the proposal.

AI matters

The rapid advancement of AI, especially in generative models, will profoundly impact film production. Prioritizing research and broad application will leverage AI's positive role in Chinese cinema's high-quality development, he wrote.

Wang suggested further improving people's recognition of AI and promoting the development of AI as a new quality productive force for the film industry in China, in order to lower costs and improve efficiency, strengthen the localization of AI applications for the dissemination of excellent Chinese culture, and nurture more talent in this field.

He said that despite all the advantages of AI, people need not worry about being replaced because the art of filmmaking involves emotions.

To promote healthy development of China's film market, Wang also suggested building a comprehensive big-data film evaluation system.

"Currently, there are many different commercial rating systems, which are not objective, comprehensive or professional," he said. "To boost diverse marketing, refine development and strengthen market operations, we must establish a robust film evaluation system, leverage big data's positive impact, and create a national-level film data system free from commercial influence."

The big data evaluation system can scientifically reflect the dissemination influence of films in China and their influence on societal development, and provide references for the film evaluation system, Wang said in his proposal.

"We have been developing this project for the past year, and in April, the system is due for launch," he added.

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Above: People look at movie posters at a theatre in Beijing on Feb 15. DU LIANYI / CHINA DAILY Center: A filmgoer passes by a giant poster advertising the realistic film "Article 20" in a cinema in Yunnan province, on Feb 15. XUE YINGYING / XINHUA Below: A visitor poses at one of the filming locations for the domestic comedy "YOLO" in Dongguan, Guangdong province on Feb 12. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



TWO SESSIONS

Important interviews



Deputies to the 14th National People's Congress give interviews on Monday ahead of the closing meeting of the second session of the 14th NPC at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

Policies boost global confidence

Foreign companies take rosy view of China's high-quality economic upgrade in years ahead

By MA SI
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China's latest emphasis on nurturing new quality productive forces as well as the efficient policies introduced during the annual sessions of the country's top legislative and political advisory bodies are boosting confidence among multinational companies.

Highlighting that technological decoupling poses a big risk to global economic recovery, company executives and experts said that China holds great appeal for multinationals, as they see more opportunities in areas such as artificial intelligence, smart automobiles and advanced manufacturing.

Eager to turn those prospects into reality, foreign companies are ramping up investment, expanding their business lines and chalking up medium- to long-term plans for steady growth, with a rosy view of China's high-quality economic upgrade in the coming years.

Frank Meng, chairman of Qualcomm China, said he is intrigued by the concept of new quality productive forces, as the phrase was highlighted in this year's Government Work Report and ignited mounting

enthusiasm across the country.

Meng said that the wireless communication industry in which the United States chip company operates offers strong support for nurturing new quality productive forces, and Qualcomm has been expanding its local business, from its traditional offering of chips and solutions for smartphones to providing the same for personal computers, cars and more devices.

"China's smart car industry has shown strong momentum globally last year. ... We have helped 40-plus Chinese automotive brands in launching more than 100 new models with intelligent connectivity capabilities," he said.

Underscoring Qualcomm's confidence in the long-term prospects of the Chinese economy, Meng said, "Qualcomm has consistently considered China as a pivotal business partner and valued customer, viewing it as more than just a market or a link in the supply chain".

As China promised in the Government Work Report to launch an "AI plus" initiative to accelerate the technology's commercial use, foreign companies are eager to tap into the next trillion-dollar opportunity in the world's second-largest economy.

Chen Xudong, chairman and general manager of IBM Greater

China Group, said AI is projected to enhance human productivity and unlock \$4.4 trillion in value per year globally by 2030. It will offer a competitive edge to individuals and organizations that effectively leverage its capabilities.

"According to a recent survey by IBM, the AI adoption rate of Chinese enterprises is among the highest in the world, with 85 percent of surveyed Chinese companies saying that they will accelerate the application of AI in the future," Chen said.

"We remain committed to making further contributions to China's digital economy through co-creation with our Chinese partners," he said.

Denis Depoux, global managing director of market consultancy Roland Berger, said the concept of new quality productive forces indicates China's strategic shift toward modern and sustainable economic growth.

The term new quality productive forces refers to new productive forces that emerge from continuous advances in science and technology, driving strategic future and emerging industries that could introduce breakthrough technological advancements in an era of intelligent information.

"Technology and innovation are key to bringing disruptive changes to the Chinese economy. We have seen China leapfrogging in some new areas such as electric vehicles, energy storage, aerospace, solar photovoltaics, and wind energy," Depoux said.

As the innovation-driven development strategy gains traction in China, "in the future, we may see more similar patterns in industries such as healthcare, new materials and artificial intelligence," Depoux added.

Last year, foreign direct investment in China's high-tech industries reached 423.3 billion yuan (\$59 billion), accounting for 37.3 percent of the country's total utilized FDI, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Wei Jianguo, former vice-minister of commerce, said the proportion of high-tech investment in the overall FDI in China has been increasing in the past five years, indicating that more foreign-funded enterprises are participating in China's drive to build advanced industrial chains and attaching greater importance to research and development in the country.

Yin Zheng, executive vice-president for China and East Asia operations at Schneider Electric SE, a French industrial and technology conglomerate, said he believes that new quality productive forces involve digital productivity and green productivity, which will open broader development opportunities in China.

Huang Chenhong, president of SAP Greater China, said the German tech company sees robust growth opportunities from Chinese companies' strong demand for cloud computing technologies and sustainable development this year.

Cross-Strait exchanges urged to boost cultural ties

By ZHANG YI and CUI JIA

The Chinese mainland should be vigilant about the pursuit of "de-Sinicization" in the areas of ideology and culture by the Taiwan authorities that aims to sever the island's historical, cultural and ethnic connections with the mainland as it may raise cross-strait tensions, said the country's top legislators and political advisers during the annual two sessions.

They suggested organizing more cross-strait exchanges, especially for younger people, and promoting the common Chinese culture shared by both sides, to counter the "Taiwan independence" efforts.

Li Yihu, a deputy to the National People's Congress and head of Peking University's Taiwan Institute, warned that the Democratic Progressive Party may seek to further integrate Taiwan's cultural, educational and social systems around the "one China, one Taiwan" framework this year.

He said Lai Ching-te of the DPP, who is set to take office as the island's head in May, could potentially use his position to promote "Taiwan independence" in the fields of culture and ideology in a clandestine manner by introducing a "basic cultural law", given his strong "pro-independence" stance.

Mentioning recent instances of natural cultural exchanges, such as a popular dance video from the mainland that was shared extensively on social media in Taiwan, he said that promoting cross-strait cultural exchanges and cooperation is an effective way to counter the promotion of "Taiwan independence" in the field of culture.

"These exchanges happened naturally," Li said, adding that "we should better develop and promote the common Chinese culture to make it serve as a psychological and emotional link between compatriots on both sides."

Yang Yizhou, a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, and also vice-chairman of

the All-China Federation of Taiwan Compatriots, said vigilance is necessary against Lai's gradual approach to "Taiwan independence", with a focus on efforts to "de-Sinicize" the culture of Taiwan.

He added that strengthening cultural exchanges between the two sides and promoting the common Chinese culture of both sides through cultural cooperation and activities was the most effective approach.

Chen Yunying, a deputy with the Taiwan delegation of the NPC, said, "Taiwan's society is weakening and separatism is very rampant. In fact, for our compatriots in Taiwan, it is a tragedy when you hear someone say, 'I do not recognize myself as a Chinese'."

"I feel very sorry for the young people in Taiwan who are being subjected to 'de-Sinicization' in education," Chen said. She condemned the DPP authorities by saying, "Are they going to let the young people have no future, no prospects at all? Should they be confined to an island of 36,000 square kilometers?"

Regarding future cross-strait exchanges, Chen said, "The mainland will make the greatest efforts to welcome Taiwan compatriots, whether it is for studying, employment, entrepreneurship, business, or other matters."

Yan Ke, a deputy from the Taiwan delegation, said that last year, there were approximately 3 million cross-strait visits, and the number of visits by Taiwan compatriots to the Chinese mainland increased by 74 times compared to the previous year.

"This indicates that compatriots from both sides desire exchanges, interactions and cooperation, which cannot be obstructed by the DPP authorities," she said.

Zeng Liqun, another deputy from the Taiwan delegation, suggested allowing young people in Taiwan to learn about Chinese culture through summer camps, winter camps and Chinese culture study camps.

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Deputies to the 14th National People's Congress from Taiwan delegation exchange views with other participants on Saturday during an open group meeting in Beijing. JIANG QIMING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

CPI: Maintaining price stability will be stressed

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low levels, indicating the persisting pressures faced by the broader economy," Xiong said.

Looking ahead, Xiong said he expects the country to introduce a new round of policies — including potential reserve requirement ratio cuts and interest rate reductions — and further expand the size of a targeted funding tool, pledged supplementary lending, to bolster the world's second-largest economy.

Addressing a recent news conference in Beijing, Pan Gongsheng, governor of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said the PBOC will deem keeping prices stable and promoting a moderate recovery in prices as important considerations of monetary policy adjustments.

According to Pan, China still has room to further cut the reserve requirement ratio — the proportion of money that lenders must hold as reserves — as strengthened macroeconomic adjustments are needed to

cope with complex and changing international and domestic situations.

Louise Loo, lead economist at British think tank Oxford Economics, said the announcement was consistent with her team's baseline assumption of another pair of 25-basis-point cuts to the RRR in the coming quarters, as well as a cumulative 20 basis points in benchmark rate cuts to the one-year medium-term lending facility this year.

"China's real interest rates rose meaningfully last year, as inflation expectations fell on persistent disinflationary pressures, so rate cuts could help lower overall financing costs," she said.

According to Loo, the central bank's balance sheet may also be increasingly used as part of authorities' stimulus drive, including the use of structural relending tools — effectively low cost central bank funds — to channel resources into sectors where they are most needed, such as small businesses, green projects and technology.

Road map: Environmental conservation and green transition were central themes

From page 1

One of the most significant announcements of the two sessions was the emphasis on technological self-reliance and innovation. In a world where technological supremacy is increasingly synonymous with economic and military power, China's commitment to bolstering its research and development capabilities signals a long-term strategy to navigate the complexities of global technological competition and security.

This focus on tech self-reliance is not just about economic growth; it is also a strategic imperative aimed at ensuring China's sovereignty in the digital age.

Environmental conservation and the transition to a green economy were also central themes of the two sessions. China's leadership reiterated its commitment to the 2015 Paris climate agreement and

The sessions serve as a barometer for China's policy priorities and its vision for the future, offering insights into the leadership's approach to governance, development and global engagement.

announced substantial investments in renewable energy sources, reflecting a keen awareness of the existential threat posed by climate change. This agenda, ambitious in its scope, is indicative of China's role as a key player in global efforts to combat climate change, balancing its economic aspirations with environmental responsibilities.

The 2024 two sessions also placed a strong emphasis on social welfare and demographic challenges. With policies aimed at improving healthcare, education and housing, the Chinese government signaled its commitment to fostering a harmonious society by tapping into rural vitality and helping vulnerable social groups. Measures to support family development and encourage higher birth rates were introduced, addressing the pressing issue of an aging population and its implications for China's economic and social future.

The policy directions and legislative actions emanating from the two sessions are a testament to China's strategic foresight and its adaptability in the face of both domestic and international challenges. The sessions serve as a barometer for China's policy priorities and its vision for the future, offering insights into the leadership's

approach to governance, development and global engagement.

As we analyze the outcomes of the 2024 two sessions, it becomes evident that China is steering itself toward a new epoch. Peaceful modernization for all members of society will be characterized by a balanced pursuit of economic growth, technological innovation, environmental sustainability and social welfare.

The decisions made and the policies formulated during these sessions are not merely for the annals of China's legislative history. They are the building blocks of China's future and, by extension, the future of geopolitics and global economics.

The annual meetings reflect China's evolving political landscape and the country's impact on the global stage. They offer a glimpse into the strategic thinking of the Chinese leadership for navigating the complexities of modern challenges.

The author is deputy editor-in-chief of Pakistan Economic Net and Daily Ittehad Media Group. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



TWO SESSIONS

Fujian deputy eyes private economy

By CAO DESHENG and HU MEIDONG

Huang Maoxing, a deputy to the National People's Congress from Fujian province, has called for concrete policies to boost the development of the private economy and stimulate private enterprises to promote high-quality development of the sector.

As a national lawmaker, Huang, who is also vice-president of the Fujian Academy of Social Sciences, has submitted suggestions to the National People's Congress, the nation's top legislature, every year since 2018.

Huang's motion for this year's session was focused on promoting the high-quality development of the private economy, in addition to green transformation and technological innovation.

Last year, Fujian issued and implemented a guideline on advancing the high-quality development of the private economy in the new era, and established a leading group to boost the comprehensive implementation of the strategy in the province.



Huang Maoxing

These initiatives have injected strong confidence into the development of private enterprises in the province, Huang said. The private economy is a crucial force in Fujian's economic development, creating employment, generating tax revenues and fostering a multitude of market entities, he added.

The private economy in Fujian contributes approximately 70.6 percent of the province's tax revenue, around 70 percent of GDP, over 70 percent of technological innovation achievements, more than 80 percent of urban employment, and 94 percent of total market entities.

Huang frequently conducted research in private enterprises in the past year, learning about the challenges they face during their development and listening to the demands of private entrepreneurs.

"Through on-site investigations, I gained first-hand information, which has deepened my understanding of the contributions of private enterprises to the Chinese economy," he said.

"Simultaneously, I have also gained insight into the assistance needed for the development of private enterprises."

It is crucial to turn the beneficial policies and measures unveiled by the central and provincial governments into a real impetus to boost the growth of the private economy, Huang said.

China has announced concrete measures in multiple areas to enhance support for the private economy.

They include accelerating the legislative process of the law on the promotion of the private economy, attracting more private capital to participate in major national engineering projects, such as railways and nuclear power, as well as in other sectors covering energy, water facilities, and ecological and environmental protection, and improving work mechanisms with a view to better serving the growth of the private economy.

While acknowledging the importance of leveraging the policies, Huang also stressed the need to vigorously propel private enterprises to adapt to modern technological and industrial transformation and accelerate the development of new quality productive forces.

It is important for private enterprises to upgrade industries, optimize structures and promote the high-end, intelligent and green transformation of industries, he said.

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Photo moment



National lawmakers pose for a group photo outside the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Monday after the closing meeting of the second session of the 14th National People's Congress. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

Mayor of Dalian says openness in city's genes

Port aims to strengthen international connectivity as key hub in Northeast Asia

By ZHANG XIAOMIN in Dalian, Liaoning

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The northeastern port city Dalian, in Liaoning province, will build up a high-level gateway to facilitate smooth domestic connections and international linkages, and push for higher-level opening-up, Chen Shaowang, a deputy to the National People's Congress and mayor of Dalian, said.

"Openness, which has given life and prosperity to Dalian, is in the genes of the city," said Chen, who is also deputy Party chief of Dalian.

Located at the center of the Northeast Asia Economic Rim, an important point for the development of the Belt and Road Initiative, Dalian was one of the first 14 coastal cities in China to open up and it has taken a lead in terms of openness in Northeast China.

"So far, Dalian has introduced more than 17,000 foreign-invested enterprises," Chen said. "It boasts more than 30,000 foreign trade enterprises and exports to over 200 countries and regions."

He said Dalian will further integrate with the building of the Belt and Road, and strengthen economic and trade cooperation with the countries involved in the initiative and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership.

"We will promote opening-up to the north and expand cooperation with Russia in energy, minerals, grain, fisheries, timber and automobiles," he said.

"And we will continue to promote opening-up to the east, deepen coop-



Chen Shaowang

eration with Japan and South Korea in high-end equipment manufacturing, electronic information, energy conservation, environmental protection, marine economy and other fields."

With Dalian Jinpu New Area, China's 10th State-level new area, the Dalian Area of the China (Liaoning) Pilot Free Trade Zone, the RCEP (Dalian) International Business District, Dalian High-Tech Industrial Zone and many other high-level platforms for openness, Dalian is one of the sub-provincial cities with the largest number of and the most comprehensive functional areas for openness.

Dalian Port is connected to more than 300 ports in over 160 countries and regions, with container shipping routes reaching all major ports in RCEP member countries.

The city is accelerating the building of an international shipping, logistics and regional finance hub in Northeast Asia.

"Dalian has superior geographical conditions, profound opening deposits and broad development prospects," Chen said.

Just before this year's two sessions, Chen led an economic and trade delegation from Dalian to France, Italy and Japan, where they visited top companies and related leading enterprises, conducted six extensive investment promotion

seminars, and reached 40 agreements and memorandums of understanding on deepening strategic cooperation.

"Business people we met believe that the prospects for Chinese modernization are broad and the revitalization of Northeast China is facing major opportunities, and expressed their willingness to continue to increase investment in Liaoning province and Dalian," Chen said.

He said the city will implement the 24 pro-foreign investment measures put forward by the State Council in August as well as provincial and municipal measures to help foreign-funded enterprises reduce costs and increase efficiency.

It will also shorten the negative list on foreign investment access and expand market access for foreign investment.

"We will ensure national treatment for foreign-funded enterprises and promote the implementation of Dalian's regulations on the promotion of foreign investment to protect the rights and interests of foreign investors in accordance with the law," Chen said.

The city will attract and utilize foreign capital with greater intensity, providing infrastructure, science and technology, finance, data, personnel and other factors to facilitate the establishment of iconic foreign-funded projects, he said.

"In June, Dalian will host the 15th Annual Meeting of the New Champions (also known as the Summer Davos Forum)," he said.

"We'll present vivid practice to advance the full revitalization of Northeast China in the new era and Dalian's good image of high-quality development, and share opportunities with the world."

Anta boss promotes 'Jinjiang Experience'

By CAO DESHENG and HU MEIDONG

The "Jinjiang Experience" should be promoted nationwide to bolster high-quality development of county-level economies as part of the nation's efforts to build a unified domestic market, said Ding Shizhong, a member of the Standing Committee of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

Ding, who is chairman of Chinese sportswear brand Anta, also urged support for the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, which, he said, have created over 80 percent of urban jobs and contributed significantly to economic and social stability.

The Jinjiang Experience refers to the transformation of Jinjiang, which used to be a poor county with a large population and little land in Fujian province, into an economic powerhouse with a developed private economy.

In 2002, when President Xi Jinping was governor of Fujian, he wrote two articles summarizing and promoting



Ding Shizhong

Jinjiang Experience involves continuous innovation of management models for enterprise development and the way the government creates a favorable business environment for enterprises.

"I believe the most important lesson from the Jinjiang Experience for private enterprises is sticking to the real economy," Ding said. "That's why Jinjiang continues to thrive even in today's challenging global economic development situation."

He emphasized the significance of county-level economies as a fundamental part of the national economy, saying that their development plays a pivotal role in promoting coordinated regional development and building a new development pattern.

Anta, which was founded in 1991, is a beneficiary of the Jinjiang Experience. As part of his proposals to the recently concluded second session of the CPPCC National Committee, Ding suggested the establishment of a Jinjiang Experience Learning Base, focusing on the development of the private economy at the county level and led by the National Development and Reform Commission's Private Economy Development Bureau.

He recommended the initiation of national research projects on the Jinjiang Experience for county-level economic development. He also proposed the establishment of Jinjiang as the permanent venue for the National Summit on High-Quality Development of the Private Economy, which would serve as a platform for policy announcements, theoretical and practical exchanges.

The Jinjiang Experience should serve as a crucial guiding principle for promoting high-quality development of the private economy in the new era, Ding said.

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Guizhou to develop its Red culture resources

By YANG JUN and ZHAO YIMENG

Guizhou will further develop Red cultural and educational resources to help students contribute to socialist cultural construction with Chinese characteristics, a national legislator said during the two sessions.

Zou Lianke, a deputy to the National People's Congress and director of the Guizhou Provincial Education Department, said the province will give better play to the educational roles of Red resources in promoting Chinese history and culture.

Guizhou boasts abundant Red culture resources as it saw the longest duration and widest range of actions by the Red Army during the Long March, while the Zunyi Conference, held in the province, marked the turning point in the Party's history.

"It is imperative to continue organizing the lecture series across the provincial education system that involves hundreds of Party secretaries, thousands of teachers, and tens of thousands of students," Zou said.

The Long March-themed immersive digital experience hall and the national cultural park should be better utilized to leverage the educative power of Red cultural resources, he said.

Ethnic cultures need to be cultivated through activities such as introducing intangible cultural heritage into campuses, and enriching content related to ethnic traditional arts, folk dances, ethnic sports and traditional craftsmanship.

"The activities aim to guide teachers and students of all ethnic groups to experience the diverse Chinese culture," Zou said.

Students and teachers will be encouraged to spread the unique Tunbao culture, based on villages built inside stone walls by soldiers during the early Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), through various forms such as online literature and documentaries.

"They are expected to enhance their historical confidence in the Tunbao culture by protecting it," he said.

We commit to an annual reduction of administrative expenses by no less than 5 percent and investing these funds into the education sector."



Zou Lianke, a deputy to the National People's Congress and director of the Guizhou Provincial Education Department

As education plays an essential role in promoting rural vitalization, Guizhou has prioritized the development of education in ensuring people's well-being, Zou said.

"We commit to an annual reduction of administrative expenses by no less than 5 percent and investing these funds into the education sector," he said.

In recent years, continuous efforts have been made to enhance learning conditions in rural areas and optimize the allocation of regional educational resources.

High-quality teachers will be encouraged to make contributions in rural areas to ensure that no one is left behind on the path of developing education, Zou added.

The province has also carried out special rectification related to student meals. Last year, Guizhou spent 3.9 billion yuan (\$543 million) on nutritional meal subsidies, benefiting 3.9 million primary and secondary school students, Zou said.

Schools involved in the nutrition improvement plan in Guizhou can provide lunch with at least three dishes and one soup every day, featuring a diverse supply of fresh vegetables and ample provisions of meat, he added.

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Primary school students take part in a cooking skills competition in Kaili, Guizhou province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

What NPC deputies say



Wang Xu, NPC deputy and deputy secretary of the Party committee and principal of Yali Middle School in Changsha, Hunan province

In the world, there are no two completely identical persons, and on Earth, there are no two completely identical leaves. There are no gaps between children, only differences. Let the children who like archery practice archery, and let the children who like chess play chess. By respecting differences and believing in children, we can inspire every child's talent, potential and dreams, thus inspiring every child's hope.



Gao Song, NPC deputy, an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and president of Sun Yat-sen University

Most of the problems encountered in reality are complex and uncertain, and single disciplines and specialties often find it difficult to solve them. However, our education is fundamentally about teaching present students with past knowledge, hoping that they can solve future problems.



Ma Xiuying, NPC deputy and a nurse in Jishishan county, Gansu province

Over 600 medical personnel in Jishishan promptly engaged in the rescue work within half an hour after the earthquake last year. As a participant in the earthquake relief work, I feel fortunate and proud of living in a country filled with love and strength. Comfort comes after hardship, and the spring of Jishishan is bound to be full of vitality.



Zhang Min, NPC deputy and general manager of China Telecom Hubei Company in Hubei province

The rapid development of artificial intelligence technology has given rise to a large number of new industries, new formats and new models, while simultaneously exacerbating associated security risks. This is especially true for critical information infrastructure, where it represents a double-edged sword.

YAN DONGJIE, ZHAO YIMENG AND XU ZHESHENG



TWO SESSIONS

Closing meeting



Deputies attend the closing meeting of the second session of the 14th National People's Congress at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Monday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Program targets lunar resources

Plans for future include retrieving samples from the moon's far side

By ZHAO LEI
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China has made remarkable achievements in lunar exploration, with two robots still working on the moon. The country has also announced plans for the coming years, including retrieving samples from the moon's far side.

However, those ambitious endeavors are not only related to science, but also embrace a magnificent aspiration: to find and develop resources on the moon for the good of mankind, according to a leading scientist in China's lunar program.

"This year marks the 20th year since our country started its lunar exploration program. Along with the development of our lunar exploration, we will pay more attention to the research and utilization of resources on the moon, and that is in line with the purposes of other space powers in their recent adventures to the moon," Yang Mengfei, a senior researcher at the China Academy of Space Technology and an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said.

"The first step will be sending large numbers of robots to search for resource-rich places, especially those with recoverable frozen water. Water is paramount to our effort of establishing a long-term human presence on the moon — with it, we will be able to make oxygen and hydrogen and grow plants there. And then we will come out to find other resources like metal and silicon minerals and then put them into an advanced extraction and refinement process."

After that, 3D printers will turn the metals and silicon into construction materials or solar panels to be used to build roads, structures and power stations, Yang said.

"By that time, humans will be able to set up bases that can support long-term robotic operations and short-duration human stays," he said. "Astronauts can manufacture scientific apparatuses like radio telescopes inside such facilities and place the hardware near bases — the absence of atmosphere and electromagnetic interference makes the lunar surface perfect for astronomical observation."



Yang Mengfei

Yang said the bases could also be used to refuel spacecraft carrying humans to distant destinations inside the solar system.

He said advances in science and technology mean it will likely become possible to extract helium-3, an ideal fuel for future nuclear fusion power plants, from the moon.

It is estimated there are 15 to 20 metric tons of helium-3 on Earth, but experts say there could be at least 1 million tons on the moon.

"Of course it will be very difficult but if we could make it happen, then it will be a very big deal to humans on Earth," Yang said.

He said that to realize the grand road map, Chinese scientists and engineers have started designing an Earth-moon spacecraft telecommand and communications system that will be capable of transmitting data and providing positioning and navigation service to spaceships traveling between them.

Yang also shared his vision for the next 50 years.

"My optimistic anticipation is that ordinary people will be able to travel between Earth and the moon in the foreseeable future," he said. "Advances in science and technology will definitely move our civilization forward. When moon-bound journeys become available to commoners like you and me, the moon will then become mankind's eighth continent."

Yang is widely known for leading the design work on the Chang'e 5 robotic spacecraft that fulfilled China's first lunar sample retrieval mission.

He was speaking on the sidelines of the second session of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, which concluded in Beijing on Sunday. He is a member of the CPPCC National Committee, the top political advisory body in China.

China began its lunar program in 2004 and has launched six robotic probes since 2007. The most recent mission, Chang'e 5, landed on the moon in December 2020 and soon brought 1,731 grams of lunar rocks and soil back to Earth, achieving a historic accomplishment about 44 years after the last lunar substances were brought back from our nearest celestial neighbor.

China to accelerate development of railway tech

By LUO WANGSHU
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China aims to accelerate research and development of key core technologies and application-oriented technological innovations this year, with a focus on developing a faster bullet train capable of traveling at 450 kilometers per hour and intelligent high-speed rail technologies, said Liu Zhenfang, the president of China State Railway Group, which operates the national railway system.

Liu, who is also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress, said the company will continue to promote independent research and the industrial application of key core technologies this year, enhancing self-reliance in railway technology.

"Technological innovation can foster new industries, new models and new momentum," he said. "It is the core element for developing new quality productive forces."

"China's high-speed railways are a successful example of independent innovation in our country, and the overall technological level of China's railways has entered the forefront of the world."

The group plans to unveil a more advanced bullet train, the CR450 — with a top operating speed of 400 km/h and an experimental speed of up to 450 km/h — by next year.

It plans to complete a prototype this year and begin testing.



A high-speed train runs above a rape flower field in Nanchang county, Jiangxi province, on March 2. JIN LIANGKUI / XINHUA

Liu said achievements in promoting self-reliance in railway technology had been made last year.

"In 2023, the alliance to promote science and technology innovation in the railway sector was established," he said. "The CR450 science and technology innovation project has achieved major breakthroughs."

Last year, bullet trains traveled at speeds of 453 km/h on test runs in Fujian province, collecting data on trains running at different speeds on tracks that include tunnels, bridges and curves.

Currently, the fastest bullet trains in China operate at speeds of 350 km/h along several lines, including the Beijing-Shanghai High-Speed Railway and the Beijing-Tianjin High-Speed Railway.

A train traveling at 400 km/h would shorten the journey from Beijing to Shanghai to 2.5 hours.

Liu also said China aims to achieve technological breakthroughs to improve operational safety, enhancing key equipment and infrastructure.

"Research efforts will be increased in the application of cutting-edge technologies in the field



Liu Zhenfang

of railways," he said.

"We'll focus on promoting the system's informatization and network security and enhancing the construction of digital railways."

We'll also carry out the standardization, interconnection and sharing of railway information systems, aiming to empower the innovative development of railways through digital intelligence."

By the end of last year, China's national railway network extended for 159,000 km, including 45,000 km of high-speed lines. About 80 percent of China's planned high-speed railway network has been completed, with a further 15 percent under construction.

"China's overall level of railway infrastructure has reached the forefront globally, providing the foundation and conditions for further advancement toward a higher level of modernization," Liu said.

He said China aims to have 165,000 km of track by the end of next year, 50,000 km of which will be high-speed.

According to the national plan, by 2035, the railway network in China will reach 200,000 km, with about 70,000 km of high-speed lines, including some high-speed inter-city railways.

Jiangmen connects production, innovation

By WANG KEJU in Beijing
and LI WENFANG in Guangzhou



Wu Xiaohui

Jiangmen in Guangdong province is set to anchor the development of new quality productive forces laid out in this year's Government Work Report by promoting the relationship between manufacturing and technological innovation, said Mayor Wu Xiaohui, who is also a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress.

The city has identified several industrial chains for development, such as next-generation information technology, new energy vehicles and intelligent equipment, Wu said in an interview in Beijing during the annual session of the country's national legislature.

Wu said the city government will support enterprises' technological transformations and digitalization initiatives, as well as help consolidate and enhance traditional industrial chains focused on sectors such as metal products, household appliances, paper products, motorcycles and textiles.

Such efforts echo the steps mapped out in the Government Work Report to advance the construction of a modern industrial system and accelerate the development of new quality productive forces, with the upgrading of industrial and supply chains, fostering of emerging industries and future-oriented industries, and expansion of the digital economy high on the agenda.

Jiangmen has nurtured several leading motorcycle enterprises and emerged as one of the key motorcycle manufacturing hubs in China. But the industry has encountered challenges in recent years due to urban restrictions on motorcycles and the rapid development of new energy vehicles, Wu said.

The city's motorcycle enterprises

have weathered those headwinds by upgrading their technology and improving their products. The industry has achieved rapid growth in output value for three consecutive years, climbing 10.9 percent year-on-year to 28.4 billion yuan (\$3.95 billion) last year, Wu said.

The city is now poised to expedite the construction of major innovation platforms, strengthen the research and development of key core technologies, and promote their industrial applications. Jiangmen will also support enterprises in tackling bottlenecks and accelerating innovation, Wu said.

It will foster the growth of large-scale enterprises, with a special focus on specialized and sophisticated firms that produce novel and unique products, to achieve significant increases in business quantity, as well as their output value and profits, Wu said.

The city will also implement routine services for the top 200 industrial enterprises and continue to prioritize the needs of small and micro-sized businesses through a responsive platform, Wu added.

Jiangmen's overseas Chinese, numbering 5.3 million and residing in 145 countries and regions, serve as a significant asset for the city's high-quality development. By harnessing the power of overseas Chinese, Jiangmen has attracted quality foreign investment, stimulated economic growth, and created a conducive environment for innovation and entrepreneurship, Wu said.

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Base aims to be Silicon Valley of agriculture

By YANG RAN
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Chen Fan

Beside Yazhou Bay in Sanya, Hainan province, the Nanfan Scientific and Research Breeding Base stands as a testament to China's dedication to agricultural innovation.

The base has developed over 70 percent of the country's new crop varieties and now aspires to leverage technological innovation to contribute to global food security, aiming to become the "Nanfan Silicon Valley" of agriculture.

Chen Fan, a deputy to the National People's Congress and deputy director of the Yazhou Bay National Laboratory, has been at the forefront of the transformation.

Having dedicated two decades to breeding research at the Nanfan base, he envisions Nanfan Silicon Valley as being akin to Silicon Valley in the United States, emphasizing technological innovation and the integration of capital, industry and innovation chains.

For Chen, the essence of building Nanfan Silicon Valley lies in it being a true science park rather than an industrial zone. He said it will be a place where research activities align seamlessly with industrial goals, and where industry demands for innovation are met with cutting-edge research, propelling the development of the industry to the next level.

"What we need most now are the new quality productive forces," he said. "So that we can use the development of high-tech enterprises to make the transition from traditional to modern agriculture."

"What we are doing now in the Nanfan base is designed breeding, which means that the crop varieties are specifically designed for the environmental conditions in which they will be cultivated in the future. It's like tailoring clothes, but the design is completed at the genetic level."

"These genetically designed seeds promise greater application scenarios, meeting the demands of industrialized agriculture and enhancing precision in farming practices. It's hoped that in the future we will produce specific seeds for companies based on what they need; whatever they require, we can create for them."

Nanfan does not refer to a specific location, but rather a unique breeding process that makes the most of warm winters. Located south of Wuzhi Mountain in Sanya, winter temperatures in the area consistently exceed 16C, making it an optimal environment for seed breeding.

While northern parts of China experience freezing temperatures in winter, the area's mild climate allows seeds to undergo an additional breeding cycle, which makes the region a natural breeding accelerator and attracts many scientists to do breeding research in winter.

"We have been doing Nanfan since the 1970s, which has significantly contributed to ensuring food security in China," Chen said. "Looking forward, we hope to develop strategic crop varieties in Nanfan Silicon Valley and contribute to global seed industry development, aiming not only to feed China but also to help feed the world."

The Nanfan base has already become a hub for international agricultural cooperation. According to official data from the provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Hainan has trained over 5,000 personnel from 99 tropical countries and is developing the China-Cambodia Tropical Eco-Agriculture Cooperation Demonstration Zone in Cambodia to facilitate local agricultural development.

Chen said the base is also working on an international soybean research collaboration platform.

"We are studying the possibilities of cultivating Chinese-developed soybean varieties in Brazil, which can not only help to improve Brazil's local soybean varieties but also bring more profits to local farmers," he said.

"Our rice varieties, including Yuan Longping's high-tech hybrid rice, have made their way to many countries. In the future, we also hope to gradually export our soybeans and corn varieties to more places."

WORLD

China slams India's tunnel inauguration in border area

By WANG QINGYUN
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China has expressed strong dissatisfaction to India over Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's attendance at a tunnel inauguration in the eastern sector of the China-India border, saying that India has no right to develop China's Zangnan, or the southern part of the Xizang autonomous region.

"Zangnan is China's territory. The Chinese government never recognizes, and resolutely opposes the so-called Arunachal Pradesh illegally set up by India," China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin said on Monday.

Indian reports said Modi inaugurated the "strategically significant" Sela Tunnel in "Arunachal Pradesh" on Saturday.

Voicing China's strong dissatisfaction and firm opposition to Modi's move, Wang said the border issue between the two countries is not yet resolved.

"The relevant move will only complicate the issue and impose a negative influence on the situation in the border area," Wang said.

The inauguration came less than three weeks after China and India held the 21st round of commander-level talks over border issues.

During the talks, both sides agreed to keep up communications through military and diplomatic channels, and work for a resolution accepted by both sides as soon as possible, so that the situation in the border area will improve.

Briefly

PORTUGAL
Center-right claims victory in election

Portugal's center-right Democratic Alliance won Sunday's general election, its leader Luis Montenegro said, though it was unclear if he could govern without the support from far-right Chega, with whom he again refused to negotiate. Near-complete official results showed on Monday that the Democratic Alliance captured 29.49 percent of the vote in Sunday's poll, just ahead of the Socialists, with 28.66 percent, who have been in power since 2015. Chega, led by former priest trainee and television football commentator Andre Ventura, captured 18 percent of the vote, giving it 48 seats, up from just 12 in the last election in 2022. The election was called after Socialist Prime Minister Antonio Costa, 62, unexpectedly resigned in November following an influence-peddling probe that involved a search of his official residence and the arrest of his chief of staff.

SWITZERLAND
5 missing skiers found dead, search on for 6th

Five cross-country skiers who went missing during a ski tour in Switzerland were found dead, while a search was still on for the sixth skier, police said in a statement on Monday. The skiers, five of them members of the same family, went missing around Tete Blanche mountain on Saturday on the Zermatt-Arolla path, near the Matterhorn mountain that straddles the border between Switzerland and Italy. Police did not reveal the identity of those who were found dead. Zermatt is a popular mountain resort renowned for skiing and attracts tourists from around the world.

UNITED STATES
3 killed in morning shooting in Arkansas

Three people were killed and several others injured early Sunday when a shooting broke out at a private party in Arkansas, police said. Officers found multiple gunshot victims when they arrived at the scene near Jonesboro's downtown area around 5 a.m., Jonesboro police said in a Facebook post. Police haven't said what may have led to the shooting, or provided updates on the people who were taken to the hospital. An investigation is continuing.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



A Palestinian child plays with a sparkler in Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip, on the eve of the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan on Sunday. SAID KHATIB / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Specter of hunger hangs over Gaza

Somber mood prevails as Palestinians observe Ramadan in shadow of conflict

JERUSALEM/CAIRO/RAFAH — A somber mood prevailed in Gaza as Palestinians began fasting for Ramadan amid heightened security measures by Israeli police and the specter of conflict and hunger overshadowing the Muslim holy month as talks to secure a cease-fire stalled.

Amina Al-Ashi, a mother of six in the Gaza Strip, has never been as scared of a holiday as the fasting season began.

For millions of starving Palestinians like her, the raging Israel-Hamas conflict and bloodshed seem to render any thought of festivity utterly absurd.

"Last year, on days like these, I was busy hanging Ramadan decorations and preparing for *suhor* (pre-dawn meal) and breakfast for several days," the 44-year-old woman recalled.

"My children and I starve most of the time due to lack of food. I do not know how to encourage them to fast when they only find the slightest amount of food," she lamented, referring to practices of Islamic traditions during the holy month.

The nightmare started months ago when heavy Israeli airstrikes on Gaza City took away her job and all her property and shattered her peaceful life.

After the conflict broke out, she was forced to flee again and again, first to the Nuseirat refugee camp in central Gaza, then to the city of Khan Younis, and finally to the southernmost city of Rafah, where she lived in a makeshift tent near the border with Egypt.

Social order is collapsing in Gaza as millions of desperate Palestinians struggle to make a living amid

heavy Israeli strikes, paralysis in public services, and overwhelming humanitarian needs.

Jordanian, US, French, Belgian and Egyptian planes parachuted aid into northern Gaza on Sunday, but the United Nations aid coordinator for the area has said boosting supply by land is the best way to get assistance to the territory's more than 2 million people.

Some of the airdropped food packages smashed open on impact, leaving residents picking through the dirt to salvage what they could, AFP TV images showed.

The conflict began on Oct 7 when Hamas fighters launched a surprise attack on Israel, killing about 1,200 people, according to Israeli tallies.

Increasing alarm

Israel's relentless campaign in Gaza has caused increasing alarm across the world as the growing risk of famine adds to a death toll that crossed 31,100, the Hamas-run health ministry said on Monday.

Hopes for a cease-fire, which would have allowed Ramadan to pass peacefully and enabled the return of at least some of the 134 Israeli hostages held in Gaza, appear to have been shattered with talks in Cairo stalled, Reuters reported.

A Hamas official told Reuters the group was open to more negotiations but, as far as he knew, no dates had been set for further meetings with mediators in Cairo.

Thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters gathered amid tightened security at the Waterloo Square in central Amsterdam, demanding an end to Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and an immedi-

ate cease-fire in Gaza, as the Netherlands opened the National Holocaust Museum on Sunday with a ceremony presided over by the Dutch king as well as Israeli President Isaac Herzog.

The protest leaders emphasized they were against Herzog's presence, not the museum and what it commemorates.

International Committee of the Red Cross President Mirjana Spoljaric discussed the humanitarian situation with Ismail Haniyeh, chair of Hamas' political bureau, during a visit to Qatar on Sunday. She also met with Qatari officials as part of the group's efforts to hold direct talks with all sides, the agency said.

Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN Palestinian refugee agency UNRWA, said in a post on X that the month of Ramadan should "bring a cease-fire for those who have suffered the most" but instead for Gazans "it comes as extreme hunger spreads, displacement continues & fear + anxiety prevail amid threats of a military operation on #Rafah."

In Israel, fears of car ramming or stabbing attacks by Palestinians have also led to heightened security preparations.

For many Gazans, there is little alternative but to hope for peace.

"Ramadan is a blessed month despite the fact this year is not like every year, but we are steadfast and patient, and we will welcome the month of Ramadan as usual, with decorations, songs, with prayers, fasting," said Nehad El-Jed, who was displaced with her family in Gaza.

"Next Ramadan, we wish for Gaza to come back, hopefully all the destruction and the siege in Gaza will change, and all will come back in a better condition."

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Rail demand surges amid Red Sea attacks

By JONATHAN POWELL in London
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A surge in demand for rail transport through Russia from Asia to Europe has been reported by logistics companies and rail operators in the wake of the disruption caused to ocean routes brought on by recent Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.

Most major container shipping lines have redirected their Asia to Europe sailings away from the Suez Canal due to the ongoing attacks on commercial vessels, leading to global trade flow disruption.

Rerouting of ships around Africa's Cape of Good Hope has not only resulted in an additional 10-15 days of journey time but has also brought about numerous surcharges and increased costs for shippers, trade news outlets have reported.

Logistics companies are revisiting routes through Russia in response to the volatile situation in the Red Sea.

The Financial Times newspaper cited Germany's DHL as saying demand to move goods on the Russian rail route surged by approximately 40 percent since container

ships started choosing the longer route in December.

RailGate Europe reported a 25 to 35 percent increase in requests and the Netherlands-based Rail Bridge Cargo noted a 31 percent rise in cargo rail traffic through Russia compared to this time last year.

"The requests have picked up since the beginning of the situation in the Red Sea by around 40 percent," DHL said on the demand for rail. "The overwhelming amount is going through Russia."

The company emphasized that it was not handling any traffic to or from Russia due to Western export restrictions related to Russia's special military operation in Ukraine.

"We're doing severe export controls, in line with applicable sanctions," it said.

Cost-effectiveness

According to DHL, a significant portion of goods traveling from Asia to Europe by rail use the "west corridor" through Kazakhstan into Russia and Belarus, while some traffic follows the "north corridor," crossing directly from China into Russia east of Mongolia.

Rail transport is proving appealing to shippers due to its cost-effectiveness compared to airfreight and faster delivery times than ocean transportation, US media outlet CNBC reported.

Julija Sciglaite, RailGate Europe's chief business development officer, told CNBC last month that the company, which transports furniture, toys, clothes and automotive parts from China through Russia to European countries, uses the route as the journey takes between 14 and 25 days depending on its origin and destination, a transit time that is "significantly better" than ocean times.

When the Russia-Ukraine conflict first started, some customers expressed concern about shipping goods via rail through Russia, Sciglaite said.

"Bookings decreased significantly via Russia, but within the last year, this route is recovering due to good transit time and prices," she said.

Sciglaite added that since the beginning of attacks on vessels in the Red Sea by the Houthis toward the end of 2023, demand for rail transport has "skyrocketed".

TWO SESSIONS

5% GDP goal in line with growth plan, expert says

By ZHENG WANYIN in London
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China's aim for a GDP growth of about 5 percent this year is in line with its task to build a modern socialist country through high-quality development, said Michael Dunford, a leading scholar in the field of economic geography from the United Kingdom.

He made the remarks in an interview with China Daily on the latest Government Work Report, which was delivered on March 5 at the opening of the second session of the 14th National People's Congress, the country's top legislature.

The report reflects on China's recent past and outlines plans for 2024, including the GDP target for economic expansion.

"The rates of growth projected for 2024 are not out of order given the enormous size and wealth of China's domestic market, the completeness of its industrial system, and the quality of its workforce. They are more than consistent with China's long-term goals and are creditable in the context that China itself has chosen in the new era to grow more slowly," said Dunford, emeritus professor at the University of Sussex and visiting professor at the Institute of Geographical Sciences and Natural Resources Research of the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

"Instead of high rates of quantitative growth that brought ecological problems, overconcentration of unskilled processing industries, and increasing inequality, China has opted for high-quality development and a distinctive Chinese modernization path," he added.

High-quality development implies "a structural transformation" by moving away from some of the old growth drivers and developing new quality productive forces at a faster pace, which was also proposed in the work report this year, he said.

New quality productive forces refer to advanced productivity that is freed from traditional economic growth mode. They feature high-

tech, high efficiency and high quality, and they are in line with the new development philosophy.

Specific plans aimed at accelerating the development of new quality productive forces in the work report include launching an AI Plus initiative for innovative development of the digital economy, stepping up efforts to develop hydrogen power, new materials and innovative drugs, and more, Dunford said.

New industrial revolution

"Already in the 14th Five-Year Plan, it was clear that China aimed for supply-side restructuring to enable itself to play a leading role in the new industrial revolution by developing new industries and upgrading traditional sectors to become high-end, intelligent, and green," he said.

The 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) is China's latest medium- and long-term economic and social development plan, which was approved in 2021.

However, Dunford also said that achieving growth through the high-quality development path will not be "painless" considering the current international conjuncture, including the effects of COVID-19, and the increasing geopolitical turbulence, among others.

"In choosing the path, China has extremely important assets. In particular, it has the most complete industrial system in the world, but it needs to adjust it," he said.

For example, Dunford suggested that the skills profile of the graduate and technical workforce must be better matched with the changing profile of the economy, alongside other actions aimed at short-term employment generation.

Despite some challenges ahead, he expressed confidence in China's long-term economic prospects and praised the target for being practical. "I think it balances the strategic importance of structural change with managing the difficulties encountered due to relatively slower growth in the transition era," he said.



Police officers keep watch outside the US embassy building in Port-au-Prince on Sunday as the US military airlifted embassy nonessential personnel out of Haiti. RALPH TEDY EROL / REUTERS

Embassies evacuate staff as Haiti reels under violence

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — With Haiti's capital spiraling deeper into gang violence, members of several diplomatic missions, including staff from the United States and the German ambassador, began leaving Port-au-Prince on Sunday.

Beleaguered residents were scrambling for safety following the latest spasm of unrest, with a United Nations group warning of a "city under siege" after armed attackers targeted the presidential palace and police headquarters.

Criminal groups, which already control much of Port-au-Prince as well as roads leading to the rest of the country, have unleashed havoc in recent days.

Since Feb 29, Haitian armed groups have launched a wave of attacks in the capital, calling for the resignation of Prime Minister Ariel Henry.

The US military said early on Sunday it had "conducted an operation to augment the security of the US embassy at Port-au-Prince, allow our embassy mission operations to continue, and enable non-essential personnel to depart".

A US State Department spokesman said the embassy "remains open, on limited operations" with reduced personnel.

The German foreign ministry meanwhile said its ambassador joined other European Union representatives in leaving for the Dominican Republic on Sunday.

The European Union has evacuated all its diplomatic personnel from Haiti because of "the dramatic deterioration of the security situation", the European Commission spokesman Peter Stano said on Monday.

CARICOM, an alliance of Caribbean nations, has summoned envoys from the US, France, Canada and the UN to a meeting in Jamaica on Monday to discuss the violence and ways to provide assistance to Haiti.

Jean-Marie Theodat, a geographer at the Pantheon-Sorbonne University in Paris, said in the long term, Haiti needs to mobilize more young people, particularly through conscription, to strengthen the police and armed forces.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

WORLDUS

Real estate loans put US regional banks at risk

Commercial portfolio debt tops \$1 trillion; property values decline after pandemic

By BELINDA ROBINSON
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Regional banks in the US are facing tremors as they have yet to be paid back more than \$1 trillion in outstanding loans linked to commercial real estate, which is under strain from a glut of empty buildings after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The regional banks provide a vast number of real estate loans for the commercial real estate market across the country. But the industry has seen higher interest rates that have affected property values.

New York Community Bank in Hicksville, New York, saw its stock fall more than 40 percent on Wednesday.

The beleaguered bank said it will receive a \$1 billion equity investment. At least \$450 million of the money will come from former US

treasury secretary Steve Mnuchin's company, Liberty Strategic Capital. Mnuchin served under former president Donald Trump. The rest will come from investors.

The lender sought the cash infusion after it said on Feb 29 that it had identified higher-than-expected losses in the fourth quarter of \$2.4 billion, in part because of real estate loans on office and apartment buildings.

It is estimated that regional banks hold about \$1.4 trillion of the \$2.6 trillion of commercial real estate loans that will mature from this year up to next year. They are linked to office buildings, apartment buildings, hotels and retail spaces, according to Trepp, a real estate data company.

However, at least 14 percent of all commercial real estate loans and 44 percent of office loans are worth less than their debt, research by

the National Bureau of Economic Research shows.

Many of the loans are maturing as millions of office workers in large and small areas across the country are still working from home, or in a hybrid capacity, which has led to landlords facing difficult times, including seeing the value of office buildings nosedive.

Stijn Van Nieuwerburgh, a professor specializing in real estate at Columbia Business School in New York, said he believes the value of US office buildings will plunge 40 percent by 2029 or \$411 billion.

Landlords are having to adjust everything from expenditure to incentives to retain tenants amid changing times, Van Nieuwerburgh said. "Tenants are either not renewing leases or renewing leases but taking less space."

Failure by owners to pay their debts could have far-reaching consequences for the banks. Analysts fear it is not if, but when, that these problems will hit the market. Loans tend to be five to 10 years in term.

On March 1, shares of Valley National Bank and Columbia Banking System fell more than 2 percent. Both banks have large real estate loan portfolios. Their commercial real estate holdings as a proportion of total risk-based capital are above 300 percent.

Cracks first began to appear in the small banking sector last year after Silicon Valley Bank failed. It led to several other banks buckling.

To stabilize the entire sector, the Federal Reserve established the Bank Term Funding Program, which helped distressed lenders get low interest loans. But the program was scheduled to end on Monday.

New York Community Bank bought one of the affected banks, Signature Bank, last spring. It helped the NYCB grow to more than \$100 billion in assets.

The NYCB is a major lender for rent-stabilized landlords in New York City. More than half its total multifamily loan portfolio is secured by properties in New York

state, subject to rent regulation laws, Reuters reported.

While larger banks such as Deutsche Bank, Bank of America and JPMorgan Chase have set aside a budget to tackle their real estate loan debts, the outlook is different for smaller banks.

They tend to have bigger portions of their loan portfolios in commercial real estate than big banks do. For banks with more than \$100 billion in assets, commercial real estate loans account for 13 percent of total credit; but for smaller banks, it is 44 percent of credit.

The delinquency rates on commercial mortgage-backed securities are expected to rise to 8.1 percent this year, according to credit rating agency Fitch, as many companies struggle to convert remote and hybrid-working employees.

The Federal Reserve said it is working with the banks to tackle any upcoming issues.

Last month, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said at a congressional

testimony, "Commercial real estate is an area that we've long been aware could create financial stability risks or losses in the banking system, and this is something that requires careful supervisory attention."

Jerome Powell, the Fed chair, told the CBS news program 60 Minutes last month that the problem was "manageable", and "it doesn't appear to have the makings of the kind of crisis things that we've seen sometimes in the past, for example, with the global financial crisis".

"There's some smaller and regional banks that have concentrated exposures in these areas that are challenged. And, you know, we're working with them," he added.

Regional banks could be forced to sell loans at a loss. But that will not work for all, especially loans on properties valued 50 percent to 75 percent below their valuations at the time loans were taken out. Other regional banks may be forced to close or merge, Powell said.



The photo exhibition *Sino-American Friendship in Guangxi* is launched at the China Institute in New York on Monday. The opening ceremony featured a display that showcased the ethnic diversity in the region, with people wearing traditional attire from their respective groups. MINLU ZHANG / CHINA DAILY

Guangxi builds bonds with friendship events

By MINLU ZHANG in New York
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In a move to boost tourism, local governments in China are taking steps to enhance US-China friendship and cooperation from a substate perspective. The local government of Guangxi in Southwest China has launched a series of cultural events in the United States.

In the photo exhibition *Sino-American Friendship in Guangxi* launched at the China Institute in New York on Monday, Chinese Consul General in New York Huang Ping recalled a time in history when China and the US "joined hands, fighting together for human justice".

About 80 years ago during World War II, the Chinese were fighting against the Japanese invaders and were appreciative of the many American airmen who went to China and fought in the skies against the invaders,

Huang said, referring to the Flying Tigers. He said that about 260 American pilots gave their lives in China.

The Flying Tigers were an American volunteer air squadron based in Guilin, Guangxi, during the initial years of the war.

Hosted by the Guangxi People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, the exhibition's opening ceremony on Monday drew nearly 200 attendees, including representatives from the New York state and city government, and relatives of the Flying Tigers.

"We need to remember, we need to carry on the spirit the Flying Tigers... left as a legacy," said Huang.

The landscape of Guangxi and the United States has a close connection, and Guilin is a place frequented by many foreign dignitaries, including those from the United States, said Guangxi Vice-Governor Liao Pinhu.

"The Flying Tigers fought side

by side with the Chinese people in Guangxi to resist the invasion of the Japanese fascists, hence the people of Guangxi are friendly to the American people," said Liao.

Last year, with assistance from the Sino-American Aviation Heritage Foundation, Guangxi and the US signed and launched the "Flying Tiger Friendship Schools and the Flying Tiger Youth Program", a new platform for civil friendship and cooperation, said Liao.

"Guangxi hopes to extend the traditional friendship with the American people, join hands for development and cooperation, and jointly write a new chapter of exchanges and cooperation between China and the US," Liao said.

"At this point, the subnational relationship is one that has the strongest legs and the most positive aspects," said Jan Berris, vice-president of the National Committee on United States-China Relations.

"I think it" up to all of us in this room to do whatever we can to help bring back not the life-and-death aspect of the relationship but the focus on the importance of people-to-people relationships, getting to know one another, and realizing that we really have no choice," she said.

Berris, who accompanied the Chinese table-tennis team on its tour of the US in 1972 during the days of Ping-Pong Diplomacy, also suggested travel to Guilin as it stood out as her most cherished journey, not only due to the familial bonds it strengthened but also for the region's hospitality and beauty.

Guangxi is home to 12 ethnic groups: the Zhuang, Han, Yao, Miao, Dong, Mulam, Maonan, Hui, Yi, Jing, Sui and Gelao. The opening ceremony on Monday featured a display that showcased this ethnic diversity, with people wearing traditional attire from their respective groups.

Oppenheimer takes home 7 Oscars

HOLLYWOOD, California — *Oppenheimer* swept the board on Sunday at the Oscars, Hollywood's biggest night of the year, scooping seven awards including best picture and best director, crowning a triumphant year for filmmaker Christopher Nolan.

Nolan's masterful drama about the father of the atomic bomb also bagged gongs for lead actor Cillian Murphy and supporting actor Robert Downey Jr.

Nolan — a British-American filmmaker hailed as a generational talent — however said film as an art form still has room to grow.

"Movies are just a little bit over 100 years old. I mean, imagine being there 100 years into painting or theater," he said at the Dolby Theatre.

"We don't know where this incredible journey is going from here. But to know that you think that I'm a meaningful part of it means the world to me."

The haul was not quite complete — *Oppenheimer* was nominated for 13 prizes, but with seven statuettes on the night, it is still one of the most awarded films in Oscar history.

Downey was recognized for his

stellar performance as J. Robert Oppenheimer's political nemesis Lewis Strauss. It was the third overall Oscar nod for one of Hollywood's most versatile performers but whose career has been marked by extreme setbacks.

"I'd like to thank my terrible childhood," Downey said in a light-hearted speech, pausing for the audience's laughter, "and the academy — in that order."

He also gave thanks to his wife, Susan. "You loved me back to life and that's why I'm here."

Nolan's cerebral take on the man he has called "the most

important person who ever lived" also snapped up prizes for editing, cinematography and best original score.

"For better or worse, we're all living in Oppenheimer's world," Murphy said in his acceptance speech. "I'd like to dedicate this to the peacemakers."

Emma Stone won Best Actress for her daring performance in the surreal, Frankenstein-esque *Poor Things*, which won three other technical prizes.

Stone, who previously won an Academy Award for *La La Land*, paid tribute to the other women in her category and the five women on stage who presented the category.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

Curb on Chinese talent sparks strong backlash

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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A Florida law barring public universities from hiring researchers from China is facing mounting criticism from academics and advocates for its potential to cripple scientific progress in the United States.

The National Postdoctoral Association, or NPA, a leading advocate for postdoctoral researchers, or postdocs, in the US, has recently joined the fight against the law, advocating for the freedom to hire top talent regardless of national origin.

"We oppose any bill that bans international students or postdocs from studying or working at public universities. This approach benefits no one and harms both the individual seeking to come to the US and our national research efforts," Thomas Kimbis, executive director and CEO of NPA, told China Daily.

The law, SB 846, took effect on July 1, 2023. It prohibits Florida's 12 public colleges and universities from taking money from or partnering with entities in China and six other "countries of concern", including Russia, Cuba, Iran, Syria and Venezuela.

The list of banned interactions includes offering anyone living in one of those countries a contract to do research.

"The bill, intentionally or not, can cause a significant slowdown in the process of becoming a paid graduate student or postdoc at a variety of state institutions," said Kimbis.

"Postdocs in particular already face a difficult immigration journey and don't need to have any additional delays that are accompanied by a lack of clarity of process," he added.

Kimbis emphasized the crucial role of scientists born outside the US in driving global innovation as well as US economic, societal and health advancement.

"Nearly 60 percent of our postdoc population comes from outside the US — a figure that is steadily increasing," he said, adding that this group plays a significant role

in advancing research and development across various disciplines.

Lost opportunity

Kimbis also expressed concerns about a potential brain drain by turning away the brightest minds — "a lost opportunity for innovation that could threaten the very national security that SB 846 purports to protect", he said.

Faculty members at the University of Florida, or UF, which boasts the state's largest research portfolio, have been most vocal in opposition. More than 350 have signed a petition since December urging the university to disregard nationality when recruiting top graduate students.

They warn that "failure to act swiftly" will result in losing exceptional talent to other universities and cause "irreversible damage".

The law applies to all academic interactions with China and the other six countries. Exceptions are allowed only when the Board of Governors, which oversees higher education in the state, grants a waiver on a case-by-case basis. But it isn't clear how it would be implemented.

The law's ambiguity regarding implementation has left faculty members in a state of confusion. Professors across various disciplines at the UF have voiced their concerns, as shown in their comments on the petition's endorsement form.

Fred Gmitter, a professor of horticultural sciences, slammed the law as "counterproductive" and an attack on academic freedom.

"Excessive political interference in the affairs of a public university is counterproductive and contrary to the fundamental concepts of academic freedom," he said, "This bill is dragging UF down, not lifting us up."

Emma MacKie, assistant professor of geological sciences, highlighted the detrimental impact on accessing international talent.

"China and Iran are powerhouse incubators for geological talent, with a disproportionate number of students studying geology and geophysics, especially in industry or applied geoscience topics," she said. "We cannot strive to be a top 10 department if we can't access or collaborate with a significant fraction of the world's top geoscientists," she continued.

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BUSINESS

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TWO SESSIONS

Adviser says macro policies' joint effect key

Fiscal and monetary adjustments together can drive development

By ZHOU LANXU
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China's macroeconomic policy support can achieve greater impact by further coordinating fiscal and monetary policy measures, such as integrating the funding support provided by fiscal subsidies and structural monetary policy instruments, said a central bank official and national political adviser.

"Fiscal and monetary policy — as the country's two major macroeconomic adjustment policies — can generate a greater combined effect in driving economic development," said Wei Gejun, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body.

Wei, who is also head of the Shaanxi Provincial Branch of the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, said in an exclusive interview with China Daily that further enhancing coordination across various policy measures can bolster their overall impact and conserve the policy room for maneuver.

"Fiscal subsidies for interest payments can be combined with the funding support of structural monetary policy tools to better incentivize financial institutions to boost credit support for key areas and weak links while further reducing the financing costs facing the real economy," Wei said.

With regard to supporting project construction, he said it is advisable for local government special bonds to be utilized more in supplementing project capital, which can in turn encourage banks to allocate more credit resources to the projects.

Wei's remarks follow market mavens' desire to watch if China would better coordinate fiscal and monetary policies to elevate the efficiency of policy adjustments, in order to reach this year's GDP growth target of about 5 percent.

Zhang Ning, senior China economist at UBS, said the Swiss bank regards China's 2024 GDP growth target as proactive while the macroeconomic policy stimulus pack-

age unveiled at the just concluded two sessions — the annual gatherings of the country's top legislature and the top political advisory body — is moderate in scale.

UBS predicts that the Chinese economy will grow by 4.6 percent this year in the baseline scenario, Zhang said, and the achievement of a higher growth rate will hinge on efforts to enhance the intensity and efficiency of policy support.

The latest Government Work Report has stressed the need to enhance the consistency of macro policy orientation, strengthening coordination and interplay between policies to see that together they deliver greater outcomes and avoid focusing on one single policy to the detriment of others or letting one policy impede another.

In his proposal to the second session of the 14th CPPCC National Committee, Wei underscored the importance of boosting policy synergy. "Both fiscal and financial funding support can assist in enterprises' development. However, without coordination and cooperation, there could be situations where fiscal funds displace financial funds, which would affect the outcome of financial support and raise fiscal burden."

Relevant efforts are underway as the PBOC said last week in a column on its website that the central bank has supported the implementation of proactive fiscal policy by providing ample liquidity to accommodate the issuance of government bonds, having conducted three cuts to the reserve requirement ratio since 2023 and injecting more than 2 trillion yuan (\$278.5 billion) in long-term liquidity.

Chinese Finance Minister Lan Fo'an said on Wednesday that fiscal policy will strengthen its coordination with monetary, employment and industrial policies to strengthen the combined policy impact.

Wei said it is essential to assess whether the policies introduced by various departments — both economic and non-economic — are aligned with macroeconomic policy objectives to avoid instances where policies interfere with one another and weaken policy outcomes.



Employees check wind turbine blades at an industrial park in Zhangye, Gansu province. WANG JIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

New quality productive forces to inject momentum into economy

By FAN FEIFEI
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China's emphasis on constructing a modern industrial system and accelerating the development of new quality productive forces is expected to ensure the security of industrial and supply chains, advance new industrialization and inject fresh impetus into the country's high-quality economic development, political advisers and industry experts said.

Qu Yongyi, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body, said more efforts should be made to step up investments in core technologies in key fields and solve bottlenecks in areas like raw materials, critical components, core equipment and basic software, so as to boost the nation's self-reliance and strength in science and technology and unleash new quality productive forces.

Qu, who is also Party secretary and deputy director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Industrial Economics, stressed the need to strengthen international cooperation in sci-tech, accelerate the construction of new types of infrastructure, including new-generation communication base stations, computing power centers and national laboratories, and deepen reforms, especially in sci-tech to cultivate more high-quality talent.

The comments have come at a time when the Government Work Report for this year has stated that China will strive to modernize its industrial system and quickly

develop new quality productive forces.

The country will give full rein to the leading role of innovation, spur industrial innovation by making innovations in science and technology and press ahead with new industrialization, in order to promote a new leap forward in the productive forces, according to the report.

Qu said the term "new quality productive forces" means advanced productivity, mainly driven by revolutionary technological breakthroughs, innovative allocation of production factors, and deep industrial transformation and upgrading. They can generate new industries, new models and new growth momentum.

Citing that sci-tech innovation is a key element in developing new quality productive forces, he said, "For traditional industries, the injection of new quality production factors such as data, and the innovative allocation of original production factors can effectively promote the deep transformation and upgrading of industries."

Moreover, strategic emerging industries and future-oriented industries play a vital role in propelling the development of new quality productive forces, he added.

On the Government Work Report's GDP growth target of around 5 percent for this year, Qu said it aligns with the objectives of the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) and the broader goal of achieving socialist modernization by 2035, taking into account the need to boost employment and people's incomes, and prevent and defuse risks.

Cao Peng, a member of the 14th CPPCC National Committee and chairman of e-commerce platform

JD's technology committee, said he was inspired by the country's efforts in developing new quality productive forces revealed in the Government Work Report, which has set a crucial direction for bolstering high-quality economic development and advancing Chinese modernization.

Developing new quality productive forces denotes the close integration of cutting-edge digital technologies represented by cloud computing and artificial intelligence with intelligent machines and a digitally savvy workforce.

In his proposal to this year's two sessions, Cao called for efforts to step up policy support for industrial internet platforms to push forward the digital transformation of small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as bolster the in-depth integration of the digital and real economies.

Faced with increasingly fierce international competition, China's intensified push to foster new quality productive forces is of great significance in propelling the intelligent, green and high-end development of industries, improving the resilience and security of industrial and supply chains, and consolidating the economic recovery momentum, said Pan Helin, co-director of the Digital Economy and Financial Innovation Research Center at Zhejiang University's International Business School.

Pan said enhanced efforts are needed to double down on indigenous innovation to make breakthroughs in core and key technologies, and expand the industrial application scenarios of leading technologies, so as to gain a competitive edge on the global stage.

Fostering homegrown AI talent critical

By MA SI
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As much of the world remains transfixed with emerging artificial intelligence technology, more efforts are needed to cultivate AI talent for various sectors so as to better help China seize opportunities in the evolving landscape of tech revolution and industrial transformation, said a national legislator.

Lei Jun, a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress and chairman of Chinese tech company Xiaomi Corp, said there is a global surge of interest in artificial general intelligence, or AGI technologies.

AGI refers to AI's versatility in performing multiple tasks such as writing essays, checking program bugs and sketching out business plans. This differentiates it from previous more narrow AI projects that excel in only one area. The emergence of AI chatbot ChatGPT and text-to-video generation tool Sora triggered widespread discussion regarding the rapid development of AGI.

Lei said that amid the surging demand, China lacks top-tier AI talent. To address this, he proposed key ways to ensure that China remains at the forefront of the AI revolution.

Lei called for incorporating AI literacy as part of China's nine-year compulsory education curriculum, introducing AI general knowledge courses. "This approach aims to inspire students from an early age, fostering a comprehensive understanding and practical application of AI concepts," he added.

The comments came after the Government Work Report said last week that China will step up research and development, applications of big data and AI, as well as launch an AI Plus initiative and build digital industry clusters with international competitiveness.

To cultivate top-tier talent, Lei also advocated a substantial boost in the development of AI-related programs in universities. This involves attracting renowned overseas educators and bringing industry experts into academia.

Lei called for more efforts to support large tech companies and educational institutions in cultivating talent for AI applications. He proposed incentivizing these entities to provide training programs tailored to the rapidly evolving AI landscape, and addressing the high demand for skilled professionals with practical expertise in the field.

Jerry Liu, head of China internet research at UBS, said a new computing cycle will emerge every 10 or 15 years, and generative AI will be the beginning of the next cycle.

Briefly

Major bridge in Sichuan under construction

Southwest China's Sichuan province will see its connectivity with neighboring regions further progress as construction of a highway project in the area's eastern portion moves closer to completion. China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp, a State-owned builder, said recently its workers have started construction of the Yazikan Bridge, another major crossing within the Nanchong-Tongnan Expressway project. Upon completion, it will facilitate the route between the provincial capital Chengdu and Chongqing, and boost integrated development in the inland area.

Auto sales up 11.1% in first 2 months

China's auto sales rose 11.1 percent year-on-year to nearly 4.03 million units in the first two months, said the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. Auto sales reached about 1.58 million units in February, down 19.9 percent from the same period a year ago.

CHINA DAILY - XINHUA

Economic blueprint enthuses MNC execs

By CHENG YU
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China's latest economic blueprint unveiled at the two sessions reflects the nation's pragmatic attitude toward high-quality development, which will offer sufficient growth impetus to the global economy while maintaining stability, said executives of multinational corporations on Monday.

The Chinese government's sharpened focus on "new quality productive forces", "high-standard opening-up" and "high-quality development" will bolster MNCs' confidence that they can grow unimpeded in China, they said.

Pablo Machado, president of the Asia unit of Brazilian pulp and paper maker Suzano, said: "For another year, China has set solid growth targets during the two sessions, which signals its strong confidence to the market."

China has set a GDP growth target of around 5 percent for 2024. "This reflects the expectations of market analysts and indicates the Chinese government's policies and actions for tackling economic challenges, while keeping the engine of the economy running to provide economic and social development

globally," Machado said.

Agreed Saravoot Yoovidhya, CEO of Thai beverage company TCP Group, adding it showed China's "rational and pragmatic" attitude toward development.

"As the Chinese government's measures to stabilize the economy are implemented one after another, we firmly believe that China's economic development will continue to improve and remain stable over the long term," he said.

Yoovidhya further said TCP Group is "more confident than ever" that it can grow further in China as the nation has vowed to strengthen foreign trade, foreign investment and high-standard opening-up in the latest Government Work Report.

"It fully reflects the great importance and support the Chinese government accords to foreign-funded enterprises, and encourages foreign companies to exploit more opportunities in the super large Chinese market," he said.

Yoovidhya noted that in recent years, opening-up has continuously deepened and the Chinese business environment has been continuously optimized, making China a preferred destination of foreign investors.

"Today, China is eager to attract and utilize foreign investment to a

greater extent, treat local and foreign-funded enterprises equally, and promote landmark foreign-funded projects. All this will enable foreign companies to see a stronger potential in the Chinese market."

According to the latest Government Work Report, China will strive to modernize its industrial system and develop new quality productive forces faster. The country will also underscore the leading role of innovation, spur industrial innovation by making innovations in science and technology, and press ahead with new industrialization, so as to promote a new leap forward in productive forces.

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

Francis Liekens, vice-president of the China unit of Swedish industrial giant Atlas Copco Group, noted that China's shift from basic manufacturing to high-quality technology and development is of great importance.

"China is leading, not following, in many sectors. As a company, if you're not leading in China, then you cannot be a leader in the global market."

He said Atlas Copco is confident of



A view of the booth of Suzano during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

its long-term growth prospects in the Chinese market, given the speed of both development and innovation.

Referring to China's efforts to become a major source of technology and innovation, Liekens said this will place foreign companies in a good position to drive and respond to these opportunities in emerging sectors like energy efficiency, digitalization and carbon neutrality.

Machado from Suzano said he is impressed by the new vision of developing new quality productive forces, which showcases China's efforts to embrace innovation-driven growth. "China's ongoing round of techno-

logical revolution and industrial transformation is a response to its transition from high-rate growth to high-quality development."

Strategic emerging industries and industries of the future will be seen as key drivers of the new quality productive forces, which include biotechnology, new energy, new materials and environmental protection, Machado said.

"This will enable foreign companies such as Suzano, which are aligned with the new quality productive forces and help promote high-quality development, to continue to thrive in China."

BUSINESS



TWO SESSIONS



A view of the Zhongguancun Science Park in the Xiong'an New Area. WANG YUANZHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Xiong'an eyes hub of innovation, startups

New area outside Beijing proving boon to upcoming businesses

By ZHANG YU in Shijiazhuang
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Xiong'an New Area in North China's Hebei province is building itself into a hub of innovation and entrepreneurship in the new area, with the area's atmosphere for innovation and entrepreneurship becoming increasingly strong, a top provincial official said on Wednesday.

Based on the initial batch of relocated units or companies from Beijing, the area has promoted two major innovative chains — one for aerospace information and satellite internet tech and the other dedicated to collaborative innovation among relocated universities, Ni Yuefeng, a deputy to the 14th National People's Congress and secretary of the CPC Hebei Provincial Committee, said during the Hebei delegation's opening media day on Wednesday.

Xiong'an New Area came into being on April 1, 2017, when China announced the decision to establish it in the capital's neighbor Hebei to relieve Beijing of functions not essential to its role as the nation's capital and to advance coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region.

Since then, China's centrally administered State-owned enterprises have set up more than 200 subsidiaries and branches in Xiong'an, said Zhang Guohua, an NPC deputy and secretary of the CPC Work Committee of the Xiong'an New Area.

"Xiong'an is vigorously developing high-end and high-tech indus-

“Xiong'an is vigorously developing high-end and high-tech industries, establishing over 10 innovation platforms including a science and technology innovation center, an innovation research institute and a high-tech development zone.”

Zhang Guohua, secretary of the CPC Work Committee of the Xiong'an New Area

tries, establishing over 10 innovation platforms including a science and technology innovation center, an innovation research institute and a high-tech development zone,” Zhang said during the media event.

In addition, as of February, the area has implemented a total of 383 key projects, with a completed investment of 671 billion yuan (\$93.4 billion). The development area covers 184 square kilometers, with a total construction area of 43.7 million square meters, according to the work committee.

In Xiong'an, over 4,010 new buildings have been erected, along with 712 kilometers of new roads, 141 km of new underground utility tunnels and 315 km of new hydraulic engineering embankments.

Mingzhi Data Co, a Beijing-based entrepreneurial enterprise, just set up its branch in the area earlier this month.

“After seven years of construction and development, I've seen that Xiong'an is full of opportunities for innovative firms like mine,” said He Cheng, founder and CEO of Mingzhi Data Co.

Having worked in the field of IT and big data for more than 10 years in Beijing, He said his company is dedicated to providing intelligent management of offline stores including chains of restaurants and retail outlets based on big data and intelligent technology.

“The area has become a fertile ground for innovation and business ventures, and I believe there's great potential for my company to expand here with multiple chances to find new customers,” He said, adding that he would consider transferring his firm's headquarters from Beijing to Xiong'an in the future.

Other than the innovative atmosphere that has attracted He to develop a branch in Xiong'an, there are other key factors enticing him back to Xiong'an. He is actually a local who grew up in Rongcheng county, which is now part of the new area, but worked in Beijing for over a decade.

“The government departments work very efficiently here in Xiong'an,” he said, adding that the whole process of establishing the branch in Xiong'an to the final settling down with a ready office and all kinds of procedures and paperwork, only took about two months.

“What's more, the public services for personnel are very alluring so that my employees can have a high quality of life,” he said. He listed several things like heavy subsidies for housing and offices, as well as high-quality education that can be compared to that of Beijing.

“The area is really building a people-centered city that is both livable and conducive to doing business,” He said.

Financial sector key to country's sci-tech push

By LIU ZHIHUA
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China's financial industry must better facilitate innovation in science and technology, said a political adviser.

The country has in recent years taken multiple, targeted measures to facilitate bank loans and other forms of financing for high-end manufacturing, specialized and sophisticated enterprises that manufacture new and unique products, and science and technology-based small and medium-sized enterprises, said Wang Dongsheng, a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the country's top political advisory body.

“Through pilot works on technology finance, many experiences that can be replicated and promoted have been accumulated, laying a good foundation for the financial industry to support sci-tech innovations,” said Wang, who is also chairman of the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Co Ltd.

He suggested improvements to top-level design and increased government funding as well as related policy support for technological innovation and transformation.

“It is advisable to establish an interdepartmental and expert working group at the central-government level to coordinate research and design a strategic plan for national

science and technology development and coordinate the further development of science and technology and the financial industry,” he said.

Works should also be done to improve the effect of government policies.

For instance, the government should provide more resources and funding for science and technology development, encourage enterprises to increase investment in sci-tech innovations through tax incentives, and roll out policies to guide more private capital and overseas funds into supporting sci-tech innovations and transformation, he added.

Wang also said it is important to strengthen cooperation between financial institutions and science and technology-based enterprises.

“We should guide financial institutions to make good use of various financial tools such as venture capital, private equity investment, bonds, and insurance, to provide targeted, complete and full-life-cycle financial services for science and technology-based enterprises at different stages of development,” he said.

“Different regulatory agencies should also provide policy support and regulatory tolerance for financial institutions to launch such diversified products and services.”

The political adviser also said that the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area has huge potential

for developing the distributed solar photovoltaic industry, although with some challenges with respect to investment and financing.

He suggested the country take measures, including strengthening government strategic planning, innovating business models and launching innovative green financial products, to promote the development of the solar PV industry in the region.

Financial institutions can research the effects of existing “photovoltaic loan” products in various places and launch new “photovoltaic loan” products with terms, quotas and interest rates that are better in line with the characteristics of the GBA.

Related products can consider linking loan interest rates to power generation performance, he said.

Asset securitization can also be used to convert assets with poor liquidity into tradable investment products to promote liquidity and transactions in the field of distributed photovoltaic power stations, he said.

Tang Daqian, associate director of corporates at Fitch Bohua, said that the continuous improvement of market-oriented trading mechanisms will help create a reasonable green premium for new energy electricity generation, which will encourage the green transformation of China's power sector and help meet the country's carbon reduction goals.

Green hydrogen, ammonia, ethanol highlighted for nation's carbon reduction

By ZHENG XIN
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Expanding the use of green hydrogen, ammonia and ethanol will be crucial for China to achieve deep cuts in carbon emissions while ensuring domestic energy security, as the future growth of power generation will mainly come from nonfossil resources, according to political advisers and industry experts.

China, being the world's largest producer and consumer of hydrogen and ammonia, holds significant strategic importance in fostering the development of sustainable green hydrogen, ethanol and ammonia, said Jiang Yi, chairman of China Huadian Corp Ltd, who is also a member of the 14th National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

Jiang suggested comprehensive research on policy support, market mechanisms and standard systems for the hydrogen, ethanol and ammonia sectors to drive commercial-scale development and application of “new energy+hydrogen/ethanol/ammonia-based energy”.

The process of producing hydrogen, ethanol and ammonia from renewable energy resources and using them as a carrier for energy storage, which can later be converted back to electricity, is considered a pivotal option for deep decarbonization at the terminal end. They have been gaining more international attention for their potential as an emissions-free fuel.

Currently, hydrogen is mainly produced from carbon dioxide and natural gas without using carbon capture, utilization and storage technology. It therefore

generates massive carbon emissions during the process, known as “gray hydrogen”.

“Blue hydrogen” has its carbon emissions captured and stored, or reused.

Just like hydrogen, there are several different types of ammonia, depending on the energy used for its production. Green ammonia — produced using wind, solar or hydro-power — is becoming the most preferable form of the fuel as it is carbon-free.

China's national emissions trading scheme (ETS) currently covers only power generation enterprises. Sectors such as chemicals and steel, which are strongly associated with the widespread application of green hydrogen, ethanol and ammonia, have not been included.

Experts believe that green hydrogen, ethanol and ammonia could be a key to the success of the country's carbon peak and neutrality goals, which aim to peak carbon emissions by 2030 and achieve carbon neutrality by 2060.

With clear demand and the potential for use in various industries, green hydrogen, ethanol and ammonia are gaining increasing attention from governments and companies looking to shift away from fossil fuels to renewable alternatives, said Luo Zuoxian, head of intelligence and research at the Sinopec Economics and Development Research Institute.

Seeing the potential for green hydrogen, ethanol and ammonia, governments across the world are exploring a variety of renewable sources to decarbonize their transport sectors and other areas. Luo believes green hydrogen, ammonia and ethanol have

been emerging as a clean and versatile fuel with the potential to revolutionize various sectors.

On the other hand, China's green hydrogen production costs are declining as a result of increased technological breakthroughs, while greater investment that supports innovations in technologies can help further reduce production costs, said Luo.

As China is currently the world's largest hydrogen producer and consumer, it has substantial room for further development, he said.

Wu Mouyuan, vice-president of the China National Petroleum Corp Economics and Technology Research Institute, said hydrogen's ability to produce energy without emitting CO2 makes it a promising solution for decarbonizing sectors that are challenging to directly electrify, such as heavy industry, aviation and long-haul overland transport.

By serving as a clean fuel alternative, hydrogen can replace traditional fossil fuels while playing a crucial role in consuming and storing renewable energy, making it an indispensable energy alternative for achieving deep emissions reductions at the terminal stage, Wu said.

Jiang said Huadian aims to step up new energy project construction this year, including solar and offshore wind power, amid the country's green energy transition.

It eyes establishing an integrated energy industry supply chain that covers hydrogen, energy storage and carbon trade, while accelerating technological research and innovation to further integrate digital technologies and artificial intelligence with energy production, so as to foster new and high-quality productive forces, he said.

Dubai commodities center attracts more Chinese firms

By WANG XIN in Shanghai
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An increasing number of Chinese member companies have settled down at the Dubai Multi Commodities Center, the largest free zone in the United Arab Emirates and of the Government of Dubai Authority on commodities trade and enterprise, according to senior executives.

The center is looking to welcome more Chinese firms seeking global expansion, the executives said during a road show in Shanghai on March 1.

Last year, the DMCC saw 852 Chinese companies registered with the free zone, a growth of 25 percent year-on-year. Among them were major industry players Autel

Robotics and Hebei Logistics Group Metal Materials, according to the center.

The latest figures reveal that the DMCC is now home to over 14 percent of the estimated 6,000 Chinese businesses based in the UAE.

“For the past two years, we have maintained a consistent 25 percent growth in Chinese companies joining DMCC. Such strong numbers are a testament to our ability to provide both the bespoke services and quality commercial space demanded by Chinese businesses,” said Ahmed Bin Sulayem, executive chairman and CEO of the DMCC.

He said the DMCC is one of the biggest hubs for Chinese businesses in Dubai across various critical sectors, such as services, technology,



A view of the skyline with Burj Khalifa in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. KAMRAN JEBRELI / AP

fintech, manufacturing, gaming, renewable energy and electric vehicles.

Over the past two years, the DMCC has also noticed some new trends in the expansion of Chinese companies.

“During the past two years, more Chinese companies have been looking for growth and expansion beyond just trading. Dubai continues to be the easiest place to start, (and) then to expand into the rest of the region. So, we start to see more Chinese companies looking to Dubai but beyond Dubai,” said Hamad Buamim, chairman of the board of directors at the DMCC.

Looking ahead, the DMCC is optimistic about further collaboration opportunities that Dubai presents for Chinese businesses looking to expand through global markets.

“The Belt and Road Initiative is

of great interest for us. Dubai is well located in the corridor between the East and the West. We believe that Chinese companies in Dubai will definitely benefit and contribute more to this important initiative. Besides, the UAE has just joined the BRICS. This can open more opportunities for both of our countries to benefit from the economic ties and growing relationship further,” Buamim added.

Muhammad Sulaiman Al Naqbi, consul-general of the United Arab Emirates in Shanghai, said at the road show: “The UAE and Shanghai share a deep connection built on a foundation of collaboration and thriving trade ties. The work that the DMCC is doing to further this cause reflects the major opportunities on offer as we work together to boost bilateral trade, and the global trade landscape as a whole.”

BUSINESSFOCUS

Boosting rural prosperity with sci-tech

Anhui explores unique ways to help farms prosper

By MA CHENGUANG and ZHUANG QIANGE

Zhou Guangqi, a denizen of a mountainous region in East China's Anhui province, set up a factory to produce tofu and preserved fish in 2017, selling some 60,000 to 80,000 jars of the pickled products each year.

"I inherited such skills from my father, and our preserved dace fish, chopped peppers and fermented bean curd in my hometown of Mituo, Taihu county, enjoy a good reputation," Zhou said, noting however, that his company, which employs six, has had problems to address.

"My fermented bean curd broke apart too easily, sometimes developed a peculiar odor with yellow and red discolorations, and tasted a bit rough and hard," he said.

"I had difficulty for several years, and had to discard hundreds of thousands of jars of products due to inferior quality," he said, adding that lacking the necessary technology and with no professionals in the village or town qualified to help, it was difficult for him to make further progress.

Aid came on Oct 12, 2021, when Liu Dong, a PhD from Anqing Vocational and Technical College based in Anqing — which administers Taihu county — decided to help him with his problems, largely raising the products' quality and increasing sales by almost 50 percent.

Zhou has renovated his factory to produce nearly 1 million jars of various pickled vegetables annually, with a production value of 20 million yuan (\$2.78 million).

Joint efforts

Liu's welcome assistance was part of Anhui's efforts to promote rural vitalization with coordinated efforts, helping the province's 25.43 million rural residents among a total populace of 61.27 million.

With the Leading Group for Rural Work of the Anhui Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China overseeing overall efforts, the province set up the Anhui Rural Vitalization Bureau on May 28, 2021, aiming to seek a new pattern of creating "a unique product for each village, and a unique industry for each county".

Since 2012, rural denizens in Anhui have witnessed double-digit growth in household incomes on a year-on-year basis, said the CPC Anhui Provincial Committee and the provincial government.

Anqing, which administers three districts, five counties and three county-level cities with a total population of 4.15 million, is a revealing example of the campaign's success.

The city set up the Anqing Rural



Researchers from Anqing Vocational and Technical College assist farmers in Taihu county, Anhui province, in caring for rice seedlings last summer. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Vitalization School at AVTC on Dec 1, 2021, aiming to cultivate more talent and bolster scientific and technological training and services for rural areas.

The school not only has professors and PhDs from AVTC, but also attracts outside talent, including 14 academic experts, seven governmental policy researchers, 32 experts from agricultural technology promotion centers, five farming experts as well as 10 agricultural entrepreneurs.

"We want to make new and greater contributions to accelerating the construction of a modern and beautiful Anqing," said Tong Hongkui, Party secretary of AVTC.

The educators would often visit rural areas to provide assistance in a timely fashion.

Another AVTC PhD, Li Ping, and her team decided to assist Zhao Zhilin, a native of Changlin village in Mituo town, who set up Anhui Qinyou Biotechnology Co Ltd in 2022 dedicated to planting *Acorus calamus*, a plant whose roots and stems are used in traditional Chinese medicine.

"With the development of TCM, demand for *Acorus calamus* is also on the rise as it helps in curing a number of maladies," said Zhao, adding that his dedication to the plants could also make him rich.

But the first thing is to acquire the best seedlings, as the wild plants have become scarce due to excessive local harvesting, he added.

In March 2023, Li and her team guided Zhao in breeding 20,000 seedlings in a greenhouse at AVTC through a method of rhizome reproduction, with a survival rate topping 95 percent.

"I'm now fully confident in expanding my cultivation scale, and developing an industry chain spanning planting, processing and sales," Zhao said, adding he also intends to help farmers around him.

There has been provincial-wide assistance for farmers in Anhui. For example, in Yuexi county, the local branch of Guo Yuan Agriculture Insurance joined the Yuexi bureau of finance and the Yuexi bureau of agriculture and rural affairs in launching one month of insurance between Dec 28, 2022 and Jan 27, 2023 to cover the 15,000 hogs overseen by 22 large-scale breeders in the county.

When the price of live pigs fell below their costs since late December 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, breeders received compensation of 2.38 million yuan from the insurer.

Wang Xiaobing, head of the Yue-xingshan Black Pig Breeding Professional Cooperative, said the compensation reduced their burden to some extent.

Large-scale agriculture

As a major grain producer, Anhui has pledged to maintain its production capacity of around 70 billion kilograms each year, spanning arable land of no less than 5.82 million



Tong Hongkui (first right), Party secretary of AVTC, encourages farmers in Changlin village in Taihu county to promote their mountain produce via livestreaming. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

hectares, encouraging the local farmers to get rich through planting and producing grains, and making the province's grain sector stable and people's livelihoods better secured.

In Taihu county of Fuyang in northwestern Anhui, Xu Congxiang is an experienced wheat farmer.

Owning an 82-hectare agricultural science and technology park, which includes an R&D building and over 10 units of large mechanical equipment, his park produced 820,000 kg of wheat in 2022. He also has proprietary ownership of some 20 key technologies for planting high-yield wheat through scaled agricultural operations.

To increase its grain production,

Anhui netted in a total yield of more than 83 billion kg of grain in 2023 by planting over 6.67 million hectares of the commodity.

One product per village

Anhui also aims at a new pattern of "a unique product for each village, and a unique industry for each county", with a driving force of "industries" as the core for development.

In Anqing's Qianshan county, the Anqing Forestry Bureau sent staff to aid farmers in Pingfeng village, helping them identify their potential unique products — in this case, sweet potatoes — and encouraging more than 40 residents from over 30 households to

expand cultivation of the tubers.

In 2023, the village harvested 120,000 kg of small sweet potatoes and produced 20,000 kg of sweet potato flour, leading to an income of 300,000 yuan for the village.

Each household in the village could increase their annual income by over 5,000 yuan, the bureau said, adding that the village is now thinking of an enlarged mode of "online livestreaming promotion + offline sales" to bolster the popularity and sales of small sweet potatoes.

Meanwhile, with over 61 million people living in 104 county-level areas administering various townships and villages, Anhui is also trying to form a mode of "one specialty for each county".

Funan county, with 1.74 million residents in southern Fuyang, is encouraging farmers in its 28 towns to develop wicker products interwoven with cattail, willow and mulberry strips, expanding its fame as "the capital of China's wickerwork".

Located along the Huaihe River, the county has abundant resources, and in Yangzhai village under Huanggang town, households running wickerwork businesses can each earn up to 60,000 yuan annually from handicrafts.

Currently, Funan can produce over 10,000 wickerwork varieties, which are of both ornamental and practical value, and are sold both at home and abroad, said its publicity chief Zhang Lei.

Tong said that the ultimate path to rural prosperity is to rely on science and technology, and his college routinely sends a team of teachers with PhDs to help cultivate professional breeders and high-quality farmers in Taihu county.

He added that the further progress of both Zhou's and Zhao's businesses has demonstrated the power of science and technology.

Citing Xinrui Rice Industry Co Ltd as an example, Tong said the firm operates a 180-hectare rice paddy, adopting mechanized farming, drone seeding and pesticide spraying.

In addition to offering technical help for Qinyou Biotechnology, Li Ting from the AVTC School of Modern Business also helps farmers in Changlin with e-commerce skills in livestreaming their mountain produce.

The village, located in the hard-to-reach Dabie Mountains, has many types of mountain produce to publicize, and science and technology can offer a helping hand, she said.

Wang Xiping, secretary of the CPC committee in Mituo town, said AVTC not only sends experts and professors to the town for technical guidance, but also provides local farmers with funds and advanced concepts, which will help guide them onto the path of prosperity.

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Dreams of better futures in countryside come true

By MA CHENGUANG and ZHUANG QIANGE

East China's Anhui province is helping bring about brighter futures for over 61 million people in 104 county-level areas administering various towns and villages. In short, the modernization of Anhui's agricultural and rural areas will basically be achieved by 2035, making it a pioneer in China.

The province's 25.43 million rural residents living in its 16 prefecture-level cities have answered the timely call by devising their own paths for prosperity.

Chu Jie, 31, who graduated from Anqing Vocational & Technical College in 2015 with a marketing degree, decided to build his hometown of Weiling — a national ecological town — into a tourist hot spot integrating catering, accommodation, sightseeing, leisure and folk culture.

Chu returned to his hometown in Yuexi county of Anqing, and joined his elder brother Chu Lei in 2015 in setting up Jinbang (Top-notch) Homestay, a rare business venture in Jiahe village under Weiling's administration.

Nestled in the Dabie Mountains and originally hampered by incon-

venient transport and therefore with few outside visitors, Jiahe sports distinctive, fresh agricultural produce, relaxing lifestyles and impressive ecology as a small village.

Chu's homestay has launched its own website and WeChat account, posting photos online of four guest rooms on the second floor of their home, together with captions. On May 1 of that year when the homestay officially opened, they greeted 12 tourists from Hefei — the provincial capital — and Nanjing — the provincial capital of nearby Jiangsu.

"We adhere to our own business philosophy of 'small but exquisite operations,'" the younger Chu said, adding that with only 23 guest rooms, the homestay has kept a maximum occupancy of some 45 tenants per day.

Their persistence has led to a booming business. Each year, they receive over 3,000 tourists from all over the country, with rooms almost full all through the summer and an annual business income of some 1 million yuan (\$138,900).

The two brothers also encouraged 12 nearby households to join in as an alliance, and helped another 18 surrounding homestays in business operations and development.

In less than three years, they founded three companies to provide catering services and foodstuffs for tourists, and advised village businesses on how to market local produce, which could provide supplemental income for each participating household.

The success of Jinbang Homestay has drawn the attention of the township government, which has invested more than 500,000 yuan to improve local road conditions, build parking lots, erect streetlights and renovate the villages' waterways, in a bid to help boost rural vitalization.

As the Chu brothers are now thinking of further business expansion, back in 2017, Jinbang Homestay was selected as one of the "Top Eight Summer Tourism Destinations in Anhui" by the Anhui Provincial Meteorological Bureau.

Hard-won success

While Chu Jie enjoyed smooth business development, Dai Shuangjie and her husband Fo Guoxing experienced a bumpier road to success.

After graduating from Anqing Agricultural School (the predecessor of AVTC) in 2003 majoring in horticulture, Dai was recommended by the school to work in a flower company in nearby Zhejiang province.

In just a few years, she progressed from an ordinary worker to a technician specializing in soil quality and the cultivation of orchids in laboratories with a handsome monthly salary.

In 2011, Dai decided to try planting crops on 13.3 hectares of farmland on her own, thinking that she had mastered the needed knowledge, and had the ability to carry out the enterprising task.

She expanded the farmland to 26.6 hectares in 2012, and 80 hectares in 2013, when her husband resigned from his job in Anqing and joined her in Qipan Ridge in Tongcheng, a county-level city administered by Anqing.

The couple even rented an idle primary school in the village and used the surrounding barren mountains to raise poultry, with a division of labor — the wife tending crops and her spouse handling the chickens.

In the spring of 2014, they decided to set up their own Shuangfu Family Farm by taking two Chinese characters from their names and using homophones.

Catastrophe hit in 2016, when continuous heavy downpours caused floods and rendered Dai's rice output moldy and spoiled, while Fo's uncle and Dai's father were only able to provide the chickens with moldy rice, which led to the birds' demise.

Four years later, in the summer of 2020, floods returned, inundating 67 hectares of Dai's farmland, with all her investments only partially compensated by her insurer.

"We needed to pay the land rent by year-end and had to pay our workers, and it was a very difficult time for us," Fo recalled.

Seeing Dai completely floored with dark thoughts every day and



Dai Shuangjie spends a joyful day at her chicken farm in Tongcheng, Anhui province, last summer. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

no strength to work due to insomnia, Fo did his best to console his wife, saying: "Even if we had a loss of 1 million yuan this year, we could recover it in 10 years, as we are still young."

Fo added his wife was comforted by her husband's tenderness, and together, they enjoyed much more success going forward.

At present, they are operating a 106-hectare farm, bringing them enough zinc-rich rice, and a 33.3-hectare forestland, where some 10,000 chickens and ducks roam freely with sufficient eggs. The forest also yields them wood-pressed edible oils.

Dai has also built a rice processing plant to better process her products, which are well-received by the mar-

ket, and she provides employment for about 50 women living nearby and some temporary work for the elderly.

Dai has been elected an outstanding female entrepreneur in Tongcheng, a model worker in the city as well as a female representative for Anqing, while Fo has also been chosen as a village official and served as a political advisor for Tongcheng.

In recent years, they also became the key targets for training assistance by local governments, which sent Dai to study at Shanghai Jiao Tong University in November 2020, and supported her in receiving a 15-day training session at Huazhong Agricultural University as a candidate chosen by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

COMMENT

Editorials

Conclusion of NPC session highlights guarantees for healthy private sector

The development of new quality productive forces is a clear priority for the country, as the advancements in artificial intelligence, blockchain, cloud computing, big data, the metaverse and Web 3.0 are ushering in a new scientific and technological revolution, which will transform every aspect of life.

China has made unprecedented achievements in almost all fields in the past more than four decades. The country is a giant in terms of its manufacturing industries, IT industry, and innovation.

However, China cannot afford to slacken its endeavors in innovation, and must continue to make breakthroughs in key technologies and key fields not only to shore up its own economic growth but also to act as a major contributor to global development and social progress.

The emphasis on the development of new quality productive forces is meant to tap the potential of innovation in China to the utmost.

This means that governments at all levels must do whatever they can to make policies that will encourage and support enterprises and institutions in their pursuit of innovations. National support must be given to the development of key technologies in a targeted manner, and the national resources mobilized nationwide must be used in a way that will facilitate a leap forward in the advancements in frontier areas.

As part of these efforts, it has been emphasized time and again in Communist Party of China Central Committee documents that institutions and mechanisms at all levels must be constantly optimized to unswervingly encourage, support and guide the development of the nonpublic sector, which is an important factor in the development of new quality productive forces, as it accounts for about 70 percent of the country's innovation, according to official data.

In light of this, the central authorities have stressed that efforts should be made to optimize the environment for the development of private enterprises, enhance policy support and strengthen the legal guarantees for the private sector.

The work report of the National People's Congress Standing Committee that was approved at the conclusion of the weeklong second session of the 14th NPC on Monday reaffirmed that the legal guarantee for the private sector is to be strengthened in the form of a new law that will help pioneer the development of future-oriented industries, encourage the development of venture capital and equity investment and improve the functions of industrial investment funds.

The law to promote the development of the private sector that is in the works aims to address the difficulties faced by private enterprises, make sure their property rights are protected and that entrepreneurs have a sense of security and the confidence that their rights will be protected and they will be competing on a level playing field.

As the NPC said in the report, the law that is being drawn up will encourage, support, and guide the development of the nonpublic sector and create an environment conducive to stimulating the endogenous impetus and innovative vitality of private business entities and entrepreneurs.

It will hopefully give a shot in the arm for the private sector enabling it to play its role in advancing the country's overall economic and social development.

Ukraine aid boosts vitality of US economy

The \$60 billion assistance package that includes new aid to Ukraine has stalled in the United States Congress since early last month due to the opposition of Republicans, who have been demanding that the White House address the security crisis on the border with Mexico.

But with US President Joe Biden ramping up his reelection campaign, his administration has become more straightforward about the nature of the Ukraine aid, which they admit is actually a booster for the US economy.

Speaking at a meeting of the White House Competition Council on Tuesday last week, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin claimed that the US' military assistance to Kyiv has not only "saved lives" and kept Ukraine in the fight, but also has been a boon for the US economy.

"These investments have expanded facilities and created jobs for American workers. And the weapons that we've sent to Ukraine to help defend itself are made in America by American workers nationwide — from Texas, to Ohio, to Arizona," he said.

By singling out Texas, which is the focus of the border policy dispute, and Ohio and Arizona, both key swing states in the presidential election, the Pentagon chief was apparently trying to insinuate to the voters in these states that the Republicans are threatening to take away their jobs by not approving the aid.

The US has been Ukraine's main military backer, providing Kyiv with around \$45 billion in arms between January 2022 and January 2024, while the total commitments have reached more than \$70 billion, according to Germany's Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has also admitted that roughly 90 percent of the financial assistance for Ukraine is spent on the domestic production of weapons and equipment, saying that additional tranches would "benefit American business, local communities, and strengthen the US defense industrial base".

Last month, Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland delivered a similar message in an interview with the media, saying that she had "strong confidence" that the assistance package will be approved, as it addresses the US' own interests.

"We have to remember that the bulk of this money is going right back into the US economy, to make weapons, including good-paying jobs in some 40 states across the US," she said, adding that support for Ukraine in the US "is still strong".

However, the latter is not the case.

According to a survey from the Harris Poll and the Quincy Institute last month, roughly 70 percent of Americans want the Biden administration to push Ukraine toward a negotiated peace with Russia as soon as possible.

A growing number of US citizens do not support US military aid to Kyiv unless it is tied to peace talks. They undoubtedly demonstrate a markedly higher moral standard than the US politicians in believing that it is peace rather than money that should be the goal of the US' policy, while the latter, be they Democrats or Republicans, make their Ukraine policies in lieu of a sole criterion of whether the US can make money from the mess and whether they can make political capital from it.

That callousness and hypocrisy were only reinforced by Biden's State of the Union Address last week in which the US president mentioned Ukraine eight times but only to tell the US people that the Republicans are preventing the US from making money out of the Ukraine chaos.

In Biden's reasoning, the Republicans have no reason to block the US' assistance for Ukraine, a lucrative business, as long as "there are no American soldiers at war in Ukraine". All Ukraine is asking for is weapons, "they are not asking for American soldiers", and he declared he was "determined to keep it that way".

By describing the Republicans as those "who want us to walk away from our leadership in the world", the US leader has made it crystal clear that what the US' world leadership is built on.



TWO SESSIONS

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Compensation Canada paid exposes its spying, lying and false narratives

The Canadian media recently disclosed that the Canadian government has reached a multimillion-dollar settlement with Michael Spavor, a Canadian businessman who was arrested in China on the charge of espionage, to compensate him for the nearly three years he spent in a prison in China.

Since the arrest of Spavor in 2018, the Canadian government had been hyping up China's "arbitrary detention". However, the recent settlement with Spavor is a slap in the face of Ottawa. Analysts point out that the "settlement" and "compensation" confirm that Spavor was, indeed, a Canadian government spy.

In fact, that Spavor was a spy had been long determined, he even confessed to it; only the Canadian government was refusing to admit it. Information released by China's security authorities shows that Spavor was for a long time active in the areas bordering China and the Democrat-

ic People's Republic of Korea, assisting former Canadian diplomat Michael Kovrig to collect relevant intelligence, illegally taking photos and videos of Chinese military equipment, and providing them to the Canadian embassy in China.

The intelligence the two provided to some entities overseas included classified State secrets. After they were apprehended in China in 2018, the two applied for bail, pending trial, on grounds of being unwell. Relevant Chinese court approved their bail applications in September 2021 and they were subsequently deported from China.

After returning home, Spavor took Kovrig and the Canadian foreign ministry to court. According to Canadian media, Spavor claimed he had shared sensitive information about the DPRK with Kovrig, who then forwarded it to the Canadian government and other countries of the Five Eyes Alliance, leading to the arrest of the two in China.

The infighting exposed the espionage activities Spavor and Kovrig had engaged in while in China and also proved that Spavor had indeed indulged in activities that could be deemed as harmful to China's national security. It also confirms that the Chinese "arbitrary detention" as alleged by the Canadian government was a false narrative Ottawa was spinning.

Even after the settlement with Spavor was exposed, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau continues to make false narratives to hype China's "arbitrary detention". That the Canadian government employed Spavor and Kovrig to make them engage in activities that violate Chinese law, leading to their arrest in China, not only harmed the legitimate rights and interests of its citizens, but also confirmed the hypocrisy of its tall "human rights" claims.

— THE PAPER.CN

Backbone enterprises can help remove bottlenecks

Undeniably, there are many "bottlenecks" in China's industrial sector. To solve this problem, China needs to delve deep into talent evaluation mechanisms, collaborate with innovation mechanisms between industry, academia and research centers to create room for innovation.

Take the case of the emerging graphene industry. Data show China has 67,000 graphene-related enterprises, 60 graphene industrial parks, 113 graphene research institutes, 17 industrial innovation centers and 17 industrial alliances. Moreover, China has filed 91,900 patent applications for graphene, accounting for 72.2 percent of the global total. China has also published

261,000 graphene research papers, accounting for 74.5 percent of the global total.

China has made similar giant strides in many other branches of the high-tech sector. But that does little to ease the bottlenecks. The country should focus on institutional mechanisms to facilitate the implementation of industrial projects. This is crucial for bringing all research and development outcomes into the market. Taking national laboratories as an example, they should explore a one-on-one cooperation with a backbone enterprise in their respective field to incubate innovations that can compete in the global market. The policymakers should realize that

breakthroughs in key core technologies cannot rely on short-term investment. The country should provide long-term, sustained support to a number of innovation bases, teams with distinctive strengths and research priorities so as to enhance the nation's capacity for original innovation.

The key to removing bottlenecks lies in cultivating backbone enterprises with market competitiveness. Promoting entrepreneurship, fully respecting and trusting entrepreneurs, and cultivating a market culture of fair competition are indispensable tools to promote enterprise development.

— BEIJING NEWS

What They Say

Young consumers driving adjustments on supply side

The Government Work Report this year points out that the implementation of the strategy of expanding domestic demand must be combined with deepening supply-side structural reforms to better coordinate consumption and enhance consumption's role in stimulating sustainable growth. This is the latest affirmation by the central authorities of the importance of consumption as a major growth driver.

It should be noted that consumption refers to not only the willingness to buy, but also the ability to buy. Therefore, the Government Work Report emphasized the need to increase people's income, stressing that the efforts to stimulate consumption should be made in three fields: cultivating and expanding new consumption, stabilizing and expanding traditional con-

sumption, and optimizing the consumption environment.

With the strengthening of China's economic strength and the rise of the Generation Z consumer group, the young people, who grew up in the era of China's most rapid economic development and have been active in the internet world since childhood, are pushing consumption in China from "basic survival" to "personal enjoyment". Under the impact of the demands of these consumers, products that have obvious personalized expression, a high level of intelligence and good design are more likely to be popular.

This change on the demand side also has important implications for how to stabilize and expand traditional consumption. The supply side should adapt to this new consumption trend and adjust the design, marketing ideas and pricing strategies for traditional products accordingly. That calls for not only continuously creat-

ing new consumption scenarios and experiential services, but also using intelligent technical means to give traditional consumer goods new added value.

In the context of the increasing popularity of new digital economy formats and the deep integration of the digital economy and the real economy, issues such as digital privacy protection and information cocoons caused by algorithm traps that are closely related to the protection of consumer rights and interests should be effectively addressed by strengthening supervision and building a rule-of-law business environment.

The country's future growth comes from its ever-expanding market size. With a population of 1.4 billion, China should have confidence in its consumption potential and endeavor to tap it to stimulate new momentum for the high-quality development of the country.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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COMMENT

Hussein Askary

Innovation from Achilles' heel to Pegasus

The top Chinese leader has been reiterating the importance of innovation in development and has now highlighted the key role of new quality productive forces in facilitating high-quality development. Although in the past, the relatively slow progress of science and technology in China almost became Achilles' heel for development, the country today has made remarkable achievements in almost every science and technology field.

In 2021, China became the leading country in filing applications for new patents. According to the World Intellectual Property Organization, China's intellectual property office received 1.59 million patent applications (out of a total of 3.4 million filed worldwide in 2021). It was followed by the US, Japanese, Republic of Korea and European patent offices. China led the field in 2022 and 2023, too.

China was ranked 12th in the 2023 Global Innovation Index, becoming the only middle-income country to break into the top 15. Needless to say, it ranked No 1 among middle-income economies. Also in 2023, for the first time China topped the list of countries with the highest number of science and technology clusters, having 24 in total. The United States and Germany followed with 21 and nine clusters respectively.

China is now a leader in many cutting-edge technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, financial technology, 5G, as well as electric vehicles, robots and drones. It is also one of the world's largest investors in and users of digital technologies. With a strong venture capital industry focusing on fostering advanced digital technologies and innovations, China is home to one-third of the world's unicorns (start-ups with a value of over \$1 billion).

As such, innovation is no longer the "Achilles' heel" of the economy; instead, it has become Pegasus and is carrying China toward modernization.

How does that help the world?

China's unique economic philosophy of win-win cooperation, the opposite of the West's zero-sum game in which "the winner takes all", is based on sharing the fruits of its modernization and innovations with other countries. As the global leader in railways, port, bridge and tunnel construction technology, China has been sharing it with Belt and Road partner countries. This shows the mutually beneficial nature of the Belt and Road Initiative which has enabled China to build some of the best infrastructure in the developing world — the first high-speed railway in Indonesia, the China-Laos high-speed railway, the Lekki deep seaport in Nigeria and the magnificent Peljesac Bridge in Croatia, to name but a few.

By developing clean technologies, Chinese companies are helping many countries, including European Union member states and non-Belt and Road countries, to transition to green development. A large percentage of the electric vehicles, wind turbines, solar photovoltaic panels, and critical minerals used in clean technology and digital industries in the US and the EU are imported from China, which has become the global leader in this field.

China, which also leads in space exploration, is helping many countries place Earth-observing and telecommunications satellites in orbit and has invited all countries to benefit from its space program. Interestingly, a report by the United States Institute of Peace published in September 2023 said Beijing has made support for the development of African countries' space programs a key incentive for the continent to establish closer ties with China. "By contrast", it added "although US

federal agencies and universities are actively involved in research partnerships with some African countries, space technology has not been a focus of US foreign policy in Africa."

Speaking at the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue on Aug 24, 2023, in Johannesburg, the top Chinese leader said China was committed to promoting the modernization of Africa. Accordingly, China launched the "Initiative on Supporting Africa's Industrialization" to boost Africa's manufacturing sector and help the continent realize industrialization and economic diversification, and the "Plan for China Supporting Africa's Agricultural Modernization" to expand the grain growing areas, and encourage Chinese companies to increase investment in Africa's agriculture sector and strengthen cooper-

ation with Africa.

It has also launched the "Plan for China-Africa Cooperation on Talent Development" to train 500 principals and outstanding teachers from vocational colleges every year, and teach 10,000 technicians vocational skills, and implemented the "China-Africa Universities 100 Cooperation Plan" and the 10 pilot exchange programs for China-Africa partner institutes.

But these cooperation initiatives are not charities or aid programs; they are initiatives to promote mutual and equitable growth. It's time the world embraced China's development philosophy, for it benefits all and helps advance civilization with innovation as its guiding principle.

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SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Martin Lampter

China's new development paradigm vital for world

China is now pursuing high-quality development as opposed to high-speed, quantitative growth. Its pursuit has been boosted by "new quality productive forces" and new innovations. This is not a bolt from the blue; instead, it has been conditioned by internal and external factors.

Internally, China is pursuing high-quality, innovation-driven development. From the 1980s to the 2010s, China's GDP grew at an average rate of more than 9 percent per year, even in double digits for some years. While the development of China's agricultural and industrial sectors has reached higher levels, the development of the service sector has opened the door to grander achievements.

Externally, global tensions have motivated China to focus on high-quality development, particularly to become self-reliant in key sectors and attain strategic sovereignty. Since the Donald Trump administration, the United States, along with some other Western economies, has used many strategies to contain China. The strategies did not change much even after Joe Biden became US president. Other factors, too, including economic and trade consequences during the COVID-19 pandemic, have impacted the Chinese economy.

All these issues prompted China to take measures to better manage the rising risks and more forcefully pursue high-

However, these will achieve more significant results and make better sense if they are seen in the broader framework of China's innovation initiatives.

quality development. From 2021 onwards, China has been implementing the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) for Economic and Social Development and Long-Range Objectives through the Year 2035, which focuses on innovation-driven development.

While the previous five-year plans built the base, the 14th Five-Year Plan has set eyes on new horizons, because it is the first five-year plan after China achieved the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, which is usually translated as a well-off society, by, among other things, eradicating extreme poverty by the end of 2020 and improving people's living standards.

China is aware of the importance of boosting domestic consumption, and has taken measures to that end in order to balance the domestic and foreign aspects

of development. China, it seems, has linked sovereignty to technological independence and self-reliance in key sectors. This fact is incorporated in China's concept of ecological civilization following the Paris Agreement.

China's high-level opening-up and mutually beneficial global cooperation are based on three factors: high-quality development of the new economy, high-quality development of the Belt and Road Initiative, and improvement of the global economic governance system.

Of course, higher-quality, innovation-driven development with new quality productive forces requires improvement in research and development. In fact, China has been trying to upgrade its R&D sector since 2020 when the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Education advocated a new research assessment approach, which would make it possible to assess scientific work in a new way in order to enrich people's scientific spirit with creativity.

While in the past, the focus was on quantitative indicators of publishing papers in journals, with China ranking No 1 in contributing to international scientific journals, now the aim is to promote high-level research and make qualitative global contributions.

High-quality papers published in journals are part of China's efforts to facilitate innovation-driven development, so as to

create a bigger global impact. Also part of the high-quality development process are innovative research, technological breakthroughs, industrial upgrading and green transformation.

However, these will achieve more significant results and make better sense if they are seen in the broader framework of China's innovation initiatives. Also, China's contribution to global growth can be better understood by taking into consideration the global contributions of its initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, which completed 10 years in 2023, as well as the Global Security Initiative, which aims to build a stable, peaceful world, and the Global Civilization Initiative, which promotes global cooperation and mutual respect.

As for the Global Development Initiative, it aims to promote healthier, greener development, and supports the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These initiatives will have to overcome many challenges to achieve their goals but will emerge successful in the end.

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Kang Bing

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The rise of EVs a reality in Hainan, and rest of the country

I have been spending the winter in Hainan since my retirement a few years ago to escape the freezing cold and air pollution of Beijing. In the tropical South China island province, I have noticed an increasingly large number of cars with green license plates, indicating they are electric cars.

With nothing better to do, I have gotten into the habit of counting passing-by vehicles. I am pleasantly surprised to say that about half of them are electric vehicles. I know that the government has been promoting the sale of new energy vehicles, that more than a dozen domestic EV manufacturers are doing well, and that more and more people are buying EVs. But despite seeing the increase in the number of EVs in Hainan, I'm surprised by the drastic increase in the popularity of EVs.

Further research told me that, despite the remarkable increase in EVs in Hainan, the situation in the country is different. By the end of September 2023, there were 430 million motor vehicles in China, with 330 million of them being private cars. Among them, only 18.2 million were EVs, meaning just about 5.5 percent of the total were EVs.

Many gasoline-powered car owners probably have parked their cars in garages and use them only when absolutely necessary because of economic reasons.

Yet one thing is certain. The rising popularity of EVs seems irreversible. Statistics show that last year, of the 14.6 million domestic brand cars sold in China — the country produced and sold nearly 30 million cars last year — 9.5 million were EVs, up 38 percent year-on-year. Given the increase in both manufacturing and sale of EVs, it is safe to say that the sale of EVs will see a massive jump in a few years.

Also, I didn't commit a mistake in counting the EVs in Hainan. The local authorities disclosed that by the end of last October, EVs made up 13.87 percent of the total number of cars on the island province — nearly three times more than the national average.

The island province now has 270,000 EVs with one-third of them being registered last year alone. Of every two cars sold in 2023, one was an EV. Hainan plans to increase the number of EVs to 500,000 before the end of next year and stop the sale of gasoline-powered cars by 2030.

The Hainan provincial government's adherence to environment-friendly norms and supportive policies are Hainan's secrets to making the island the national leader in promoting EVs.

The smallest province in China with a population of less than 10 million, Hainan has made tourism its pillar industry but has strict environmental protection rules, as it does not want to damage the island's beautiful environment and clean air. Welcoming EVs with open arms, Hainan was among the first provinces to require all public service vehicles to be EVs. It offered favorable policies to encourage investors to build charging stations — there is one charging pile for every 2.5 electric cars on the island.

While the above two measures could easily be copied by other regions, it's the third measure that is unique to Hainan. The island is the only province to have no tolls on its highways. The road toll is collected not through toll stations but by selling gasoline at a higher price. In Hainan, one has to pay about 13 percent more for a liter of gasoline than in the rest of the mainland. This has made EVs a natural choice for Hainan residents who want to have a car and yet save fuel costs.

I later realized the reason I counted so many cars with green plates. It was because all the taxis and online ride-hailing cabs are powered by electricity. Many gasoline-powered car owners probably have parked their cars in garages and use them only when absolutely necessary because of economic reasons.

Hainan's successful promotion of EVs has set a good example for the country. With each locality implementing preferential supporting policies and taking measures that suit their respective conditions, my guess is that the day is not far when green plates would rule the roads in China.

GLOBAL VIEWS

LU JIEHUA AND ZHU HUI

Demographic challenge

In light of changing global population structure, international order, relations and geopolitics will be reshaped to varying degrees

Population has always played a major role in a country's rise and fall. The current change in global demographics may well effect changes in the social, economic, technological, cultural and political development in different countries and regions around the world.

First, global demographic change will bring both opportunities and challenges to social development. It is predicted that the population of the least developed countries will continue to soar in the coming decades. This will generate sufficient labor supply and possibly great potential for social development. However, for the developed countries and some relatively developed ones, continuous negative population growth and social aging remain the glaring issues. For example, the global total fertility rate fell from 2.7 in 2000 to 2.3 in 2021, and the proportion of the global population aged 65 and over is projected to increase from 9.6 percent in 2021 to 16.5 percent in 2050. China's total fertility rate was only 1.3 in 2020, making it one of the countries with ultra-low fertility rate. The proportion of the elderly population over 65 years old in China reached 15.4 percent in 2023, a characteristic of a moderately aging society.

This will be testing times for the social security and public service systems of many countries and regions. Global governance should focus on advanced institutional arrangements in areas of labor and employment, healthcare, and the protection of the rights and interests of specific groups. Life-term social policies system can support the long-term, balanced development of the global population.

Second, the demographic shift will likely transform the demographic dividend as an economic driver. The traditional demographic dividend relies mostly on high labor participation and a low dependency ratio. This will no

longer be the case. With rising nutritional and health conditions around the world, life expectancy continues to improve. So does the global awareness of aging and life cycle, where the "silver economy" is expected to become a new economic driver. Higher education and human capital also make it possible to tap into the quality of the population rather than just the quantity.

Third, global demographic change may have complex impacts on areas from urbanization and migration to cultural change. In the coming three decades, the world urban population is expected to increase by 2.5 billion, deepening a shift in economic model characterized by large-scale, long-distance migration across regions and borders. For all the economic benefits, the risk of civilizational conflicts exist, which underlines the importance of acculturation, assimilation and cultural diffusion. In China, urbanization rate is projected to reach around 75 percent by 2035, bringing social fusion to the center of attention.

Fourth, global demographic change will reshape geopolitical and international order. Population has always been the key force in great power competition and national defense. The population size, distribution, quality, migration, ethnic or religious diversity can all exert an influence. The negative population growth and rapid aging currently experienced in some developed countries may lead to reduced economic and innovation capabilities, eventually undermining their political clout or interna-



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tional status. The developing countries will further rise in status and importance. It is foreseeable that this change must cause

the reshuffling and reshaping of the international order and relations, geopolitics included, to varying degrees.

Last, global demographic changes have the potential to influence technological reform and innovation. Since the British

demographer Thomas Malthus raised the famous Malthus Trap in his published work *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, there has been debates over the link between population growth and technological innovation. The pessimistic view holds that population explosion and industrial expansion will bring about global famine and resource depletion, while the optimistic view is that population growth will otherwise stimulate the economy and spur invention and innovation. The impact of demographic structure on technological innovation is far from decisive. The traditional view tends to believe that aging has a direct or indirect impact on technological development, but it does not exclude the complex impact of multiple factors such as education, occupation and employer features. Notably, some countries that have experienced aging problems early on have also assumed a leading role in automation, networkization, digitalization and artificial intelligence. Meanwhile, China's technology develops by leaps and bounds, coexisting with the new normal of aging and sub-replacement fertility. Therefore, it is justified to believe that population and technology are in this interactive, cohabiting and adaptable relationship. The global technological development and sustainable progress should also meet the law of global demographic change, especially the needs brought afresh by aging and sub-replacement fertility.

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SANG BAICHUAN

Endowed with confidence

China should enhance its appeal to foreign investment by establishing a law-based and internationalized business environment

Utilizing foreign investment is a key aspect of China's opening-up drive. Cementing the foundations for foreign investment will not only allow foreign investors to keep contributing to China's growth, but also help China gain an advantage in the global institutional competition, accelerate the building of an open economic system, and maintain its position as a global manufacturing center. It is also of immense significance for the country to build a new development paradigm and seize the opportunities presented by the new round of industrial revolution.

First, China should expand high-standard opening-up.

At the core of high-level opening-up is institutional opening-up, which means to align with high-standard international economic and trade rules and standards in order to establish a high-level open economic system. China's goal is to establish a high-standard system of rules that facilitates free trade and investment, encompassing areas such as transparency, digital trade, competitive neutrality, government procurement, intellectual property rights, and environmental and labor standards.

However, China, which has a unique social system and economic model and is at a different stage of economic development compared with many Western countries, should not simply copy high-standard international economic and trade rules. Any rules that may endanger its national security or harm the overall economic interests of the country must be blocked.

Second, China should build a world-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized.

China should strive to create a market-oriented business environment where the market plays a

decisive role in the allocation of resources. To this end, the country needs to fully guarantee national treatment and most-favored-nation treatment for foreign investors, remove unfair and discriminatory practices, and implement the negative list system for foreign investment, further relaxing restrictions on access to service industries.

To build a first-class business environment, it is necessary for China to ensure fair competition and access to infrastructure and various production factors needed by foreign-invested enterprises, and fully unleash the potential of its large domestic market, thus increasing its appeal to foreign investment.

Creating a law-based business environment calls for rolling out detailed implementation measures in accordance with the principles laid out in the Foreign Investment Law to ensure that foreign-invested enterprises can equally enjoy the same support policies as their Chinese peers, the lawful rights and interests of foreign investors are safeguarded, and there are smooth complaint channels to reduce the cost of protecting their rights. Efforts should also be made to cut unnecessary administrative supervision and inspection of foreign-invested companies to ease the burden on them.

To create an internationalized business environment, China needs to align with high-standard international rules for investment.

First, it is imperative for the country to comb through government subsidies and cancel the subsidies prohibited in the World Trade Organization Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures, treating domestic and foreign enterprises equally.

Second, China should create a level playing field for State-owned and foreign enterprises, and avoid

crowding out foreign investment due to unfair competition.

Last, China needs to create a stable, transparent, predictable and fair policy environment for foreign investors, and improve the protection of the intellectual property rights of foreign-funded enterprises.

Third, China should forge a brand for "Investing in China".

Opening-up is a defining feature of contemporary China and a shining name card of the country to attract foreign investment. Facing ever-stronger de-globalization headwinds and a sharp contraction in foreign direct investment worldwide, China must uphold the banner of opening-up and seek to safeguard an open world economy, which is vital to stabilizing the expectations of foreign investors, attracting high-quality factors from around the world, and enhancing the quality of foreign investment.

Efforts should be made to upgrade regional open platforms such as free trade zones to build these platforms into the name cards for "Investing in China".

The country needs to build the Hainan Free Trade Port into a prime example of high-level opening-up, and turn the pilot free trade zones across the nation into magnets for foreign investment in high-end manufacturing and high-end services. Meanwhile, it should transform economic development zones into growth poles with complete support facilities for industries so that they are capable of leading regional high-quality development.

The country should strive to build comprehensive bonded zones into free economic zones for foreign investors in bonded processing and manufacturing as well as maintenance, and make key demonstration areas undertaking the transformation of the processing



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

trade and national processing trade industrial parks into new hubs for high-level development of foreign investment. Besides, more steps should be taken to build Beijing's national integrated demonstration zone for greater openness in the services sector into a model for free and convenient investment of foreign enterprises in the service industry.

Fourth, China should improve the quality of foreign investment utilization. China should give full play to the role of foreign investment in driving innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development so as to promote the construction of a new development paradigm where the domestic circulation is the mainstay and the domestic and international circulations mutually reinforce each other. To achieve this, it is necessary to

further expand its encouraged investment catalog, give incentives to foreign investors in mid-to-high-end manufacturing, high-tech, the transformation and upgrading of traditional manufacturing, modern services, digital economy and other fields. Efforts should be made to pool high-end factors and to support foreign enterprises in increasing research and development to spur innovation.

Last but not least, China should double down on efforts to build bases for receiving the industrial transfer of foreign investment in the central and western regions, encourage foreign investors to invest in the central and western regions, and promote the transfer of foreign investment in the processing trade to the central and western regions and the northeast, thereby boosting coordinated

development among different regions.

China should also seek to attract more foreign enterprises with advanced green technologies to promote environmentally-friendly development. Moreover, the country needs to ameliorate the system for foreign enterprises to fulfill their social responsibilities, encourage them to participate in public welfare activities, and protect the rights and interests of their employees, thus promoting shared development.

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LIFE



Wang Lijuan (center) and her puppeteers study sculpting at her shadow puppetry museum in the capital's Haidian district. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Pulling the strings for cultural treats

Ancient style of puppetry enchants and educates a new audience as those behind the screen find rewarding role and sense of achievement, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

Behind a gray curtain in Beijing's Mentougou district at the end of January, people moved to the music as they adeptly maneuvered a cast of cowhide puppets.

The twists and turns of the plot were narrated in expressive, attention-grabbing tones as the puppets vividly reenacted scenes, featuring firefighters, village heads, volunteers and startled victims, that tugged at the heartstrings of the audience, who had filled this makeshift theater in the capital city's western suburbs to bursting.

"That was exactly how it happened," some of the villagers whispered during the show.

Fierce rain and flooding wreaked havoc on the district in late July, but local residents fought their way back to normalcy.

When the show ended, the puppeteers stepped out from behind the curtain to meet the audience and were greeted by thunderous applause.

"We get that a lot," says Wang Lijuan, who organized the show to commemorate the touching stories of the natural disaster.

The puppeteers, who are mostly in their 20s and generally about 1.3 meters tall, all have pituitary stalk interruption syndrome, which can inhibit growth. They have been able to find jobs that show off their talents with Wang's help.

It took three months of interviewing local residents about their flood experiences, developing the script, fashioning puppets and rehearsing, before the show was ready.

"The audience has usually expressed a strong sense of admiration mixed with a touch of curiosity," says the woman who is carrying forward puppet shows with characteristic Jingxi (western Beijing) cultural elements.

Shadow puppetry play is over 2,000 years old. It originated in the Shaanxi region of ancient China during the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24), making it one of the oldest traditional theatrical forms in China.

It is composed of five main stages: making the puppet parts, carving, dyeing and mounting them, and then performing, using the interplay of light and shadow to tell stories. The Museum of the Cinema in Paris has referred to Chinese shadow plays as the "ancestors" of film and animation.

"Shadow puppetry varies with regions, such as the performing dialects," Wang explains.

The Jingxi style stands out for its use of Peking Opera facial makeup and distinct personas, portraying both good and evil roles, while its vocal style integrates elements from both Peking Opera and Kunqu Opera, she says.

When the puppeteers infuse emotion into their performance, the

shadow puppets seem to have a life of their own. Shadow puppetry integrates multiple folk traditions, ranging from paper-cutting and carving, to oral skills and drama, and was listed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2011.

Wang was born into a shadow puppetry family in Shandong province.

"I grew up watching my grandfather perform, and my parents designing and making puppets," she says, adding that her grandfather's grandfather used to perform in Beijing.

It was Wang's childhood interest in the art that led her to tie the knot with her husband Lin Zhonghua, who also shares a love of puppet shows, albeit for the one from his hometown in Chifeng city in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

The couple were both working in Beijing when they met, Wang at a multinational company and Lin at a media organization.

In 2006, Lin decided to launch his own career. "We figured it should be something to do with our shared passion, and so the idea of promoting Jingxi puppet shows came up," Wang says.

Initial research revealed that the number of experienced performers was on the wane and very few young people were interested in the art form. So, the couple decided it was time to take action.

Lin resigned and rented a 1,000-square-meter space in Qianmen and then spent nearly 200,000 yuan (\$27,780) turning it into a shadow puppet museum, which opened to the public in 2007.

After this, they began looking around for experienced artists, who were mostly in their 50s and from Inner Mongolia, and the provinces of Hebei and Heilongjiang. However, problems soon ensued.

"Young visitors barely understood what the performers were saying, and those performers wanted to leave after just a short while to rejoin their families," Wang says.

The audience for the shows was also disappearing. At their lowest moment, Wang had to use her salary to fill in the financial holes but they still fell short of



Puppeteers teach children how to manipulate shadow puppets behind a screen after a performance at a kindergarten in Beijing.



Wang takes her actors to give puppet shows on a TV program at China Central Television in Beijing.

the rent. So, the museum shut a year later, as the couple looked for answers to the problems that had led to the failure of their first attempt.

"We were not going to give up," she says. That was when her husband Lin came up with the idea of training people with pituitary stalk interruption syndrome in the traditional art.

"He had interviewed a girl of short stature with the syndrome, and had been impressed by her positive attitude and singing talent," Wang says.

Since others in a similar position also had trouble finding jobs, the couple felt they might have found potential trainees for shadow puppetry.

They found four actors with the syndrome and offered them free training for three months.

"These actors were very intelligent and

hardworking," Wang says.

Given their stature and size of their hands, she made the wooden rods used to manipulate the shadow puppets thinner to facilitate performances.

It didn't take long before Wang noticed the actors' other merits. "They have a certain charm for children, who treat them as if they are one of their own. At the same time, they possess the wisdom of adults and are good at keeping children amused," Wang says, talking about the backstage interactions after each performance.

This initial success led to more people with the syndrome knocking on her door and to date, 300 people have been given training.

"The puppet show is an ideal way for them to build confidence step by step," Wang says.

Out of timidity, the puppeteers perform behind the screen but as the audience recognition grows, many have developed greater confidence.

Many of the trainees have either gone on to start shows in their hometowns or have become teachers promoting the art form.

There are now about 30 actors in Wang's troupe.

As business got on the right track, Wang also quit her job to fully commit to puppetry.

In addition to the hiring of short puppeteers, other innovations have played key roles in the revitalization of the art.

Wang and her team have created many children's plays featuring plots based on classic Chinese fairy tales and novels. Plays based on real life have also been introduced, including about COVID-19 prevention and control, and the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics.

Innovation in content inevitably leads to innovation in form. "Compared to traditional shadow puppet shows, we have incorporated new elements, making significant changes to the appearance of the characters, their costumes, stage settings and props," Wang says.

So, for example, elements like ambulances during COVID-19 and pet dogs have all been presented true to life.

The puppeteers also have to put in a little extra effort. "For example, to accurately portray figure skating, the performers need to carefully study the movements of figure skaters in videos before being able to execute all the lifts, jumps

and spins with precision," Wang explains.

In 2018, Wang opened a Douyin account to promote the shows. "We got 290 million views in three days, which was unbelievable," she says, adding that so far, topics related to the shows by Wang and her team have been viewed over 69 billion times.

The couple have also visited more than 1,000 primary and middle schools to draw attention to the art, and have set up puppetry clubs in 20 schools.

In 2022, they wrote *Chinese Shadow Puppetry*, a book to help students better appreciate the culture and craftsmanship behind the art.

Hou Yangjun, a senior member of the Chinese Folk Literature and Arts Association, says the book is a good fit for children, and demonstrates the professionalism and pragmatism of the authors.

Huang Panwei, an official at the People's Education Press, says the work done by Wang and her team is a creative transformation and an innovative development in traditional folk art, adding that the publishing of the book is also a good example of the inheritance of traditional Chinese culture.

During their years of involvement, Wang and her husband have built up a collection of around 20,000 shadow puppets from the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), and have caught the attention of the local government in the process.

To make full use of these cultural treasures, with favorable policies from the government, the couple set up a shadow puppetry museum in the capital's Haidian district which opened to the public last November.

"For the first time, the museum has put on display more than 500 ancient shadow puppet collections from various schools, including those of Beijing, and Shaanxi, Gansu, Henan, Hebei and Zhejiang provinces, as well as many shadow puppetry artifacts from the Ming and Qing dynasties," says Lin, who is the museum's curator.

Wang says shadow puppetry is not her family's art but the country's. "We will be happy if the shows are appreciated by more people as a result of our efforts," she says.

They have taken part in a number of Spring Festival celebrations and are now working on creating multilingual shows.

"We are working with the Beijing Foreign Studies University now, and we have come up with shows in English and Russian," she says. "Japanese, German and French versions are in the works too, so, hopefully, this traditional Chinese culture will go global."

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Shadow puppets with Winter Olympic elements created by Wang's team.

LIFE

Above the fold

Artist's creations defy perceptions of the craft to create pieces that transcend paper, **Li Yingxue** reports.

As you step into the lobby of The Peninsula Beijing, you are greeted by the breathtaking sight of colorful paper dragons, each made from a single 6-meter square paper. The magnificent creatures, untouched by scissors or glue, exude strength and grace, and their intricate folds bring them to life in the air. Nine dragon installations adorn the hotel's public spaces. They are the work of acclaimed paper folding artist Liu Tong. Drawing inspiration from the iconic Nine-Dragon Wall in Beijing's Beihai Park, he spent over three months infusing traditional Chinese imagery with modern artistic flair.

But the journey doesn't end there. On the third floor, the Art Gallery hosts a solo exhibition by the artist, *The Art of Paper*. Here, Liu's timeless classics like the Northern white Rhinoceros and whimsical creations such as *Balzac* and *Garfield* delight visitors, alongside other colorful creations.

From making state gifts to installations for international brands like Hermes, Liu's journey from paper folding enthusiast to revered artist has been nothing short of the extraordinary. Since his introduction to the art in 2006, he has transformed this ancient craft into a boundless realm of creativity that invites people to explore the endless possibilities of a single sheet of paper.

"Paper folding is pure magic — a blend of tradition and innovation," Liu reflects. "With every fold, I aim to push the boundaries of this art form, creating beauty that knows no bounds."

The exhibition highlights a series of paper-folded rhinos, including life-size pieces and other colorful examples.

This series originated in a piece Liu created for the Guinness World Records — a colossal paper-folding rhinoceros which he and his team made out of a 196-square-meter sheet of white paper in 2017. It took them over three hours to fold the massive sheet into the shape of a rhino that finally stood seven meters tall and four meters wide.

Creating this masterpiece took teamwork. Liu and his team meticulously moved across the paper, bending over, squatting, and crawling to make the rhino.

However, the project wasn't just a demonstration of skill. The artist also sought to raise awareness of animal conservation, especially of Sudan, the last male northern white rhinoceros, who was still alive at the time. Sudan passed away in Kenya in 2018. Liu spent a year preparing for the project in the hopes that it would inspire people to protect

"Paper folding is pure magic — a blend of tradition and innovation. With every fold, I aim to push the boundaries of this art form..."

Liu Tong, paper folding artist

wildlife and shun products derived from endangered species.

Cameron Cundle, the managing director of The Peninsula Beijing, was initially drawn to Liu's rhinoceros pieces and was inspired by them to invite him to hold a solo exhibition.

At the exhibition, Cundle was particularly fascinated by flat paper pieces, which make use of lines and colors to create geometric designs. "I like the shapes," Cundle remarks. "But they're actually folded patterns that create the artwork, which is cool."

After trying his hand at making a paper dragon during a workshop, Cundle gained firsthand understanding of the intricate art form and realized that it demands patience, much like meditation. "You can't skip a step. You have to be precise from the very beginning and stay disciplined," he says, adding that it's amazing how a piece of paper can be made into something so beautiful.

Unexpected encounter

Liu's fascination with paper folding began with a single paper rose. In 2006, while he was studying in Germany, he was captivated by a passenger on a bus effortlessly making a paper rose for a nearby girl, leading to a happy conversation between the two.

This unexpected encounter completely changed Liu's view of paper folding. Until then, he had only seen flat, monotonous creations, but the passenger's lifelike, three-dimensional paper rose ignited a passion for the art.

When he returned home, he searched online for tutorials on making paper roses and spent the entire night following instructions in German, successfully folding his very first rose.

This further fueled his love of paper folding. From then on, he dedicated every spare moment to experimenting with different designs. Starting with simple pieces like cranes and owls, his collection quickly filled a room.

In 2014, and already gaining recognition in the world of paper folding, Liu was given the fresh challenge of coming up with a special gift to celebrate the 40th anniversary of diplomatic ties between China and Gabon during the World Peace Festival. Liu recalls that the real challenge wasn't folding paper, but deciding on the perfect gift.

After careful thought, he settled on making a blue-and-white porcelain vase. It took him over three months to perfect the design. Initially, his prototypes were off by 2 millimeters, prompting him to tweak the pattern numerous times. After over 100 drafts and more than 1,000 sheets of paper, he finally got it right.

The difficulty stemmed from the vase's curved lines, which Liu had initially depicted as straight. To fix this, he had to recalculate and redesign the pattern with precision.

The following year, he made a big decision and left his job as a lecturer at the Renmin University of China to focus entirely on paper folding.

In 2015, one of his pieces, a representation of a Bronze Age *ding* caldron was given as a gift to the Japanese ambassador on the International Day of Peace. The following year, Hermes invited him to make window displays for their flagship store in Doha, Qatar, under the theme of "Wild Nature 2016". The displays, which showcased various animals, drew many visitors eager to take photos.

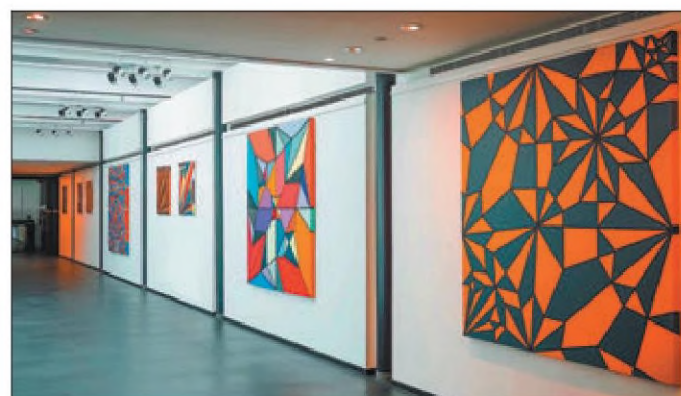
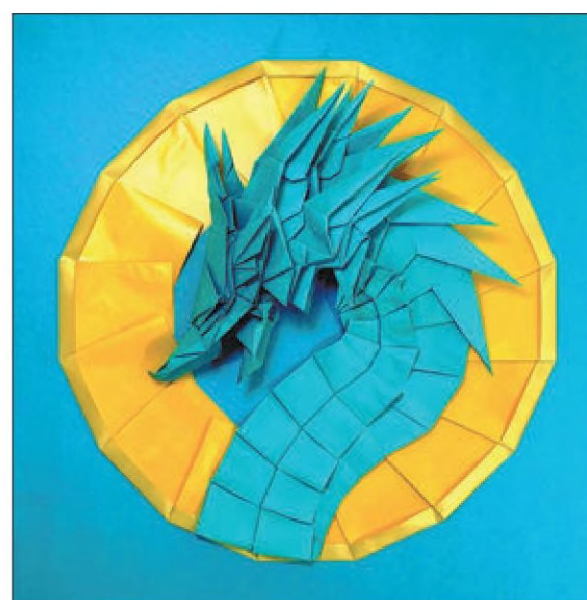
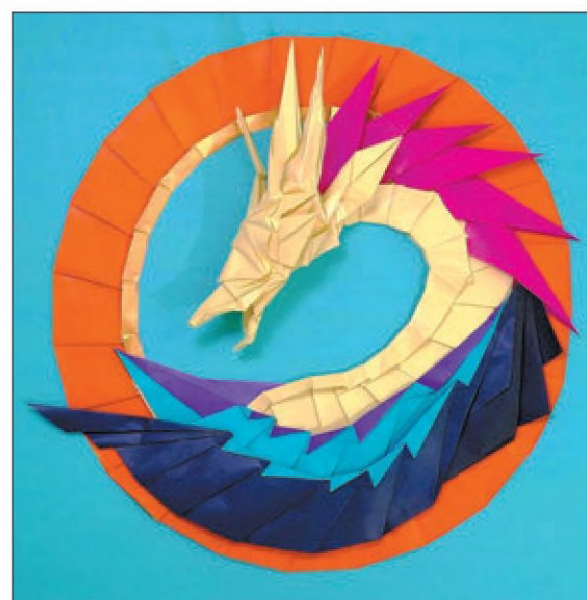
While some people may think paper folding is simple and quick, like making a paper airplane, Liu says it requires mental focus, time, and physical effort, much like running a marathon, especially when it comes to large-scale creation.

He says that paper folding demands attention to detail and precise calculation at every step, from choosing the right paper to designing the folds. Making large paper-folding pieces also involves considering factors like the paper's strength and flexibility. "It's like solving a math problem," he explains.

Unlike painting, which adds layers onto a canvas, or sculpture, which in most times subtracts from the raw material, paper folding is a process of allocation. "It's a process of creation from single white sheets of paper," Liu says. "It's also a nostalgic art form, upgraded from the childhood paper planes or boats we all once folded. When I'm folding, I lose track of time, and become completely absorbed in my own little world."

Exploring crossovers

China's paper-folding scene is home to plenty of up-and-coming talent, and online forums are filled



Right from top: Three paper dragons shown at The Peninsula Beijing, each made from a single 6-meter square paper by Liu Tong. **Above:** Liu introduces his paper-folding work *Garfield*. **Left:** Liu's solo exhibition, *The Art of Paper*, showcases his classic works as well as paper with fold patterns. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

with enthusiasts. But it's still rare for someone to make paper folding their full-time job; most people just see it as a hobby.

What sets Liu apart as a professional artist is his vision for what the art can be, and his work has caught the attention of many brands, especially luxury brands.

"When I'm making my own work, I see myself as an artist. But when I work with brands, I see myself more as a designer. I use my art to collaborate and create something special for them," he explains.

He doesn't find making a new design hard. His years of experience mean he's used to calculations and experiments. What is hard is making a new piece that has its own style, rather than one that shows off its difficulty.

"Nowadays, paper folding is a way for me to explore more, to try out new collaborations," he says.

Looking ahead, he wants his work to have greater meaning, maybe by focusing on issues like animal conservation, or by making pieces that make people think.

Paper folding is just one of Liu's hobbies. He also loves woodworking, making niche musical instruments, making leather goods, and making silver jewelry.

Lately, he has been trying to use bacterial cellulose to fold. "Folding is everywhere — when you blink, when insects flap their wings — and it has many uses," he says.

"Paper folding also has lots of uses in engineering; it can be used in everyday items, like air safety bags in

cars," Liu says, adding that he's working with researchers to see what else the art can be used to do.

These experiments in different fields are new territory, but Liu's happy to explore it alone, enjoying the thrill of discovering something new.

In January, he teamed up with pastry chef Xu Bing to introduce the new, paper folding-themed afternoon tea served in the lobby of The Peninsula Beijing, adding a fresh twist to traditional paper culture by blending it with culinary delight.

This unique afternoon tea combines Chinese-style steamed and crispy treats with paper works in the form of angular designs and vibrant Chinese reds and yellows to create a touch of Eastern elegance.

During their collaboration, Liu and Xu ensured that each pastry displayed distinct folds, adding to the paper folding-inspired aesthetics.

Xu explains that his aim was to create a harmonious balance of ingredients and flavors that also echoed Liu's vision of the art as an art of balance and distribution.

The menu also includes a fun surprise — guests get to make their own lucky items with auspicious meanings, like fortune bags, red packets, and lanterns, using paper Liu has pre-designed.

The highlight of the afternoon tea is a chocolate Chinese dragon, which draws inspiration from Liu's nine *Dragon Spirit Wall* installation in the hotel's lobby.

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Chinese sauerkraut shows good taste at home and abroad

SHENYANG — Walking through his neighborhood supermarket in Australia, where packs of Chinese sauerkraut line the shelves, Huang Xiqing feels like he's shopping in his hometown of Shenyang in Liaoning province.

"The sauerkraut soup tastes just like home," says the 45-year-old expat living in Canberra, sounding a little homesick.

Chinese sauerkraut, a pickle made of wombok, or Chinese cabbage, is a traditional specialty of the northeastern region and is now sold across the country and exported.

In the past, only a few fresh vegetables were available during the cold northeastern winters. Wombok, which was cheap and could be stored for a relatively long period of time, gained popularity with ordinary households.

In Shenyang, 70-year-old Wang Shuqing still maintains the habit of making Chinese sauerkraut every winter. After harvesting wombok from her garden, she puts the leaves into a big jar along with water and salt and two months later, it is ready to eat.

However, it is no longer the main course on her menu for Lunar New Year's eve, which now includes braised prawn, fried beef and carp cooked with sweet-and-sour sauce. "Now that our livelihood has improved and the logistics have developed, we can find whatever we want to eat during the winter," she says.

Over the years, the elderly woman has seen the changes to her dinner table.

In 1988, China launched a "Vegetable Basket Project" to increase the production of non-staple foods, to ensure urban supplies. In 2023, Liaoning built and upgraded about 100,000 *mu* (about 6,666.7 hectares) of greenhouses.

"Now people have more food to choose from, they don't just want enough food to eat, but also to eat well," says Zhang Sining, a research fellow from the Liaoning provincial academy of social sciences.

Before Spring Festival, the wholesale food market in Liaoning's Panjin city was a busy place, with more than 2,000 metric tons of vegetables arriving from southern China every day. There, buyers could also find crabs from Russia, salmon from Norway and cherries from Chile.

The production of traditional dishes like Chinese sauerkraut has also risen.

In the township of Damintun, the wombok growing area has increased to more than 30,000 *mu*. Several Chinese sauerkraut companies have been established. Among them, the Xinmin agricultural product company of the Heilongjiang Cuihua Group has sold its Chinese sauerkraut not only domestically, but also to countries including Canada, Japan and the United States.

Chinese sauerkraut has become a signature northeastern dish, and restaurants there now serve sauerkraut burgers and sauerkraut pizzas to cater to the tastes of young people.

"This is the first time I've tried Chinese sauerkraut, and it tastes marvelous," Deng Bin, a tourist from Sichuan province, said during a visit to Shenyang.

Between Jan 13 and 28, when people were making purchases for Spring Festival, sales of Chinese sauerkraut on Douyin increased more than 10-fold compared to last year.

For Huang however, Chinese sauerkraut is largely about nostalgia and an enduring link to home.

"Now that I have tried delicacies from across the globe, Chinese sauerkraut is still one of my favorites, and reminds me of my hometown," Huang says.

XINHUA

LIFE

Zhao Zhiqiang's parents used to worry that their son would turn into a "bad boy" as he was, in their eyes, hanging out in the wrong company.

Growing up in Qitai county in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, Zhao was raised by his father, but also spent time with his mother. He didn't like going to school, and spent a lot of time hanging out with youths who were much older than him.

"I didn't know what I would become until one of the kids I played with showed me his guitar," recalls Zhao. "When he played the instrument, I became fascinated. I loved the sound and started to listen to rock music he shared with me."

At 13, Zhao taught himself the guitar and formed his own band, which caused further paternal concern.

However, rather than becoming a "bad boy," Zhao devoted himself to music, playing guitar for hours every day, and tried to prove himself to his parents by studying hard in school so that he could continue playing. Though he had a regular job in his hometown as a driver, of which his parents approved, Zhao still loved playing his guitar.

In 2011, after discussing his idea with his parents, Zhao quit his job and opened a store selling musical instruments, such as keyboards, guitars and drums. He also trained youngsters to play instruments and helped them form their own bands.

One of the teenage bands that Zhao helped form, named Honghai'er, or Red Boy, stood out in a national music competition, and they won an award at the Midi Kids Band Competition, which concluded on Feb 20 in Beijing.

Now in its sixth year, the competition, which was launched and organized by the Beijing Midi Art Communication Co, saw 75 bands compete from May last year to February.

These were then divided into two groups: children aged under 12 and children aged from 13 to 17, according to the competition's organizer, Ren Guobin.

"We've seen a diversity of musical styles and great original songs performed by these young bands coming from different parts of the country," Ren says. The company also organizes the Beijing Midi Music Festival, one of the oldest and largest events of its kind in China.

"It was the first time that Honghai'er entered the top 10 ranking of the competition. I am so proud of them," says 41-year-old Zhao, adding that the band has participated in the competition three times since it was founded in 2018. "Like my parents who used to worry about me, their parents also feel reluctant about their children playing in a band. The award is quite convincing, which also makes the members and their parents proud."

The band is led by 12-year-old lead singer and guitarist Bao Zimo. The other members are guitarist Hou Wenbo, bassist and *guzheng* (a traditional, zither-like stringed instrument) player Pei Shoupeng and drummer Wang Peng. They named the band Honghai'er because coincidentally, the members all wore red when they did their first rehearsal.

Since Xinjiang is home to different ethnic groups, with Zimo being of Hui ethnicity and the other members of the Han ethnic group, the band has absorbed folk music styles, and sings stories from their hometown Xinjiang.

One of their songs is called *Song of Shule*, which was inspired by a



Fine-tuning his musical prospects

Childhood passion for guitar paying dividends for young man with noteworthy talent, **Chen Nan** reports.



Clockwise from top: A talented young band from Maoxian county, Aba Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture in Sichuan province, named Esinaba, or "azalea flower" in the Qiang language, is one of the top 10 winners of the sixth Midi Kids Band Competition; lead singer and guitarist Bao Zimo from a band named Honghai'er from the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region performs at the competition; Esinaba's bassist Kun Jiayi; Esinaba's lead singer Li Guoran and drummer Qiu Zixin. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



local folklore about Shule, an ancient city in Kashgar.

"One day, the children shared a movie they watched with me, which was director Zack Snyder's *300*. They were impressed by the brave warriors," recalls Zhao. "I told them a story about Shule, which is about a battle led by a general named Geng Gong over 2,000 years ago. With a few hundred soldiers, the general fought against an outnumbering army to protect Shule city. In extremely severe conditions, such as harsh weather and a lack of food, they bravely fought and won the battle with only 13 people left."

"We wrote the song together and performed it for the first time during the competition," says Zhao.

The song won best original song when they competed in an event in Southwest China.

Vocalist Zimo started to learn to play the guitar with Zhao when he was 5.

"We wrote the song from the very first note together. Though we didn't win the competition, we were happy that our song was heard by so many people during the event."

Under Zhao's guidance, the band also wrote another song, *I Am You*, which they also performed during the competition. "It is like a letter from the band members to their parents. It's also what I want to say to parents, to my parents in particular. It talks about worrying parents and their children, who are rebellious in the eyes of the parents. The song is about the communication between children and their parents," says Zhao.

"Like any other children learning to play instruments, such as piano and violin, they need to work hard on practicing. Doing rehearsals enables them to listen to one another, just like chamber musicians. They grow up and continue their school work while enjoying music," he adds.

Another group that stood out among the competitors, and which was made a top 10 finalist during the competition, was a band of Qiang and Tibetan ethnic performers from Maoxian county, Aba Tibetan and Qiang autonomous prefecture, Sichuan province. The name of the band, Esinaba, means "azalea flower" in the Qiang language.

The band was formed in March last year, and is made up of six children, including lead singer Li Guoran, guitarist Zhang Ruixiang and drummer Qiu Zixin, with an average age of 10.

According to their music teacher Ha Xue, it was formed to perform folk songs and compositions based on Qiang folk music.

"The original idea of forming a band was to make our school's musical education interesting and appealing to children. Our goal is to popularize our folk music and allow this beautiful music to reach a wider audience," says Ha, a music teacher at two local primary schools in Maoxian county. She adds that one of the members in the band is Yu Mengxiaofeng, who plays a Qiang musical percussion instrument made of sheepskin.

"We collected old songs of our ethnic group, many of which even have no written lyrics and are passed down by elders humming to their children," says the teacher. "I worked with the children to turn the old songs into new pieces with contemporary instruments. We plan to release an album this year featuring some of the songs we collected and adapted."

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A trip to Chengdu is a good way to spice up your life

Being from Arizona makes one accustomed to heat. Sunny days in the 45-50 C range are frequent enough that a common claim is



Haydn James Fogel
Second Thoughts

that you can cook your eggs, or even a steak, right there on the sidewalk. It's wise to wear gloves when driving to avoid burning your hands on the steering wheel. I don't miss it.

The heat I do miss is the culinary type. Arizonans love spicy

Latin-American food smothered in verde or roja sauce to wake up the tongue. A friend of my mom's used

to bring us homemade salsa, and I once had a chance to watch her make it. She used habanero peppers and an unfamiliar red pepper she called "Sichuan peppers."

Since living in China, I'd always heard that Sichuan province had the spiciest cuisine. My longing for the taste bud-annihilating salsa of my youth guaranteed that I would try it. I finally visited Chengdu in 2021.

My first surprise on arrival was how alive the city was. Forty-five percent of the city's population are between the ages of 14 and 45, making it one of China's most youthful places. Here and there were trendy boutique shops, hip cafes and live music. The people were out and

about, not going anywhere particularly but meandering with their friends, using the free time of those who don't work overtime and without children to ship from class to class.

Jiuyanqiao Bar Street made me think of Coney Island or Times Square. As the sun sets, the city comes out to spend their earnings at endless unique bars and music venues. I opted for an upscale speakeasy style bar to hear myself think. Perhaps I'm getting too old for Chengdu's youthful exuberance and forward-thinking dynamism.

My waiter brought me a cocktail with Sichuan peppers and I took the opportunity to ask her where a spice

addict like myself should eat to really know how gnarly the hotpot can be. She laughed at me until she saw that I was serious and then told me to go to Long Sen Yuan Hotpot.

I made a reservation, finished my (outstanding) drink and went for a walk along the Jinjiang River. I'm not one for solo walks typically, but I was curious about the Jiuyan bridge, the highlight of the area. The bridge is ancient, not in a decrepit way, but in the way that emperors once built marvels to stand the test of time. It bears the architectural style of the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties and is positively stunning to take in. After a long walk, and an even longer break looking out over

the bridge and fantasizing about being an emperor, I called it a night.

The next day was hotpot day. Long Sen Yuan turned out to be quite the recommendation. I ordered lotus root, tofu, sweet potato, and other vegetables. For meat, I chose beef. I asked for the spicy broth and learned I could choose from three levels of spiciness. I asked for the most spicy broth available — the waiter made eye contact for the first and only time — and got a warning about how spicy it was. "Bring it on," I told him.

I wish I could say the legend lived up to the hype, though I do imagine the average eater would be demolished by that hotpot. Sichuan peppers measure between 50,000 and

75,000 on the Scoville Scale. It's nothing to scoff at, but the habanero peppers I was raised on top out as high as 350,000. I found the first bite underwhelming (fret not, it was absolutely delectable). However, any expert spicy food savant will tell you that spice builds as you eat, and I had a lot of broth to get through. By the end, I had replaced my assorted dishes with sweat-soaked napkins. The experience was a 10 out of 10. I would recommend it. I thanked the waiter, he laughed at the napkins, we snapped a selfie together, and I called it a night once again. I didn't sleep much.

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